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**An Afro-centric female leadership importation from the Book of Ruth  
within a patriarchal context**

**A Thesis**

**By**

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## ABSTRACT

This research explores the theme of female leadership through an Afro-centric lens, focusing on the biblical narrative of Ruth within a patriarchal context. It argues that Ruth, although not formally recognized as a leader, demonstrates significant leadership traits through her actions, resilience, and strategic decisions. Using African Biblical Hermeneutics—particularly Mburu’s theoretical framework—combined with Kouzes and Posner’s Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership, the study examines Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz as exemplars of dispositional leadership. The research highlights the socio-cultural parallels between Ruth’s context and that of African societies, especially concerning women’s roles, widowhood, and economic vulnerability. By bridging ancient biblical insights with contemporary African realities, the study challenges conventional, title-based leadership models and promotes leadership grounded in character, influence, and ethical practice. The research contributes to biblical scholarship, gender discourse, and leadership studies by offering practical applications for modern contexts where women’s leadership remains under-recognized. Ultimately, it calls for greater inclusion, empowerment, and contextualized leadership development rooted in faith, ethics, and cultural relevance.

**Keywords:** Afro-centric Hermeneutics, African Biblical Hermeneutics, Dispositional Leadership, Patriarchal Context, Contextualization, Ruth, Naomi, Boaz, Leadership Traits, Kouzes and Posner’s Leadership Framework, *Hesed*, Cultural Parallels, Empowerment, Gender Equality, Mentorship, Inclusivity, Sustainable Leadership, Canonical Text, Ethical Leadership, Relational Intelligence, Ubuntu.

## DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I, Johann Luface, declare that the dissertation/thesis entitled “**An Afro-centric female leadership importation from the Book of Ruth within a patriarchal context**” is my own, original work and that all sources used or cited have been properly acknowledged in accordance with the University of Pretoria’s academic integrity and ethical guidelines.

I confirm that this thesis has not been submitted previously, either in part or in full, for any degree or examination at this or any other academic institution. I further acknowledge the responsible use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools in the research and writing of this thesis. The following AI-assisted tools were used:

- **SciSpace, Elicit, Grammarly, Google Scholar.**
- **Purpose of use:** *Literature review, understanding and analyse academic papers, PDF journal search, grammar and clarity checking, text summarisation, Plagiarism check.*

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By signing this declaration, I confirm my commitment to upholding the principles of scholarly research and integrity.



**Johann Luface**

.....

**2025**

## **DEDICATED**

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my beloved wife, Violet Luface, whose life embodied integrity, wisdom, and exemplary leadership.

Her unwavering support, intellectual curiosity, and quiet strength were a continual source of inspiration throughout my academic and personal journey. Though she is no longer with us, her legacy of principled leadership and enduring faith continues to influence my work and life profoundly. May this work stand as a small tribute to the remarkable woman she was.

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# CHAPTER 1

## Introduction

### 1.1 Introduction

The book of Ruth is an ancient Hebrew narrative of disaster, which evokes daring interventions and evokes destiny on the part of the main character. During the time of narration Ruth was not necessarily recognised as a leader, judge, prophet, or king as was the case with other Old Testament personalities. Compared to another female personality, Ruth did not even have the advantages of a royal intervention and pedigree enjoyed by Esther who also made it into the sacred writings. Yet her character and behaviour depict that of a leader whose work is canonised into scripture. In this research we seek to highlight how Ruth's life and practice embeds leadership. The Book of Ruth depicts human initiative that somehow transverses the ordinary daily aspects into a divine plan. This is achieved in the backdrop of a society, culture and religion that had strong patriarchal prerogatives and ethnic stipulations which would have curtailed Ruth's initiatives. In this account leadership is discernible, thus inviting scholarly articulation to bring it to the fore especially from the fact that Ruth did not necessarily hold such a title.

The topic *An afro-centric importation of female leadership from the Book of Ruth within a patriarchal context* envisages an analysis comprising five delineations. Firstly, an afrocentric importation connotes the researcher's context that has (dis)similar issues with the ancient narrative. We compare certain practices in the book of Ruth with similar ones in African societies? In the African context when a lady is widowed, she is in economic distress just like in this ancient biblical culture. We can also mention that in Africa when a woman is widowed, she may also face economic insecurity, discrimination, stigmatization, and harmful traditional practices on the basis of her lost marital status just like Ruth and Naomi in this culture.

Secondly, female leadership is a topic in current scholarly debate and dialogue. From a scholarly level gender equality and issues have come up more than before. Morrison debates that the example of Jesus in choosing only men as his first disciples confirms the view that women are subordinates, but it does not specifically address gender roles in the church (Morrison, 2012:97). Borland clearly affirmed an abiding role distinction between men and women and an abiding leadership role for men (Borland, 1991:122). Throughout the Pentateuch, attention to the male and subordination of the female are presented as the norm. Yee comments on the garden of Eden story that the priority of the man being created first,

having the power to name the animals and the woman, has been taken as authoritative grounds for male gender privilege for centuries. The active role of the woman in the episode with the serpent has been mustered to support negative, even viciously misogynist understandings of women's spiritual and moral capacities (Yee, 2018:86).

In Africa, the emergence of women in prominent leadership positions is steadily growing. Bitiyong and Ibrahim (2019:12) state that African women have made considerable gains in the political, economic and social development of the continent but despite their efforts they are still widely marginalised within the corridors of power. It has long been customary in various African societies for women to remain silent in public discourse, to be excluded from key decision-making assemblies, and to be denied significant positions of influence — a situation that closely parallels the patriarchal context surrounding the story of Ruth. People like Angela Cyrus through customised leadership coaching, helps women to find their voices, to assert their own brilliance and command respect in the leadership journey (Cyrus, 2012:189). She promotes the idea of discovering the Divine Feminine whence women are encouraged to value themselves. The power unleashed by recognition that feminine is sacred is the power to heal and to change the world in which we live, a matter that this study is keen to explore.

It is interesting also to note that Ruth receives commendation of a good report within the new community she finds herself in, giving her a place of influence (Ruth 2:11). Biblical texts do not have many prominent women to talk about in terms of leadership. It is not the norm of the ancient culture or even in African traditional culture to talk of women of influence. However, because of emerging debates and dialogues we want to tag along what we can derive from this ancient text to inform some current practices.

Thirdly, the book of Ruth is an ancient story far removed from today, culturally, geographically, and in time. The account is seemingly about an individual family who appear to be in dire straits and are not even prominently featured in any positive way. I shall talk more on the methodical approach that will help us lift the socio-cultural issues within the text. For example, Ruth is a Moabitess: what does that mean, what contextual implications does this have on her life, character, and personality? The Moabites were not regarded as part of Israel and they were not allowed to partake in anything sacred toward the worship and following the God of the Israelite people. Deuteronomy 23:3 reads “*An Amorite or Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the LORD, even to their tenth generation shall they not enter into the congregation of the LORD forever.*”

Is it possible that we may not yet have adequately analysed the Ruth narrative with leadership in mind?. This study intends to explore such disparities further particularly on how God changes this scenario and allows a Moabite woman to bring such positive influence on the Israelite people's lives.

Fourthly, the patriarchal context envisions the entrenched cultural/religious ideal prevalent in Africa against which the female leadership conversations ought to be navigated. Patriarchy is still in place. It is a historical philosophical arrangement that is still adhered to in spite of the ongoing challenges. Media treat women better in some ways but continue to focus primarily on men and on women in relationship to men (Becker, 1999:22). It is a socially constructed system, and this is how our world has worked. According to Yang (2022:4), patriarchy remains the global norm rather than the exception, with most societies still functioning as patriarchies. While the degree of rigidity varies, some contexts are markedly more patriarchal than others (Yang, 2022:4).

Ruth and Esther in the Old Testament are examples of resourceful and proactive women who navigated patriarchal cultures where women depended on male support for survival. Both women were foreigners in their given circumstances who faced the possibility of exclusion or death as a result of circumstances beyond their control. Esther became wealthy and powerful as queen, while Ruth became the spouse of a wealthy landowner, a union that brought her unexpected privilege. Both women were agents of their destiny fulfilling their vocations in their particular culture (Bradford, 2022:7). The impact of their decisions shaped the destiny of the Israelite people. Ruth and Esther remained loyal to causes greater than their own self-interest, and this loyalty inspired the resourcefulness and at times, the cunning needed to protect those they loved (Epperly, 2016:4). Ruth did not need a position or office but with the help of Naomi she navigates to a place of influence and prominence – a royal lineage.

Lastly, contemporary reflections invite a (re-)presentation of what is applicable, pertinent, and perhaps appropriate from the analyses of Ruth's account for scholarly and contextual contributions. Bravery, obedience, love, faith, trust, humility, and integrity all characterised by Ruth reveal a woman of noble disposition. She does not break any patriarchal protocols in the process but works within the confines of the system to realise the position she has. Therefore, the key question is: How does Ruth exemplify leadership within a patriarchal context, and how can this model of leadership be applied in today's context?

## 1.2 Research question(s)

In this research we seek to answer what leadership lessons can be drawn from the book of Ruth within a patriarchal context. How does that leadership work out into today's context which is also patriarchal.

We would like to draw attention to three critical issues. Firstly, Ruth demonstrates and embodies leadership qualities in ways that redefine the very concept of leadership — showing that true leadership can exist even without an official title. Through Ruth, God reveals leadership qualities that make her worthy to become the ancestor of kings. Her behaviour at every step positions her to become a story worth remembering. Naomi who at the end of the book celebrates Ruth's success poses as the key mentor to Ruth, helping her to play her role well. Mentorship is an element to successful leadership. Boaz demonstrate qualities of a man with integrity, a characteristic of leadership in him.

Secondly, it is important to understand how an ancient patriarchal society viewed women and defined their place within it and to consider the implications of this, particularly how women were able to exercise leadership within such a system

Thirdly, it is valuable to examine how the Book of Ruth has been used within Israelite traditions and the significance of this practice. The Book of Ruth is traditionally recognised and read by the Jewish people during the festival of *Shavuot* the holiday that commemorates the receiving of the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai (Bradford, 2022:7). There are many reasons given by different scholars about why they read this particular story on this particular holiday. Could it be that one of the reasons was to establish the authenticity of Ruth's role?

Lastly, a close analysis of the contents of the book assists us with shaping meanings that can be derived from narratological strategies.

Therefore, the research question asks: How does Ruth demonstrate leadership within a patriarchal context, and how can that model of leadership be applied in today's contexts, which are also predominantly patriarchal?

## 1.3 Aim(s) and objectives

### 1.3.1 Aim(s)

This study seeks to address a significant gap in Ruth scholarship by exploring leadership as a central theme in the narrative. While existing research provides valuable insights into the literary, theological, socio-cultural, and ideological dimensions of the Book of Ruth, it has not explicitly framed the actions of Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz marked by resilience, social justice advocacy, covenantal faithfulness, and cultural navigation as models of effective leadership. By constructing a leadership framework rooted in the ethical, social, and theological underpinnings of the text, this study aims to enrich biblical scholarship and offer timeless, practical leadership insights applicable to both historical and contemporary contexts.

### 1.3.2 Objectives

This research explores dispositional leadership, using Ruth as a leader without a formal title. It aims to show that leadership is defined not by position, but by actions and decisions, as seen in the roles of Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz, who shaped the destiny of the Israelites in a society that did not formally recognize female leadership. The study will critically analyse Ruth's leadership in the biblical narrative, with a focus on its implications for modern leadership, particularly for women. Using exegetical, historical, and theological approaches, it will highlight how Ruth's leadership within a patriarchal society provides insights into leadership dynamics that are still relevant today. These lessons will offer valuable applications for contemporary leadership, especially in contexts where women's leadership is under-recognized.

### 1.3.3. Research objectives:

#### Chapter 1: Introduction

- *Investigate contextual African hermeneutics:* To apply contextual African hermeneutics, with particular emphasis on Mburu's theoretical framework, to understand the theological, literary, historical, and cultural aspects of the Book of Ruth, with the goal of contextualizing its messages for an African audience.

#### Chapter 2: Literature review

- *Review and synthesize existing literature:* To conduct a comprehensive review of key academic studies on the Book of Ruth, including exegetical approaches, theological themes,

cultural context, and post-colonial readings, in order to identify gaps in the current scholarship and establish a foundation for further study.

### Chapter 3: Portraiture of Ruth as a (Female) leader

- *Analyse Ruth as a Leader:* To construct a portraiture of Ruth as a female leader using analytical frameworks, including Mburu's hermeneutical techniques and Kouzes & Posner's "Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership," in order to highlight leadership actions, traits, and the influence of Ruth's leadership.

### Chapter 4: Patriarchal perspectives on women in leadership

- *Explore patriarchal Influences:* To delve into the patriarchal perspectives presented in the Book of Ruth, analysing how patriarchal structures influenced the roles of women in ancient Israel, and to understand how these dynamics shaped Ruth's leadership journey.

### Chapter 5: Contemporary views of women in leadership in dialogue with the book of Ruth

- *Draw contemporary parallels and applications:* To draw lessons from Ruth's leadership journey that can be applied to modern leadership contexts, particularly focusing on challenges faced by women leaders today, empowerment, and the importance of integrating faith with leadership practices.
- *Dialogue on Contemporary Women in Leadership:* To engage in a dialogue with contemporary views on women in leadership, examining how the themes and insights from the Book of Ruth intersect with modern leadership challenges faced by women, including gender biases, stereotypes, and societal expectations.

### Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations

- *Contribute to Leadership Scholarship:* To contribute to the existing scholarship by providing insights on female leadership in both ancient and modern contexts, integrating theological, cultural, and gender perspectives, and suggesting implications for policy, education, and future research directions.
- *Provide recommendations and future directions:* To summarize key findings and make practical recommendations for modern leaders, institutions, and scholars interested in the

intersection of theology and leadership, particularly concerning gender equality and empowerment.

The outcomes of this research aim to contribute to both biblical scholarship and contemporary leadership studies, offering new insights into how ancient texts can inform modern leadership practices, especially for women navigating leadership challenges today. The research intends to interpret the Book of Ruth from an African perspective, using a method of textual study known as African hermeneutics.

## 1.4 Methodological approach

### 1.4.1 Introduction

In this research, we will use an inductive study and qualitative research philosophy on the book of Ruth. We will unearth the social or cultural approach to the book of Ruth from an African perspective. Then we will interpret our finding of Ruth and Naomi's leadership traits by using the Contextualised African biblical hermeneutics. This is a method of hermeneutics promoting reading the bible from an African perspective. The rituals and customs of the people of the Bible lands are very similar to that of Africans. African biblical hermeneutics is the biblical interpretation that makes the African social-cultural context a subject of interpretation (Adamo, 2001:17). It is the rereading of the Christian scripture from a premeditatedly Afrocentric perspective. Specifically, it means that the biblical text is analysed from the perspective of African worldview and culture (Adamo, 2001:6).

I will ethnographically observe and capture the participants of the Book of Ruth in their natural environments from an African perspective. As Byang Kato puts it, we need contextualisation, an activity that he defined as "making concepts or ideas relevant in a given situation (Kato, 1985:23).

African biblical scholars like Mburu (2019), De Villiers (2016), Adamo (2015), Hinga (1996) have discovered that most African Christian communities could not relate to western European interpretations of the Bible that reflect western experiences and concerns that were vastly different from their own postcolonial experiences and concerns since the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Mburu, 2019:18). Therefore, if the Hebrew Bible can be read from within an African perspective some of the intended meaning may be brought to the open (De Villiers, 2016:2). Adamo, (2015:31) makes us aware of this by describing the nature of African biblical

hermeneutic(s), its task and distinctiveness. African biblical hermeneutics, as described, is the principle of interpreting the Bible for the purpose of transformation in Africa. It is sometimes referred to as African cultural hermeneutics, African biblical transformational hermeneutics, or simply African biblical studies. The primary task of African biblical hermeneutics is, firstly, to develop a hermeneutic that is both liberational and transformational. Secondly, it seeks to break the hermeneutical hegemony and ideological stranglehold that Eurocentric biblical scholarship has long maintained. Thirdly, it aims to understand the Bible and God through the lens of both Scripture and African culture and tradition. Fourthly, it calls for interpreting the Bible existentially in ways that speak directly to lived African realities. Fifth, it seeks to “blacken the Bible,” reclaiming African identity within the interpretive process. Sixth, it involves reappraising the Bible to correct the effects of cultural and ideological conditioning imposed on Africa and Africans through traditional biblical interpretation. Finally, it promotes African culture, tradition, and identity as integral to the faithful reading of Scripture.

African Biblical Hermeneutics has several distinctive methodological features: communal reading and interpretation, viewing the Bible as a source of power, locating Africa and Africans within the biblical narrative, employing African comparative and evaluative approaches, using Africa to interpret the Bible and the Bible to interpret Africa, and promoting distinctive life interests and African identity (Adamo, 2015:31). Teresa Hinga (1996:69) promotes the idea that biblical scholars should consider African tradition, religion and culture as “hermeneutics” in themselves, when she advised biblical scholars to shift from Eurocentric to Afrocentric hermeneutical approaches to biblical interpretation.

This study utilises Mburu’s techniques in her book *African Hermeneutics* (2019) to do a cross section of the book of Ruth, with an intention to exegete the account to demonstrate the leadership lessons drawn from the lives of Ruth, Boaz and Naomi. The study will also consult other scholars substantiating African hermeneutics. Research reveals that this book is a polemical document, and its main contribution is to the intradisciplinary field of biblical hermeneutics that requests a re-interpretation of texts for changing circumstances (De Villiers and Le Roux, 2016:1). These interpretations may serve as an ‘eye-opener’ to many Western scholars who do not always realise the issues which African communities are grappling with.

With regards to exegetical analysis of the biblical texts, Mburu’s *African Hermeneutics* will be utilised to decipher developments that issue leadership paradigms in the book of Ruth.

With regards to leadership, the research will utilise Kouzes and Posner’s *Leadership Challenge: How to Make Extraordinary Things Happen in Organisation* (2023). The

combination of this approach and biblical insights allows for a litmus test of Ruth's leadership paradigm subject to a contemporary leadership theory to discover what such a subjection will yield. The choice of Kouzes and Posner's methodology emanates from its affinity with servant leadership or Christian leadership as seen in the complementary publication *Christian Reflections on Leadership Challenge (2004)* edited by Kouzes and Posner but with perspectives from time tested voices like John C. Maxwell, David McAlister-Wilson, Patrick Lencioni, Nancy Ortberg and Ken Blanchard.

The Leadership Challenge model has also been used in a variety of organisations. The five practices of exemplary leadership—Model the Way, Inspire a Shared Vision, Challenge the Process, Enable Others to Act, and Encourage the Heart—will serve as the analytical framework for this study (Kouzes & Posner, 2017:27).

*Model the Way:* This practice will be applied to analyse how Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz embody and demonstrate leadership principles through their actions and decisions. The study will examine how these characters model ethical behaviour, integrity, and resilience, setting a standard for others within the narrative.

*Inspire a Shared Vision:* The research will explore how Boaz, in particular, articulates and enacts a vision that encompasses the well-being of Ruth, Naomi, and the broader community. This section will also analyse how the characters' actions contribute to the fulfilment of a larger, divinely inspired vision.

*Challenge the Process:* The study will examine moments in the narrative where Ruth and Boaz challenge societal norms and legal processes, taking risks that ultimately lead to transformative outcomes. This analysis will highlight how leadership involves innovation and courage in the face of adversity.

*Enable Others to Act:* This practice will be used to assess how Boaz empowers Ruth and Naomi, facilitating their ability to thrive within the constraints of their socio-economic and legal context. The study will investigate how leadership is demonstrated through the enabling of others and fostering collaboration.

*Encourage the Heart:* The research will focus on how the characters, especially Boaz, recognize and celebrate the contributions and loyalty of others, thereby sustaining commitment and fostering community. This analysis will explore the importance of recognition and celebration in effective leadership (Kouzes & Posner, 2017:27).

The proposed methodology offers a comprehensive approach to exploring leadership themes within the Book of Ruth. By integrating Kouzes and Posner's Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership with the narrative analysis of Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz, this research will contribute valuable insights into the nature of leadership in both biblical and modern contexts. The study will serve as a foundation for further exploration of leadership themes in other biblical texts, enriching the dialogue between ancient wisdom and contemporary leadership practices.

#### 1.4.2 Contextualised african hermeneutics

Contextual African Hermeneutics is the kind of hermeneutics that bridges the gap between the reader standing in an African context and the biblical text. A Hermeneutic that understands the world of the reader, on entering into the text. These hermeneutics begin with the reader's worldview, prompting readers to actively examine their own assumptions about life and reality, and critically assess how these align with or contradict biblical truth.

Mburu (2019:106) suggests that readers should not see the text as a foreign object but rather as something they can enter into. She often uses the expression "entering into a text" to emphasise that the text becomes part of the larger biblical story God's overall narrative. So we can enter into the text with techniques that we are familiar with, but we cannot enter into the text if we are using techniques like deconstruction or structuralism. Those are already so foreign. So, this hermeneutical approach will recognise the world view of the bible which is very similar to the world view we find in Africa. In other words, we should draw on aspects of African culture that facilitate our understanding of the practical implications of the Bible. Then we develop an African intercultural hermeneutic that embraces contextualization throughout the process. A hermeneutical approach that has an African world view rather than a Western world view.

Meenan (Meenan, 2014:268) also clarifies the 'why' and 'what' of African Biblical Hermeneutics. In doing African Biblical Hermeneutics, the focus should be on the biblical text and its cultural context that are linked through an 'act of appropriation' to provide an understanding of the bible that may be applicable to its readers. This implies that such an understanding would resonate with the needs and experiences of a particular community in a real-life situation. Holter (2011:378) observes that biblical hermeneutics at academic institutions such as universities, followed the Western European approach of the past two or three centuries. This is the case in Christian contexts worldwide, including universities and other academic institutions in Africa. Since the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it became

increasingly clear that Western European biblical hermeneutics does not address the concerns of African biblical readers, and therefore, African biblical scholars started to develop and employ interpretative strategies for African Christian communities (De Villiers, 2021:2).

I shall then use the African Biblical Hermeneutical Approach to draw a deeper understanding on the roles of Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz implicating leadership skills. However, I am aware that there are still many other hermeneutical methods.

#### 1.4.3 Mburu's theoretical framework.

This study uses Mburu's method of a theoretical framework for an intercultural African Biblical Hermeneutic, which utilises a metaphor of four legs of a stool and the top. This analogy assists in identifying interpretations on Ruth, Naomi and Boaz's actions and practices through (a) the theological context, (b) the literary context, (c) the historical and cultural context and (d) parallels to the African context. These legs support the seat, which represents the final stage of interpretation, namely the application.

##### 1.4.3.1 Analysis of the theological context

The study seeks to understand the theological emphases of a text and how these are expressed about the section and book in which it is found, and ultimately in relation to the whole Bible (Mburu, 2019:77). Analysis of the theological context involves ensuring that the theological context is identified before moving on to other aspects of interpretation. It is crucial that the theological emphases provide the guidelines within which meaning should be sought. In Africa when you read the Bible, you're reading it to understand what/how it can speak to you practically. In Africa, when we read the Bible, we seek practical ways in which it speaks directly into our lives. There is an immediate desire to apply its teachings. How, then, can the actions and relationship of Naomi and Ruth inspire practical, meaningful application today? Beyond simply illustrating God's provision for two women in distress, what deeper insights or lessons for life can we glean from their story?

Mburu (2019:77) says when Africans read the Bible, they look for issues that relates to God and faith and how these affect their everyday lives. So here the study examines the theological context that forms the parameters within which we should understand the text. One key to the process of interpretation is an appropriate understanding of the theological emphasis of a text.

#### 1.4.3.2 Assigning of the literary context

This step ensures that the literary context is clearly identified and thoroughly analysed. In uncovering the meaning of any text, it is crucial that the genre, literary techniques, language, and flow of the text guide the process and begin to confirm the meaning of the text. This is about identifying the literary features of the passage we are interpreting. Because the Bible is not only a spiritual document but also a work of literature, one needs to establish the genre of the book of Ruth. What literary techniques are being used, details of the grammar and syntax of the language in use, and how the passages fit together with the surrounding text.

Here Mburu (2019:80) states that literary genre is to identify the literary features of the passage we are interpreting. One can determine what they are reading is poetry or a drama or a story. Once one identifies the genre of what they are reading you, will have some idea of how one should approach the text in order to understand what the author is saying.

Therefore, we will identify a genre within the content of the book of Ruth and then use the methods and analysing African narrative to come to an understanding of the narrative.

#### 1.4.3.3 Historical and cultural context

This aspect involves understanding how the text we analyse was informed and shaped by the socio-cultural, political, and economic circumstances in which it was written and the mindset of the author, applied to all texts. Any interpretation must consider the historical and cultural context of the text. These factors are just as much part of a story, riddle, proverb, or song as its theological and literary aspects. Barton (1996:244) talks on this as historical criticism not being a “method” of interpretation but a tool, which may ascertain ways in which texts are capable of having meaning. This analysis is about recognizing that the Bible cannot be understood in isolation from its historical and cultural contexts. Here the crucial aim of this study of Ruth is to understand what the text meant in its original context. To do so, one must enter into the world of the author and allow that world to guide our understanding today.

We live in the twenty-first century, and the biblical texts were written many centuries ago in a culture that is different from today. There are thus temporal and cultural barriers between today and the Bible. These barriers are likely to hinder our full comprehension of what was written, and so modern readers need to learn as much as they can about the world of the authors and

their original audiences. If our aim in interpretation is to understand the meaning intended by the author, then this context must be uncovered and explained in terms that we understand. In other words, no text arises out of a vacuum. All texts arise from a cultural and historical context that needs to be understood if the text is to be interpreted accurately (Mburu, 2019:86).

In reading a biblical text, one tries to understand not just the content presented but also the purpose behind the communication, as well as the intended emotional impact. There are details about the text that are incomprehensible unless we know something about the narrated period. An example is the discussion between Boaz and the man who is Ruth's rightful guardian-redeemer in (Ruth 4:7–8). At the end of the discussion, the guardian-redeemer removes his sandal. We will not understand the significance of this action unless we know that at that time the removal of a sandal legalized transactions related to the redemption and transfer of property from one party to another.

#### 1.4.3.4 Parallels to the African context

This exegetical aspect is to present parallels that one finds between the African world view in particular and the biblical world view but also other aspects, for instance, African theology or even things that happen within Africa that you find within the culture that are familiar in the text. This step is to consciously identify one's own context and discover the points of contact with the biblical context. In this way, one can identify cues that will allow for a more accurate interpretation of the text through a process of comparing the two contexts and analysing the findings (Mburu, 2019:77). Firstly, it enables us to begin understanding the biblical text from a familiar position. Secondly by, examining one's own world view and context puts the modern reader in a position to recognize where his/her assumptions do not fit with the text.

This hermeneutical approach pays attention to the context of the reader and not only emphasising the historical context of the biblical text. However, scholars have increasingly recognized the two-sided nature of historical conditioning. It means that while biblical texts stand in a historical context and tradition, so does the reader. Therefore, Mburu (2019:75) advocates that the Bible's context and the reader's context are in constant engagement with one another because they share mutual interests. Ultimately, this guides us in identifying points of contact with the biblical text. The shared interests between the storyteller and the listener shape how the listener understands and interprets the story of Ruth.

#### 1.4.3.5 Appropriation

The text should evoke not just a mental or emotional response but also a practical one. This last step is therefore only a confirmation of how the text ought to be rightly applied in modern contexts. It is in this final stage that appropriation is refined, based on the data that has been uncovered in all the preceding steps. Dockery (1992:169) argues that the reader's task across contexts is not just to determine the author's meaning but to discern what the text meaning is for the present reader.

*African Contextual Hermeneutics* is not able to give all accurate meaning as they are dissonant to some of the perspectives that are different from African settings. I shall also consult other methods of interpretation where a practice is foreign to an African understanding.

Mburu (2019:117) noted that a text can only have one intended meaning – namely the meaning that the author intended to communicate when writing to his original audience. This is known as the authorial intent. Meaning is therefore understood to be single and determined by the author of the text. But meaning is not the same as appropriation. Appropriation refers to the significance of the text for a modern audience (Mburu 2019:90). This means that, while a text can have only one meaning, it can have multiple applications. Once we understand what the author intended to communicate to his original audience, we can legitimately apply this meaning to multiple contexts. Our model therefore makes a distinction between meaning (as intended for the original readers) and significance (as applied to the modern reader). This distinction is observed in other modern hermeneutical theories. Hirsh (1967:72) defines this as follows: “An interpreted text is always taken to represent something, but that something can always be related to something else. Significance is meaning-as-related-to-something-else”.

How then, should we approach this final task of appropriation? Mburu takes us back to what she has noted that, meaning is communicated in a specific cultural form. Appropriation therefore requires that we separate the meaning from the cultural form in which it is communicated in order to understand what the text signifies in our modern African contexts. What we are doing here is contextualizing the biblical meaning. Contextualization is the valid application of Scripture in any time-space context so that biblical meaning is practiced, demonstrated, formulated, or communicated with no change in content or meaning, in the cultural, linguistic, and mental patterns of that context (Mburu, 2019:92).

We must therefore seek to reframe the appropriation of the book of Ruth in a way that is relevant to modern Africans. When dealing with trans-contextual truths, we emphasize the reader's engagement with both worlds. Hence, it is important to understand that trans-contextual truths expressed in biblical cultural forms fit exactly into the biblical society but do not fit equally smoothly into African society. Therefore, these trans-contextual truths must be de-culturized or decontextualized from the biblical cultural forms and then re-culturized into specific African cultural forms in order to fit African society (Mburu, 2019:93). The same can be done for other contexts.

To help us Mburu suggests a methodology when developing an application by following these steps.

1. Distinguish the trans-contextual content of Christianity and its attendant forms and expressions in African culture.
2. Attempt to disengage the trans-contextual or non-cultural doctrines of Christianity from the biblical cultural forms. In the Jewish culture, honour primarily had to do with obedience.
3. Reframe these trans-contextual truths in African cultural forms and expressions (Mburu, 2019:94).

As one goes about the task of application of the book of Ruth, one shall be careful not to treat trans-contextual truths as relative or to make culture-bound truths applicable to all without regard for the fact that these truths applied to a particular situation in the lives of the original hearers. This is a further reason why we need to determine the meaning of a text to its original readers before we come to a final determination of its application to our present contexts. This application should be expressed in terms that one understands in African society.

#### 1.4.3.6 Limitations

We cannot say the African Biblical Hermeneutical approach is better than the others, each has its own place, serves its own purposes, is born from and addresses its own concerns and issues. Hermeneutics is an ongoing endeavour. We still benefit from a European Hermeneutical approach. There are many African perspectives that does not easily make sense to a Western reader.

This African biblical transformational hermeneutic(s) does not claim one-hundred percent objectivity. This is because a casual glance at the history of biblical hermeneutics reveals that there has never been an interpretation that has been without references to or dependent on a particular cultural code, thought patterns, or social location of the interpreter (Mulrain, 1999:116). There is no individual who is completely detached from everything in his or her environment or experience and culture so as to be able to render one hundred percent objectivity in every interpretation. The fact is that every interpreter is biased in some ways (Adamo, 2005:17). Therefore in this research I shall use Mburu's method of approaching a text, reading from an African perspective for contemporary application.

### 1.5 Hypothesis

The Afro-centric hermeneutical analysis of Ruth's narrative, utilizing Mburu's African contextual hermeneutics and Kouzes and Posner's exemplary leadership framework, demonstrates that dispositional leadership traits such as resilience, initiative, and strategic adaptability effectively empower contemporary African women within patriarchal contexts. This suggests that authentic leadership transcends formal titles and positional authority, emphasising instead ethical conduct, practical influence, and strategic actions even amidst systemic societal constraints.

### 1.6 Chapter outline

The study, titled "An Afro-centric Female Leadership Importation from the Book of Ruth within a Patriarchal Context" is organized into six chapters. Each chapter serves a specific purpose in developing a comprehensive understanding of Ruth as a female leader and connecting her story to contemporary leadership challenges. Below is an overview of each chapter's purpose and content:

#### Chapter 1: Introduction

In this chapter, the study introduces the context and motivation behind exploring Ruth as a female leader within a patriarchal society. It outlines the research questions, objectives, and methodological approach, with a focus on applying African hermeneutics. The theoretical framework of Mburu is explained, and key terms and hypotheses are introduced to set the foundation for the study.

## Chapter 2: Literature review

This chapter provides a comprehensive review of the existing literature on the Book of Ruth. It includes key academic studies and various interpretative approaches, such as exegetical, theological, cultural, and post-colonial readings. The literature review highlights gaps in the current scholarship and provides the foundation upon which this study builds. By synthesizing past research, the chapter situates the study within existing academic discourse.

## Chapter 3: Portraiture of Ruth as a (female) leader

The third chapter constructs a portraiture of Ruth as a female leader. Analytical frameworks such as Mburu's hermeneutical techniques and Kouzes & Posner's "Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership" are used to highlight Ruth's leadership actions, traits, and impact. This chapter emphasises Ruth's leadership qualities and the characteristics that made her an exemplary figure, despite the societal limitations she faced.

## Chapter 4: Patriarchal perspectives on women in leadership

This chapter examines the patriarchal context in which Ruth's story unfolds. It explores how patriarchal structures shaped the roles of women in ancient Israel, including the challenges Ruth faced as a female leader. The analysis focuses on understanding the ways Ruth navigated these restrictions, offering insights into how she exhibited leadership within a male-dominated society.

## Chapter 5: Contemporary views of women in leadership in dialogue with the book of Ruth

In this chapter, the study draws parallels between Ruth's leadership journey and modern leadership challenges faced by women today. It explores themes such as empowerment, gender biases, stereotypes, and societal expectations. The chapter engages in a dialogue between Ruth's story and the current views on women in leadership, emphasizing the relevance of Ruth's leadership traits in addressing contemporary issues and providing valuable lessons for modern leaders.

## Chapter 6: Conclusions and recommendations

The final chapter summarizes the key findings of the study, emphasizing Ruth's significance as a model of female leadership. It discusses the contributions of the study to the existing scholarship and provides practical recommendations for modern leaders, institutions, and scholars. The chapter also outlines directions for future research, focusing on the intersection of theology, gender equality, and leadership, particularly in an Afro-centric context.

## 1.7 Terminology and orthography

### 1.7.1 Terminology

TERM	EXPLANATION
African Biblical Hermeneutics	African biblical hermeneutics is the biblical interpretation that makes "African social cultural context a subject of interpretation. It is the rereading of the Christian scripture from a premeditatedly Afrocentric perspective.
Old Testament	It is the first division of the Christian biblical canon, which is based primarily upon the twenty-four books of the Hebrew Bible.
Book of Ruth	The book, written in Hebrew in the 6th–4th centuries BCE, tells of the Moabite woman Ruth, who accepts Yahweh, the God of the Israelites, as her God and accepts the Israelite people as her own.
African scholars	This is a list of African educators and scholars who were born or active on the continent of Africa.
Contextual reading	Contextual reading means utilizing all possible resources: argument of the passage or flow of thought, idiosyncratic vocabulary and syntax, historical-cultural backgrounds.
Dispositional leadership	Dispositional leadership highlights the significance of inherent personality traits in determining a person's ability to lead effectively.
Ḥesed	Loving kindness or a form of generosity that exceeds obligation.
STEM	The STEM disciplines refer to fields of study in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics. These areas encompass a broad range of topics including:
Glass-Ceiling	The glass ceiling refers to the invisible barriers that prevent women from advancing beyond a certain level in their careers.
<i>BOSADI</i>	Is a term meaning- womanhood.
Ubuntu	Ubuntu is the principle of communal care, mutual respect, compassion, and solidarity. It implies that every person's wellbeing is bound to the wellbeing of the wider community.
Relational intelligence	The ability to wisely discern, develop, and navigate relationships with intention and skill.

## 1.7.2 Orthography

### Adapted Harvard Reference System

The study employs an adapted version of the Harvard reference system to provide consistency and clarity in citing sources. All references are presented with the author-date format, which includes the author's surname, followed by the publication year, and page numbers where applicable. This system is tailored to suit the specific needs of Biblical studies, incorporating multiple sources such as journal articles, books, and online resources. When referencing Biblical texts, both primary sources (e.g., the Bible itself) and secondary sources (e.g., commentaries and scholarly articles) are formatted consistently to provide academic rigor and ease of verification.

### Abbreviations of bible books, versions, and other sources

The study uses standard abbreviations for books of the Bible to maintain brevity and readability. For example, “Gen” for Genesis, “Exod” for Exodus, “Ruth” for the Book of Ruth, etc. These abbreviations follow traditional scholarly conventions. Different versions of the Bible are abbreviated as well, such as “NIV” for New International Version and “KJV” for King James Version. When referring to other frequently cited sources, consistent abbreviations are applied throughout the study. A list of abbreviations is provided to ensure clarity and uniformity.

### List of Abbreviations for Bible Versions

- KJV: King James Version
- NIV: New International Version
- ESV: English Standard Version
- NKJV: New King James Version
- NASB: New American Standard Bible
- NRSV: New Revised Standard Version
- NLT: New Living Translation
- RSV: Revised Standard Version

- CEB: Common English Bible
- MSG: The Message
- CSB: Christian Standard Bible
- HCSB: Holman Christian Standard Bible
- AMP: Amplified Bible
- GNT: Good News Translation
- TLB: The Living Bible
- WEB: World English Bible

#### Transliterations of hebrew words

Hebrew words used in the study are transliterated to make them accessible to readers who are not familiar with the Hebrew script. Transliterations follow conventional rules, with emphasis on phonetic accuracy to convey the original pronunciation as closely as possible. Key Hebrew terms and their meanings is provided in the terminology section, along with their transliterations, to support comprehension and aid readers in understanding the linguistic nuances of the original text.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Literature review

#### 2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, we turn our focus to the review of Ruth as a female leader within the canonical text of the Book of Ruth. The account offers a perspective on one of the most celebrated yet understudied characters in biblical literature. While traditional analyses of the Book of Ruth have largely centered on themes of loyalty (Sakenfeld 1999; Duguid 2005; Block 2015), theme of redemption (Block 2015; Duguid 2005; Nielsen 1997), and divine providence (Walton 2009). We explore the way Ruth has been studied by these various authors to establish if a leadership approach is relevant.

By examining her strategic decisions, relational dynamics, and influential actions within the narrative, we aim to uncover how Ruth exemplifies leadership traits that challenge and transcend the patriarchal confines of her time. The chapter reviews key scholarly studies that have previously addressed various aspects of this biblical figure—analyzing how she has been represented, interpreted, and understood across different academic and theological perspectives and that of Boaz and Naomi too with the view to consolidate the main approaches. Furthermore, this chapter clearly delineate the existing gaps in the current research landscape, setting the stage for how this study will contribute new insights into the understanding of Ruth’s leadership.

#### 2.2 Key studies on the book of Ruth

The Book of Ruth has been the subject of various studies, commentaries, and analyses over the years, exploring various aspects of its themes, literary composition, and cultural implications. Some of the studies contribute to a deeper understanding of the Book of Ruth, exploring its literary, theological, and cultural dimensions. This section aims to briefly explore the key studies that have contributed to a deeper understanding of the Book of Ruth, examining its themes, literary structure, and cultural context. This section provides a comprehensive overview of the main scholarly approaches to the Book of Ruth and establishes a foundation for further exploration in the subsequent sections of the research paper.

Some key studies on the book of Ruth include the following:

### 2.2.1 Exegetical approaches

Scholars have delved into the literary structure and analysis of Ruth, exploring its narrative structure, character development, and the poetic element's themes, and use of symbolism. This includes analyses of its chiasmic structure, parallelism, and overall composition. This involves examining its use of dialogue, irony, and symbolism to enhance the storytelling. Scholars like Hubbard Jr. (1988:16) in his work, *The Book of Ruth*, discusses how the author of Ruth used sophisticated literary techniques to weave theological themes into the narrative, emphasizing the story's rich literary, grammatical, and theological dimensions.

Lau's (2022:111) commentary on Ruth is a fresh and engaging exposition of Ruth, undertaken for the new NICOT series at Hubbard's suggestion. Its strengths are many. A fifty-nine-page introduction addresses nine areas of interest: structure and message, genre, authorship and date, purpose, canonicity, the Hebrew text, theological messages, themes, Ruth and the New Testament. With regard to structure, Lau joins a number of scholars who call attention to an artful chiasmic structure in the book consisting of four acts, each with three scenes. As Lau points out, this chiasmic structure highlights human initiatives and positive reversals of fortune. The development of plot shows interest in the honour/shame motif. Lau characterises the book as a narrative short story; he accepts the historicity of the narrative. The "central" character of the narrative is understood to be Naomi, Ruth is the "main" character. Lau rightly concludes that it is not possible to determine with certainty the authorship and dating of the book of Ruth; he leans toward a date during the time of the monarchy. The main purpose of the book, according to Lau, was "*to present God's providence and kindness in preserving the family that produced King David*" (Lau, 2022:28).

The canonical status of the book was widely acknowledged in antiquity, although its location in Hebrew manuscripts and ancient versions varies. Lau's discussion of the text of Ruth is brief. He does call attention to several Masoretic Hebrew manuscripts, the four Qumran manuscripts containing portions of Ruth, and several ancient versions. Readers with a bent toward text criticism will probably wish for a more extensive coverage of textual issues. Theological messages in the book of Ruth are discussed under several rubrics: names of God, God's providence, human action, the cycle of divine-human kindness, and God's blessing. Two themes are singled out for discussion: (1) applying the law (especially with regard to gleaning, redemption and kinsman redeemer, exclusion from the assembly, intermarriage) and (2) Ruth's ethnicity and Israelite identity. The final topic discussed in the introduction concerns motifs in

Ruth taken up in the New Testament. These are discussed under three headings: Matthean genealogy, mission, redemption. Lau's introduction to the book of Ruth thus provides a broad but succinct overview of background matters that prepares the reader for the exposition to follow.

The layout of the commentary follows a consistent pattern. A brief summary of the chapter (i.e., "Act") is followed by an English translation of a section (i.e., "scene") with technical notes, mostly of a philological, grammatical, or text-critical nature. Next is a brief section summarizing the structure of the unit about to be discussed, followed by the commentary proper. This pattern is repeated for each of the four chapters of Ruth. The volume includes an extensive bibliography and several indexes (i.e., authors, subjects, Scripture and other ancient texts).

Several helpful features of this commentary stand out. First, Lau frequently calls attention to the influence of honour/shame expectations in the book of Ruth. How communities viewed certain actions in terms of honour or shame often influenced individual choices and actions. Lau brings to this topic an understanding that is informed by modern Asian culture. The honour/shame motif is present in the book of Ruth, but care must be exercised not to assume congruence between ancient and modern social values. Second, Lau often calls attention to details of the Hebrew text that contribute to exegesis and interpretation. He is, for example, sensitive to issues of Hebrew syntax, especially when they affect interpretation. Since Hebrew words are always transliterated, readers not trained in the original language can follow the argument without distraction. Third, Lau writes as a Christian interpreter who views the Old Testament through the lens of New Testament theology. He frequently calls attention to New Testament parallels and makes contemporary application of the Ruth narrative in light of New Testament teaching (Lau, 2022:181–83, 215, 230, 268–69, 291, 296, 305, 306–7).

Christian preachers will find this feature helpful when preparing for proclamation. Fourth, Lau effectively engages with other interpreters of the book of Ruth, both ancient and modern, Christian and Jewish. Interpretive options are carefully weighed, fairly evaluated, and judiciously resolved. One may quibble with a few minor details. (1) When referring to the designation of Ruth as "the Moabite," Lau sometimes refers to six occurrences of this description in the book (Lau, 2022:48, 119, 129). Ruth's Moabite identity is mentioned four times by the narrator (Ruth 1:4, 22; 2:2, 21), once by Boaz's foreman (Ruth 2:6), and twice by Boaz (Ruth 4:5, 10). (2) The infinitive that Lau refers to as the infinitive absolute of *šll* "to pull out" is actually an infinitive construct functioning as an infinitive absolute (Lau, 2022:136;

164). (3) The Hebrew letters of *hyl* “worth” appear in reversed order (Lau, 2022: 211 n. 80). (4) L. appeals to *ryt* “satiation” in line 12 of the Mesha inscription to suggest that the meaning of Ruth’s name might have a similar meaning (Lau, 2022:73 n.41). Caution is needed here, however, since this word in the inscription is uncertain. French epigrapher André Lemaire has concluded that the correct reading is actually *hyt* “became” rather than *ryt* “satiation,” in which case it has nothing to offer concerning Ruth’s name.

Campbell has also contributed significantly to our understanding of the book’s literary craftsmanship. He identifies and discusses various literary devices used by the author of Ruth, such as irony, foreshadowing, and chiasmus (a rhetorical device where themes or ideas are presented and then repeated in reverse order). Campbell shows how these devices enhance the literary quality of the text and contribute to its enduring appeal (Campbell, 1975:20-30).

The recent works by scholars like Hongisto and Korpel (2001) have built on Campbell’s foundational analysis of the book of Ruth by further developing and refining the understanding of its literary structure and theological themes. Hongisto (2021:19) focused on integrating literary structure with theology in the Book of Ruth. He expanded on Campbell’s identification of chiasmic structures by examining how these literary devices not only enhance the narrative but also convey deeper theological messages. Hongisto’s work delves into the implications of these structures for understanding the relationship between God, Ruth, and Naomi, exploring themes such as divine providence and redemption, which Campbell also touched upon. His approach adds layers of theological interpretation to the chiasmic patterns Campbell identified, making connections between literary form and theological content more explicit (Hongisto, 2021:19-20).

Korpel (2001:29) took Campbell’s identification of structural elements like chiasmus and irony further by employing a broader range of manuscript evidence, including ancient Hebrew, Greek, Syriac, and Latin texts. Korpel’s work seeks to create a more objective basis for discussing the structure of Ruth by analysing these texts, leading to new insights into how structural irregularities might highlight redactional history or theological themes. Korpel’s analysis supports and expands Campbell’s findings by demonstrating that structural breaks and links in the text are deliberate literary tools used to communicate specific theological ideas, such as the juxtaposition of divine justice with human experience (Korpel, 2021:29-45).

Kirsten Nielsen’s (1997:40) work provides an in-depth literary and theological analysis of Ruth. Her study offers valuable insights into the book’s structure, themes, and purpose, painting a rich and nuanced portrait of its characters. Nielsen carefully traces the many connections

between this story and other biblical passages, such as the account of Judah and Tamar, demonstrating how Ruth's narrative resonates within the broader biblical canon.

### 2.2.2 Inter-textual and canonical work studies

The Book of Ruth presents significant intertextual connections with the narratives found in the books of Genesis and Judges, offering a counter-narrative to the chaotic and violent themes prevalent in the latter. Scholars have noted that Ruth serves as a literary and thematic culmination in the trajectory of depicting moral choices amidst crises, in stark contrast to the events characterized by lawlessness in the Book of Judges. For instance, a narrative analysis comparing Ruth to the stories of Lot's daughters in Genesis 19 and Judah and Tamar in Genesis 38 argues that Ruth's story showcases a movement from illegitimacy to a model of faithful and ethical behaviour, thereby exemplifying the ideals of community and fidelity essential to Israelite society (Lu, 2017:55).

Several scholars have explored comparative studies of the narrative of Ruth with other biblical texts and ancient Near Eastern literature. Here are a few scholars known for their work in this area. Brenner-Idan, (2019) has written extensively on comparative studies of biblical narratives, including Ruth, within the context of ancient Near Eastern literature one of her essays appears in the book *The Five Scrolls*. This essay explores comparative studies of Ruth within the context of ancient Near Eastern literature.

These studies compare the narrative of Ruth with other biblical texts and ancient Near Eastern literature to draw parallels and contrast its themes and narrative techniques with those found in other ancient stories. Some studies focus on the canonical context of Ruth, examining its placement within the biblical narrative and its connections to other books in the Bible. These scholars, among others, have contributed to a deeper understanding of the narrative of Ruth through comparative studies with other biblical texts and ancient Near Eastern literature.

Moyise explores the intertextuality between Old Testament books and the New Testament, including a focus on how Ruth is referenced and reinterpreted within the broader biblical canon. In chapter three of his book, he specifically discusses how Ruth is reinterpreted within the New Testament, focusing on the genealogical references in Matthew and how they connect Ruth to the Davidic lineage. He explores how the New Testament authors, particularly in the Gospel of Matthew, reinterpret Old Testament texts like Ruth within their genealogical and theological frameworks. He discusses the inclusion of Ruth in Matthew's genealogy (Math 1:5), where she is presented as part of the lineage of David and, ultimately, Jesus Christ. He analyses how this

inclusion serves to highlight themes of God's providence and the inclusion of Gentiles into the people of God, contrasting the Old Testament's narrative with its New Testament reinterpretation (Moyise, 2000:14-41).

Moyise examines broader intertextual connections, including Ruth's themes of inclusion and redemption, which are echoed in various New Testament texts. This section would typically explore broader intertextual themes where Ruth's story intersects with other New Testament texts, focusing on ideas like redemption, inclusion, and divine providence. Moyise compares Ruth's role as a Moabite woman in the lineage of David with similar themes of Gentile inclusion seen in other New Testament passages, such as the story of the Good Samaritan or the broader Gentile mission in Acts. He also discusses the theological implications of these connections and how they inform New Testament theology (Moyise, 2020:120-135).

Recent studies on intertextual and canonical work related to the Book of Ruth explore various interpretative approaches and connections to other biblical texts. Quick argues in his essay that Ruth problematizes conventional wisdom expressed in Proverbs, aligning it more closely with Job and Qoheleth. The intertextual connections that the book of Ruth makes to the book of Proverbs, and especially to the valiant Woman of Proverbs 31, suggests that the author intended the narrative to be read in a particular way. The canonical context of the book of Ruth, when situated with wisdom literature in the writings, is a recognition of this, as is the modern reception of Ruth as an exegesis or actualization of the valiant woman character. In this essay, he states that this latter reading strategy fails to capture exactly how Ruth relates to the book of Proverbs and to the wisdom genre in general. In contrast to commentators who have interpreted the book as a demonstration of wisdom values within a narrative setting, Quick suggested that the book of Ruth can be understood as an extended problematization of the limits of wisdom expressed in categorizing discourse. Ruth attempts a destabilization of some of the authoritative claims made about conventional wisdom as expressed in the book of Proverbs. Categories of conventional wisdom are set up, only to be destabilized and complicated throughout the text. This reading of the book of Ruth brings it much closer to the other two texts that make up Israelite wisdom literature: the books of Job and Qoheleth, which also reflect on and complicate conventional wisdom. Ruth can therefore be understood in relation to the wisdom *genre*—but the relationship is more complex and nuanced than commentators have hitherto realized (Quick, 2020:47-66).

De Villiers examines different exegetical approaches to Ruth, highlighting how interpretation varies based on the chosen methodology. Her article aims to explore the matter of context in

biblical exegesis and interpretation. Several exegetical approaches are discussed, namely, text-immanent, intertextual comparison, reader-response criticism, which is subdivided into feminist and postcolonial studies, and historical criticism. The pros and cons of each approach will also be indicated. The Book of Ruth is subjected to these forms of exegesis in order to illustrate how a single text can be interpreted in various, even divergent ways, depending on the approach chosen by the exegete. Intradisciplinary interdisciplinary and/or implications to explore the matter of context in biblical exegesis and interpretation. It examines the biblical Book of Ruth by employing literary and theological theories. Different interpretations are illuminated according to the methodology chosen by the exegete (De Villiers, 2019:1-6).

Matheny unveils intertextual correlations between Judges 19-21 and Ruth through a Bakhtinian-canonical perspective, revealing shared idioms, contrasting themes, and Ruth's role as a voice of answerability to the silenced women in Judges. These studies demonstrate the rich interpretive possibilities and intertextual connections within the Book of Ruth (Matheny, 2022:43-60)

Frolov builds upon previous scholarship on the Book of Ruth, offering new perspectives on how the narrative operates within the broader biblical canon, particularly in relation to themes of exile and post-exilic identity. His analysis places Ruth's story within the wider context of biblical literature, contributing to ongoing discussions about how these texts address issues of identity, community, and divine intention. Frolov's work is especially valuable for scholars focused on the intersections of narrative, theology, and social identity in the Old Testament.

In his study, Frolov examines Ruth's identity as a Moabite, exploring how her foreign status is significant within the context of Israel's experience of exile. He investigates how Ruth's narrative interacts with other Old Testament texts that address foreignness and the integration of non-Israelites, emphasizing themes of inclusion and community. Through intertextual analysis, Frolov draws connections between Ruth's story and other biblical accounts, such as those found in the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah, which involve strict regulations against intermarriage with foreign women. Frolov highlights Ruth's Moabite identity as a crucial aspect of the narrative, showing how it interacts with broader themes of exile and return that are prevalent in the Old Testament. His analysis suggests that Ruth's inclusion in the Israelite community serves as a counter-narrative to the exclusion often experienced by foreigners in other biblical texts. By comparing Ruth's story with exilic texts, Frolov argues that her narrative presents a more inclusive vision, offering an alternative perspective on issues of foreignness and integration during the post-exilic period (Frolov, 2019:234-250).

Fewell engages with the Book of Ruth through a canonical lens, particularly in relation to Deuteronomy, to elucidate the legal and theological implications embedded within Ruth's narrative as part of the Torah. Her study delves into the Book of Ruth in the context of Deuteronomic law, analysing how Ruth interacts with, challenges, and reinterprets the legal and ethical principles articulated in Deuteronomy. By adopting a canonical reading, Fewell critically examines how Ruth's narrative both reflects and reshapes the broader biblical context, especially regarding Deuteronomy's guidelines on communal life, law, and inclusion.

Key themes and arguments covered are:

1. **Marriage and Redemption in the Role of the Kinsman-Redeemer:** Fewell investigates the Levitical and Deuteronomic laws concerning kinsman redeemer and levirate marriage, particularly those outlined in Deuteronomy 25:5-10 and Leviticus 25-25-28, which are integral to the narrative of Ruth, especially in Ruth 4, where Boaz assumes the role of a kinsman-redeemer. She provides a nuanced analysis of how Ruth's narrative adheres to and simultaneously subverts these legal frameworks, offering a complex portrayal of these laws in practice.
2. **Inclusion of foreigners:** A significant portion of Fewell's analysis is devoted to Deuteronomy's regulations on foreigners, such as the prohibition against Moabites entering the assembly of Israel (Deut 23:3-6). Fewell explores how Ruth, a Moabite, subverts this command by being fully integrated into the Israelite community and ultimately becoming an ancestor of king David. This exploration highlights the tension between Deuteronomic legal exclusion and the narrative's theme of inclusion, prompting a reflection on the broader theological implications.
3. **Social justice and community:** Fewell draws parallels between Deuteronomy's emphasis on social justice—particularly its provisions for the poor, widows, and foreigners—and the themes of kindness and provision in Ruth. She argues that Ruth exemplifies the lived expression of Deuteronomic social laws, underscoring the book's focus on loving-kindness (*hesed*) and communal responsibility.
4. **Theological and canonical implications:** From a canonical perspective, Fewell examines how the narrative of Ruth contributes to or reinterprets the theological themes found in Deuteronomy. This includes discussions on covenant fidelity, divine providence, and the broader narrative arc of Israel's history. Fewell posits that Ruth offers a corrective or complementary perspective to the strict legalism often associated with Deuteronomy, emphasizing themes of grace, inclusion, and the unexpected ways in which God's purposes are realized.

Fewell's work involves a meticulous reading of specific texts within both Ruth and Deuteronomy, analysing the language, narrative structure, and legal codes that inform Ruth's story. She focuses on pivotal moments, such as Ruth's declaration of loyalty to Naomi (Ruth 1:16-17) and Boaz's legal negotiations in Ruth 4, to demonstrate how these episodes engage with deuteronomic principles. Furthermore, Fewell compares the treatment of foreigners and marginalised individuals in Deuteronomy with other parts of the Old Testament, including prophetic literature, to contextualize Ruth's narrative within a broader biblical discourse on justice and inclusion. In the broader field of biblical studies, Fewell's research contributes to ongoing discussions about the dynamic relationship between law and narrative in the Bible. Her work sheds light on how legal texts like Deuteronomy are not merely static regulations but are reinterpreted, exemplified, and sometimes challenged in later narratives such as Ruth, thereby enriching the theological and ethical dimensions of the biblical canon (Fewell, 2016:73-90).

In the broader discipline of biblical studies, Beck's research significantly advances discussions on the intertextual relationships between different books of the Bible, particularly focusing on the development of key theological themes across the biblical canon and the role of smaller books, such as Ruth, within the overarching narrative of the Bible (Beck, 2022:463–465). Beck meticulously examines how the Book of Ruth reflects and amplifies themes from the Book of Genesis, arguing that Ruth's strategic placement within the biblical canon serves a theological purpose by linking the patriarchal narratives of Genesis with the Davidic lineage. Beck's analysis delves into the function of the Book of Ruth within the canon, emphasizing its intertextual connections with Genesis. He identifies and analyses various thematic and narrative parallels between Ruth and Genesis, particularly in how Ruth echoes the covenantal themes, divine promises, and the continuity of the family line that are central to the patriarchal narratives (Beck, 2022:463–465). For instance, Beck conducts a close reading of Ruth's loyalty to Naomi (Ruth 1), drawing parallels with the loyalty exhibited by the patriarchs toward their families in Genesis. Furthermore, Beck compares the role of Boaz as a kinsman-redeemer (Ruth 4) with the themes of redemption and covenantal responsibility in Genesis (Beck, 2022:463–465).

Beck also explores the recurring motifs of land and blessing, showing how Ruth, like Genesis, is deeply concerned with issues of inheritance and divine favour. He draws comparisons between the acquisition of land by Ruth and Boaz in Ruth 4 and the land acquisitions by Abraham and his descendants in Genesis. Through this, Beck demonstrates how the Book of Ruth connects the foundational stories of Genesis with the later historical books, ultimately

bridging the patriarchal history of Genesis with the establishment of the Davidic monarchy in Samuel and Kings (Beck, 2022:473–492). In his exploration of genealogical connections, Beck underscores the significance of Ruth’s placement within the genealogy of David, particularly in Ruth 4:18-22. This genealogical link directly ties Ruth to the promises made to Abraham and his descendants, reinforcing Ruth’s pivotal role in the continuation of the Abrahamic covenant within the biblical narrative (Beck, 2022:473–492).

Moreover, Beck engages in typological readings of Ruth, where characters like Boaz and Ruth are seen as prefiguring or echoing key figures from Genesis, such as Abraham, Sarah, Judah, and Tamar. This typological approach further accentuates Ruth’s function within the canon, highlighting its role in connecting the divine promises of Genesis with their fulfilment in the Davidic lineage. From the perspective of canonical criticism, Beck also investigates how the placement of Ruth within the Hebrew Bible (*Ketuvim or Writings*) versus its placement in Christian Bibles (between Judges and 1 Samuel) influences its interpretation. He argues that the canonical position of Ruth in these different traditions significantly shapes the understanding of its connections to Genesis and its role within the broader biblical narrative. Beck’s work suggests that these differences in placement affect how readers perceive the theological and canonical significance of Ruth in relation to the overall biblical storyline (Beck, 2022:473–492).

### 2.2.3 Historical and cultural context

Researchers have also investigated the historical setting of the story, considering the social, economic, and legal practices of the time, such as the laws of kinsman redeemer and gleaning. Block examines the historical and cultural context of the Book of Ruth, with particular focus on the social, economic, and legal practices of the time, such as levirate marriage and gleaning. Block emphasises that understanding these practices is crucial for interpreting the actions and strategies employed by Ruth and Naomi within the narrative. He discusses how these women navigate the socio-economic realities of their time, using the provisions available to them under the law to secure their survival and well-being. Block’s analysis sheds light on how Ruth and Naomi’s actions are not merely personal decisions but are deeply informed by the legal and economic structures of ancient Israelite society. This contextual understanding allows for a richer interpretation of the story, highlighting the resourcefulness and agency of the characters within their historical setting (Block, 2015:32).

LaCocque (1990:47) provides a compelling analysis of Ruth as a subversive and unconventional figure within Israel's tradition. LaCocque delves deeply into the ways Ruth challenges established social norms and expectations, particularly within the context of a patriarchal society. He portrays Ruth not just as a passive character but as a figure of remarkable loyalty, bravery, and initiative, whose actions defy conventional gender roles and societal expectations. LaCocque emphasises Ruth's decision to remain with Naomi and her proactive approach to securing a future for herself and Naomi, actions that are both bold and unconventional for a woman of her time. By doing so, Ruth not only challenges the traditional patriarchal structures but also embodies themes of inclusion and compassion. Her story transcends the typical boundaries imposed by ethnicity and social status, as she, a Moabite, becomes integrated into the Israelite community and plays a critical role in its history. Furthermore, LaCocque highlights the broader implications of Ruth's actions within the narrative of God's people. Ruth's inclusion in the lineage of David, and by extension, the messianic line, underscores the theme of breaking down barriers between different groups of people. This inclusion serves as a powerful testament to the subversive nature of her story, which upends traditional narratives and demonstrates the unexpected ways in which God's purposes are fulfilled through unconventional means (LaCocque, 1990:47).

In sum, LaCocque's analysis of Ruth in *The Feminine Unconventional* presents her as a key figure who not only disrupts societal norms but also contributes significantly to the redefinition of community and identity within Israel's tradition. His work underscores the enduring impact of Ruth's story on the larger narrative of the people of God, highlighting her as a pivotal character who embodies the breaking down of barriers and the expansion of inclusivity in Israel's history (LaCocque, 1990: 47-50).

Laffey, in her work emphasises the importance of understanding the historical and cultural context of the Book of Ruth for a proper interpretation of its message. She situates the narrative within the post-exilic period, a time when issues of identity and community formation were paramount for the Israelite people. Laffey's feminist approach critically examines the roles of women within the story, particularly focusing on Ruth and Naomi. She challenges traditional patriarchal interpretations of the text by highlighting the significant agency and influence that these female characters wield. Through her analysis, Laffey argues that Ruth and Naomi are not merely passive figures in a male-dominated society but are active participants in shaping their destinies and, by extension, the community's future. Her work underscores the need to recognize the contributions of women within biblical narratives, offering a reinterpretation that acknowledges their strength and resilience (Laffey, 1988:220-223).

In recent years, students, scholars, and lay readers of the Bible have been increasingly drawn to the book of Ruth. Delving deeply into the complicated nature of its characters' relationships, Schipper encourages readers to consider the roles that categories of difference involving gender, disability, household status, ethnicity, and sexual desire play throughout the text. This fresh translation of the deceptively simple book is more literal and less idiosyncratic than its predecessors. Combining the traditional strengths of the Anchor Yale Bible series with the latest research in biblical scholarship, Schipper's much-needed volume will succeed Edward F. Campbell's 1975 edition as the go-to commentary for years to come (Schipper, 2020:28).

According to Lau, the biblical Book of Ruth is a story set in the violent times of the Judges. Yet it features such amazing themes as risk and kindness, God's love and human action, and the saving role of substitutes. This book reads the narrative of Ruth within its original background, and delights in the literary art of the story. Lau also draws out these bigger themes, setting them within the broader context of the whole Bible in a simple, effective way anyone can understand. As he demonstrates, the only way for Christians to interpret and apply an Old Testament narrative is ultimately through the lens of Jesus Christ (Lau, 2023:16).

Bihorubusa (2023:30-37) interprets the Book of Ruth as a direct response to the challenges faced by Israel during the era of the Judges, offering both spiritual and social solutions to the nation's struggles. He argues that Ruth reflects Israel's deep-seated longing during this tumultuous period, subtly referenced in Judges 21:25. Ruth 1:1-6 is seen as portraying the chaotic cycle characteristic of the Judges' era, while the genealogy in Ruth 4:18-22 symbolizes a hopeful resolution, representing a "light at the end of the tunnel." Bihorubusa's study demonstrates how these two key passages interact with the themes of the Book of Judges, providing a spiritual interpretation of Ruth 1:1-6 and a social interpretation of Ruth 4:18-22. He suggests that the Book of Ruth responds to the Israelites' hardships and their desire for a kingdom, which they believed would resolve their political, social, and religious challenges (Bihorubusa, 2023:30-37).

Carlesso explores the Book of Ruth by contextualizing it literarily, historically, and within Jewish liturgy, proposing that it may represent a form of female memory. Although the book is not traditionally placed among the Sapiential texts, it exhibits characteristics of wisdom literature. Carlesso examines the significance of the characters' names and their relationships, interpreting these elements as reflections of the realities faced by the Jewish people during the post-exilic period under Persian rule. The anonymous author, according to Carlesso, seeks to provide guidance to the impoverished population of that time, suggesting that solutions to their

hardships were not found in the strict application of the Law of Ezra. Instead, the narrative recovers and adapts certain clan-tribal laws, such as gleaning and the right of redemption, to address the challenges of the new historical context. Carlesso argues that the Book of Ruth illustrates how the resolution of the people's difficulties was achieved through a process involving historical awareness, the redemption of social rights, and the securing of land, ultimately culminating in the marriage of Ruth and Boaz (Carlesso, 2021:1-16).

In her article "Ruth in Recent Research," Matheny provides a comprehensive overview of the scholarly work on the Book of Ruth, tracing the evolution of interpretive methods from early historical-critical approaches to contemporary interdisciplinary analyses. Matheny discusses major commentaries on Ruth, noting the shifts in research focus from 2001 onward. She highlights how modern scholarship has increasingly incorporated social sciences into the study of Ruth, leading to new insights and understandings of the text. The article also examines emerging trends and suggests potential future directions for research on Ruth, indicating that the field continues to evolve in response to broader developments in biblical studies (Matheny, 2020:8-20).

Matheny offers a critical survey of these developments, emphasising the dynamic nature of Ruth scholarship and its relevance to current interpretive conversations within the field. She underscores the importance of interdisciplinary approaches, which have enriched the study of Ruth by introducing perspectives from fields such as sociology, anthropology, and gender studies. This has allowed scholars to explore the narrative of Ruth in more nuanced and varied ways, shedding light on aspects of the text that were previously overlooked or underexplored. Matheny's article serves as both a reflection on the past two decades of Ruth research and a guide for future scholarly inquiry, pointing to areas where further exploration could yield significant contributions to the understanding of this biblical book (Matheny, 2020:8-35).

In conclusion, the historical and cultural context of the Book of Ruth is critical for a comprehensive understanding of its narrative, particularly in relation to the social, economic, and legal practices of ancient Israel, such as kinsman redeemer marriage and gleaning. These practices illuminate the strategic decisions made by Ruth and Naomi within their societal framework. Ruth is frequently interpreted by scholars as a subversive figure who challenges traditional gender roles and social norms, thereby playing a pivotal role in the redefinition of community and identity in Israel. Situated within the post-exilic period, the narrative emphasises the significant contributions of women and engages with broader themes of inclusion and social justice. The application of modern interdisciplinary approaches has further

deepened scholarly understanding of Ruth, highlighting its ongoing relevance in discussions concerning identity and community formation.

#### 2.2.4 Theological themes analysis

Many scholars have explored the theological dimensions of the Book of Ruth, focusing on themes such as theology of resilience, redemption, covenant loyalty, providence. This includes discussions on how Ruth's loyalty to Naomi and her adoption of the Israelite God reflects the covenantal themes prevalent in the Old Testament.

In her article, Panganiban explores Ruth's theology of resilience amidst vulnerability as it is portrayed in the Book of Ruth, with a particular focus on the role of *hesed* (loving-kindness or a form of generosity that exceeds obligation) (Panganiban, 2020:182–184). Panganiban argues that *hesed* serves as a powerful social force within the narrative, offering a model that addresses contemporary issues of resilience, both for those in privileged positions and those in vulnerable situations (Panganiban, 2020:185). The study reinterprets Ruth's story to provide modern theologians and serious biblical scholars with insights into how resilience can be cultivated in the face of vulnerability, particularly through the acts of caring for others, identifying with a faith community, and taking initiative while maintaining personal integrity (Panganiban, 2020:186–188).

Panganiban's analysis situates Ruth's resilience within the framework of both private and public life, suggesting that true resilience is achieved when there is congruence between the two (Panganiban, 2020:189). The article adopts feminist and post-colonial perspectives, reading Ruth's narrative through the lens of a minority foreign woman and utilizing a hermeneutic of trust (Panganiban, 2020:190–192). The study is structured in three parts: first, it outlines the author's assumptions and methodological considerations; second, it examines the concept of resilience as rooted in identity and explores the cultural and spiritual dimensions of *hesed* within the road scene from Moab to Bethlehem involving Ruth and Naomi; finally, it analyses the threshing floor scene between Ruth and Boaz as a critical moment where Ruth's resilience—manifested in her strength of mind, emotion, and spirit despite her vulnerability—is most evident (Panganiban, 2020:193–195). Panganiban concludes that these scenes are pivotal in demonstrating how Ruth's actions, driven by *hesed*, exemplify a sustainable form of resilience that is deeply intertwined with her identity and community (Panganiban, 2020:196–197).

In her analysis, Davis explores the Book of Ruth as a narrative centred on redemptive human relationships, characterised by mutual loyalty and care for the vulnerable. Davis contrasts the themes in Ruth with those in the Book of Judges, highlighting how Ruth offers an alternative to the violence depicted in Judges by focusing on *hesed*—a concept of steadfast love and loyalty that is practiced among individuals who are vulnerable in various ways (Davis, 2019:164-172).

Davis argues that Ruth embodies key biblical categories of vulnerability, including being a widow, orphan, and sojourner. Despite these vulnerabilities, Ruth's role in the narrative is significant as she becomes the mother of the Davidic and messianic line. The partnership between Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz is portrayed as emblematic, demonstrating how vulnerable individuals and groups can foster a community based on mutual respect, risk-taking, and protection. This commitment to *hesed* opens up the possibility of genuine hope and redemption for the future. Davis's research approach involves a close literary and theological reading of the text, drawing on the narrative's historical and cultural context while exploring its broader theological implications. She examines how the interactions in the Book of Ruth contribute to a deeper understanding of community, covenant, and divine providence, arguing that the text offers a powerful commentary on the transformative potential of faithful, loving relationships (Davis, 2019:164-172).

Potgieter and Taute (2020:4) explore the Book of Ruth with a particular emphasis on Naomi's spiritual transformation and the role of God's redemption through the kinsman-redeemer, which ultimately confirms the royal lineage of David. The authors argue that while Ruth is often seen as the central figure of the narrative, this perspective may limit the interpretation of the text. Instead, they suggest that the narrative structure and literary techniques employed by the author of Ruth indicate a deliberate focus on Naomi (Potgieter & Taute, 2020:4).

Naomi's journey, marked by faith struggles and deep bitterness, is portrayed as central to the story, culminating in her spiritual healing and restoration upon her return from Moab. Potgieter and Taute highlight how the themes of covenant faith and *hesed* (faithful love) are not only prominent in the text but also underscore Naomi's transformation. This transformation is significant not only for Naomi personally but also for the broader community, as it leads to a state of fullness and rest that extends to the tribe of Judah and solidifies the royal line of David. The authors conclude that Naomi's story, through the intervention of God's *go'el* (kinsman-redeemer), plays a critical role in the unfolding of God's redemptive plan (Potgieter & Taute, 2020:4-10).

In the article “African Biblical Hermeneutics and the Book of Ruth: Some Observations,” De Villiers examines the interpretation of the Book of Ruth through the lens of African Biblical Hermeneutics (ABH). The study begins by defining ABH and discussing its emergence, emphasizing the necessity of reading the Bible from an African perspective. De Villiers argues that traditional Western European interpretations of the Bible, which reflect Western experiences and concerns, have not resonated with African scholars and Christian communities, particularly in the context of postcolonial experiences in Africa since the latter part of the 20th century (De Villiers, 2021:1-6).

The article provides an overview of the development of ABH, highlighting its role as a crucial and viable method of biblical interpretation within African contexts. De Villiers also discusses the dialogue between Western hermeneutics and ABH, recognizing the importance of ABH in offering alternative readings that are more relevant to African experiences. However, the article also presents some critical reflections on ABH, pointing out areas where further development or revision might be necessary. The latter part of the article specifically addresses how ABH has been applied to the interpretation of the Book of Ruth. De Villiers evaluates these interpretations, considering how African perspectives contribute to a deeper understanding of the text, particularly in terms of themes like community, identity, and social justice, which are central to both the African context and the narrative of Ruth. The article concludes by drawing evaluative insights from these interpretations, contributing to the broader discourse on the relevance and application of ABH in biblical studies (De Villiers, 2021:1-6).

Wardlaw (2015) explores the theme of divine providence as central to the narrative structure of the Book of Ruth. Wardlaw argues that the story is intricately designed around the theological issue of God's sovereign guidance over human affairs, as reflected in Naomi's lament in Ruth 1:21, where she acknowledges the role of Yahweh in her afflictions: "I went away full, and Yahweh has brought me back empty... the Almighty has brought calamity upon me!" Wardlaw identifies the mysterious workings of God as the main thread running through the plot, particularly in chapters 2 and 3, where key moments such as Ruth's encounters with Boaz and the blessings that follow (2:12, 20; 3:10, 13) highlight the unfolding of divine providence. This theme reaches its culmination in the blessing pronounced in Ruth 4:14. Wardlaw concludes that the narrative elements, which contribute to the richness of the story, collectively testify to God's active involvement in guiding events according to His purposes (Wardlaw, 2015:31).

Another scholar who has written extensively on theological themes like God's providence and human loyalty in the Book of Ruth is Sakenfeld (1999). She addresses the theological and social dimensions of Ruth's loyalty and how it reflects divine providence extensively (Sakenfeld, 1999:3-5). Additionally, she emphasises the significance of human actions intertwined with divine intervention throughout the commentary, particularly focusing on the interactions between Ruth and Boaz and the implications for the community and the Davidic lineage (Sakenfeld, 1999:25-30).

Lau (2023) delves into the theme of covenantal faithfulness as a central focus of the narrative, emphasizing that the story of Ruth is not merely a tale of personal devotion and loyalty between individuals but is deeply intertwined with the broader theological concept of God's covenantal faithfulness to His people (Lau, 2023:231). Lau argues that the actions of Ruth and Boaz are portrayed as ideal responses to the covenantal obligations that define their relationship with God and with each other (Lau, 2023:245). Ruth's unwavering loyalty to Naomi, even after the death of her husband, and her decision to leave her homeland and adopt Naomi's people and God (Ruth 1:16-17), are seen by Lau as powerful demonstrations of human faithfulness that mirror the steadfastness of God's covenant with Israel (Lau, 2023:255).

Similarly, Boaz's role as the kinsman-redeemer is portrayed as an embodiment of covenantal responsibility, where his actions reflect not only his personal integrity but also his commitment to uphold the laws and traditions that safeguard the vulnerable in society (Lau, 2023:267).

Lau also explores how the narrative's portrayal of covenantal faithfulness serves as a reflection of God's own unwavering commitment to His promises (Lau, 2023:281). The relationship between Ruth, Boaz, and Naomi is seen as a microcosm of the divine-human relationship, where human fidelity is a response to the divine faithfulness that underpins the covenant (Lau, 2023:290).

This theological framework, Lau suggests, is essential for understanding the deeper significance of the story, as it highlights how God's providence and covenantal care are manifested through the faithful actions of His people (Lau, 2023:299). Throughout his commentary, Lau underscores that the narrative of Ruth not only showcases exemplary human responses to covenantal duties but also serves as a testament to the enduring faithfulness of God to His covenant with Israel. This covenantal faithfulness culminates in the inclusion of Ruth in the lineage of David and, ultimately, in the messianic line (Lau, 2023:308).

Sakenfeld (2012) examines the Book of Ruth by focusing on its literary structure, theological themes, and the narrative's implications for contemporary readers. In her book, *Ruth* from the Interpretation series, Sakenfeld highlights the intricate storytelling and theological messages within the text, emphasizing how the characters' loyalty and actions are deeply connected with divine providence (Sakenfeld, 2012:85-100).

Prinsloo emphasises the importance of a close connection and continuity between exegesis and theology, stating that the Book of Ruth exemplifies such unity. By means of a syntactic analysis, which could serve as an objective and controllable framework for the semantic content, this book could be used to illustrate how the theology of a demarcated whole could be determined (Prinsloo, 1980:330-341).

In Christian theology, Ruth is often discussed in typological terms as a forerunner of Christ or in relation to the genealogy of Jesus. The concept is addressed from a theme "Redemption and Kinsman-Redeemer". Scholars explore how Ruth's story anticipates or foreshadows New Testament themes of inclusion and redemption. This includes discussions on the theological significance of Boaz as a foreshadowing of Christ (Hubbard Jr, 1988:17).

These theological themes illustrate the richness of the Book of Ruth and its multifaceted implications for understanding covenantal relationships, social justice, divine providence, and the inclusion of the marginalised in God's plan. Each of these themes contributes to the broader theological narrative of the Bible, making Ruth a significant text for both historical and contemporary theological reflection.

#### 2.2.5 Ideological themes

The section examines the ideological themes in the Book of Ruth, focusing on gender, social justice, and the roles of women in ancient societies. Scholars have highlighted how Ruth and Naomi navigate patriarchal structures, interpreting their actions as forms of resistance and empowerment. African feminist scholar Masenya argues that Ruth and Naomi's resilience can be seen as a culturally resonant form of resistance to societal expectations, especially when viewed through an African lens that values "*bosadi*" (womanhood) as a means of empowerment within patriarchal contexts (Masenya, 1997:55).

Additionally, the narrative's use of gender discord is explored as a literary device that deepens character dynamics and underscore themes of gender reversal. Feminist perspectives, including those of Musa W. Dube, emphasize Ruth's courage and defiance of societal norms as a foreign woman and a widow, drawing parallels to the challenges faced by marginalised groups in

contemporary African societies (Dube, 2000:96-98). Dube's postcolonial approach offers insights into how Ruth's multiple identities shape her role in the narrative, resonating with broader themes of inclusion and justice that remain relevant today.

The Book of Ruth is often studied in the context of women's studies, exploring the roles and agency of women in ancient societies. Scholars examine how Ruth's story challenges traditional gender norms. Feminist scholars have reexamined Ruth focusing on its portrayal of female characters and their agency. Figures like Sakenfeld (1999:35-37) and Pressler (2002:105-108) have highlighted how Ruth and Naomi navigate and negotiate their positions within a patriarchal society, viewing their strategies as forms of resistance and empowerment.

Kates (1994:45-46) compiled a collection of essays that features interpretations of Ruth from various feminist perspectives, providing modern reflections on the ancient text.

Trible (2022), a feminist biblical scholar, has written on the Book of Ruth, offering feminist interpretations, and exploring the themes of gender, power, and redemption. Tribble offers a feminist interpretation of the story of Ruth. She discusses themes such as women's agency, solidarity, and empowerment, providing insights into Ruth's character and her relationships within the narrative. Tribble's analysis highlights Ruth's courage, resilience, and defiance of societal norms, offering a fresh perspective on this biblical text from a feminist standpoint (Tribble, 2022:166-181).

In the article "The Literary Effect of Gender Discord in the Book of Ruth," Davis (2013) explores how gender discord serves as a significant literary device within the narrative. Davis examines the instances where there is a mismatch between the gender of pronouns and their antecedents in the Hebrew text of Ruth, arguing that this phenomenon is not merely a philological anomaly but a deliberate narrative strategy that contributes to the book's character development and thematic depth. Davis asserts that these discordant forms are particularly concentrated in Naomi's speech, and they offer rare insight into her inner emotional state—a feature that is typically underdeveloped in the laconic style of Hebrew narrative. This gender discord reflects Naomi's profound grief and her complex, ambivalent feelings toward Ruth. By disrupting the expected grammatical norms, the narrative subtly conveys Naomi's internal turmoil and her struggle with the societal and familial roles imposed upon her.

Moreover, Davis argues that the use of gender discord in the Book of Ruth also emphasises the theme of gender reversal, which is central to the story. The narrative challenges traditional gender roles and expectations, and the linguistic discord underscores these reversals. Thus,

while the examples of gender discord might be explained on grammatical grounds, Davis highlights their integral role in shaping the characters, particularly Naomi, and in enhancing the thematic complexity of the text. This analysis provides a nuanced understanding of how linguistic features in the Book of Ruth are employed not only to convey meaning but also to enrich the narrative's portrayal of character dynamics and gender roles (Davis, 2013:495-513).

Some studies examine the social justice aspects of Ruth, considering issues of land ownership, the plight of widows, and the inclusion of foreigners. Ruth's story is seen as a reflection of God's concern for justice. Some African scholars focused on the book's implications for social justice, including the protection of the rights of widows and the poor, the role of women in society, as well as the inclusive nature of God's community. This reflects a broader concern for social justice issues within African biblical scholarship. Katongole discusses Ruth within the framework of political theology, addressing issues like land ownership, the rights of widows, and the inclusion of foreigners, and how these reflect God's justice (Katongole, 2011:147-152). Panganiban's work centres on the resilience and social justice themes in Ruth, particularly the protection of the vulnerable, such as widows and foreigners, and the social implications of Ruth's inclusion in the Israelite community. She examines how these themes resonate in contemporary discussions on social justice (Panganiban, 2020:182-197).

Havea (2021) examines the Book of Ruth through postcolonial criticism, focusing on themes of social justice, particularly the inclusion of foreigners and the treatment of widows. The work discusses how the narrative challenges colonial and patriarchal structures, advocating for a more inclusive community (Havea, 2021:167-180).

In her 2023 article, "A Woman with Multiple Identities: Reading the Ruth Character in Post-apartheid South Africa," Masenya explores the complex interplay of Ruth's multiple identities—foreigner, migrant, woman, and economically vulnerable individual—within the narrative of the Book of Ruth. Masenya argues that these intersecting identities should inform and shape the interpretive processes of Old Testament scholarship, particularly within the context of post-apartheid South Africa. She posits that as scholars of the Old Testament located in Africa, there is a need to engage with the text in a way that is conscious of the varied identities and social realities that influence both the characters within the biblical narratives and the scholars themselves. By examining Ruth through the lens of her multiple identities, she suggests that a more nuanced reading emerges, one that has significant implications for both the theory and praxis of South African Old Testament scholarship today. This intersectional approach, according to Masenya, highlights the relevance of Ruth's story in addressing

contemporary issues related to migration, gender, and economic survival in South Africa. The reading of Ruth as a character with multiple, overlapping identities encourages a broader reflection on how biblical texts can be engaged to speak to the diverse and often marginalised experiences within post-apartheid society, ultimately enriching the discourse within Old Testament scholarship (Masenya, 2023:189-201).

Sakenfeld, a biblical scholar, has also written extensively on the Book of Ruth, exploring themes of women in the Bible, social justice, and theological implications (Sakenfeld, 1999:56). A prominent theme in the Book of Ruth is the exploration of social justice and inclusion through the character of Ruth. As a Moabite woman, Ruth transcends her outsider status by demonstrating righteousness and virtue, thereby challenging societal prejudices against foreigners. Aloe discusses this narrative choice, which emphasizes how Ruth's character encourages acceptance and integration within the Jewish community, particularly relevant for individuals undergoing conversion (Aloe, 2023:160-164). This narrative contrasts with the exclusionary attitudes prevalent during the periods of Ezra and Nehemiah, where mixed marriages were often condemned (Umeanolue, 2022:131-149). Furthermore, works discussing assimilation illustrate how Ruth and Naomi navigate their identities within an oppressive societal framework, showing Ruth's journey as essential for understanding broader themes of community and belonging (Southwood, 2014:102-131).

In conclusion, the Book of Ruth is rich with ideological themes that resonate with contemporary issues of gender, social justice, and identity. Scholars have explored how Ruth and Naomi's actions challenge patriarchal norms, highlighting their resilience and agency. The narrative's attention to social justice, particularly in protecting the rights of widows and including marginalised groups, reflects broader concerns that continue to be relevant today. Additionally, feminist, and postcolonial interpretations have provided deeper insights into Ruth's complex identities, offering a nuanced understanding of the text's significance in both ancient and modern contexts.

## 2.2.6 Ruth in Jewish interpretation

Jewish scholars have made significant contributions to the study of the Book of Ruth, particularly through Rabbinic interpretations and analyses that highlight the text's importance within Jewish tradition. Numerous Jewish writings on Ruth reflect its deep significance in Jewish thought. Scholars such as Eskenazi and Frymer-Kensky (2011:15) have provided in-depth analyses of Ruth, focusing on its literary structure, theological themes, and historical context. Furthermore, scholars have examined the ways in which the Book of Ruth has been

understood in subsequent interpretations and its impact on Jewish and Christian thought. The text address's fundamental themes of identity and belonging, especially regarding Ruth's acceptance and assimilation within Israelite society, as Glover articulates the complex layers of ethnic identity in the narrative, suggesting key moments of Ruth's transition into the Israelite community (Glover, 2009:293-313). These engagements illustrate the ongoing relevance of Ruth's story, providing insights into cultural assimilation, positionality, and power dynamics throughout history.

Additionally, Chan's comparative study of early Jewish and patristic exegesis emphasises the importance of Jewish interpretations, particularly in how they highlight Ruth's role in the Davidic lineage and the moral virtues of Boaz and Ruth (Chan 2010:42-45). These contributions illustrate the rich tradition of Jewish scholarship on Ruth, offering diverse perspectives that range from historical and literary analyses to traditional Rabbinic interpretations.

In his 2023 article, Bihorubusa analyses the Book of Ruth as both a spiritual and social response to the tumultuous period of the Judges. Bihorubusa argues that the narrative of Ruth reflects Israel's profound longing for stability and order, as subtly indicated in Judges 21:25, where the lack of a king leads to widespread chaos. He interprets Ruth 1:1-6 as a portrayal of this chaotic cycle during the Judges' era, while the genealogy in Ruth 4:18-22 is viewed as a beacon of hope, symbolizing the potential for renewal and continuity. Bihorubusa's study highlights how these key passages in Ruth respond directly to the themes of despair and disorder present in the Book of Judges. He provides a spiritual interpretation of Ruth 1:1-6, where the narrative sets the stage for the challenges faced by Israel, and a social interpretation of Ruth 4:18-22, which signifies the resolution of these challenges through the establishment of a lineage that leads to the formation of a kingdom. Ultimately, Bihorubusa suggests that the Book of Ruth serves as a narrative bridge, addressing the Israelites' deep-seated desires for political, social, and religious resolution during a time of profound instability (Bihorubusa, 2023:7-15).

Eskenazi and Frymer-Kensky in their commentary provides an in-depth analysis of the text with attention to literary structure, theological themes, and historical context (Eskenazi and Kensky, 2011:115-125). These works offer a variety of perspectives, from historical and literary analyses to traditional rabbinic interpretations.

Chan's dissertation, a comparative study of patristic and Jewish exegesis, examines two exegetical traditions: early Jewish and patristic traditions. His research underscores the

importance of analysing both Jewish and patristic literature, highlighting specific hermeneutic approaches within each tradition. The thesis explores how interpreters' societal contexts influenced their interpretations, using the Book of Ruth as a case study. Chan illustrates how cultural differences among exegetes shaped biblical interpretation. Both Jewish and patristic methodologies were socially relevant and addressed the needs of their respective communities. Early Jewish exegesis emphasized Ruth's role as an heir to the Davidic dynasty and highlighted Boaz and Ruth's virtue as exemplars of morality in Judaism. Similarly, early Christian exegetes focused on social values, particularly the importance of marriage as a reflection of virtue (Chan, 2010:208).

Adamczewski (2023) argues that the primary purpose of the Book of Ruth was to promote the tribe of Judah and its Davidic dynasty, rather than to oppose the exclusivist rhetoric found in the books of Ezra-Nehemiah. Adamczewski challenges the commonly held view that Ruth's narrative, which features mixed marriages between Judahites and Moabite women, was intended as a counterpoint to the exclusionary policies advocated in Ezra-Nehemiah. Instead, through a detailed rhetorical analysis, particularly in comparison with the supersessive rhetoric of the contemporary books of Samuel and Kings, Adamczewski posits that the Book of Ruth was written to delegitimize the claims of the tribe of Ephraim to leadership in Israel. Against this backdrop, the narrative serves to elevate the tribe of Judah and support the Davidic dynasty's legitimacy. Thus, Adamczewski suggests that Ruth was a rhetorical-ideological precursor to the more extensive Judean narrative found in the books of Samuel and Kings (Adamczewski, 2023:5-36).

### 2.2.7 Postcolonial readings

Some more recent approaches that have covered on the book of Ruth, include postcolonial perspectives that analyse themes of migration, identity, and assimilation. Scholars like Yee (2018), have contributed to understanding Ruth as a Moabite and her integration into Israelite society, reflecting broader themes of inclusion and otherness. Yee examines the character of Ruth as a Moabite and her integration into Israelite society, reflecting broader themes of inclusion and otherness. Yee discusses how Ruth's identity as a foreigner and her assimilation into the Israelite community challenge prevailing notions of race and ethnicity in the biblical context. She explores the complexities of Ruth's status as a perpetual foreigner and model minority, highlighting the narrative's engagement with issues of race and integration (Yee, 2018:61-70).

Dube focuses on how colonial and postcolonial contexts influence biblical interpretation. She discusses how Ruth's story can be seen through the lens of migration, identity, and cultural hybridity. She says the story of Ruth, read through a postcolonial lens, highlights themes of migration and identity that resonate with many African contexts (Dube, 2001:45).

In her 2020 work, "Feminist and postcolonial readings of the historical Books", Howard explores how feminist and postcolonial interpretations of the Hebrew Bible, including the Book of Ruth, address the marginalization of women and colonized peoples within the biblical narratives. Howard discusses how these approaches share a common goal of amplifying the voices of those marginalised in the texts—especially women and indigenous or colonized peoples—while also challenging and critiquing each other. Howard delves into how the historical books reflect Israel's dual experiences as both a colonizer and as the colonized. She pays particular attention to the depiction of the "foreign woman," such as Ruth, Rahab in Joshua and Jezebel in Kings, arguing that these figures are portrayed in a way that constructs Israelite identity in opposition to these women. However, this construction also reveals an inherent destabilization of Israelite identity itself, as the narrative simultaneously relies on and subverts these foreign figures. Howard's analysis highlights the complexities of identity formation in the biblical texts and the critical role that gender and colonial status play in these processes (Howard, 2020:406-420).

Masenya (1997) in her works examines the Book of Ruth through an African feminist lens, focusing on the intersection of gender, power, and survival. She interprets Ruth's story in the context of African women's experiences, highlighting how issues such as economic dependency, social status, and gender roles resonate with contemporary African women. Masenya's work emphasises the importance of reading biblical texts in ways that affirm and empower marginalised women, using Ruth's narrative as a means to explore broader socio-cultural and theological questions pertinent to African women's lives. She states, Ruth's narrative provides a critical reflection on the intersections of gender, culture, and survival for African women (Masenya, 1997:55). In another article, she underscores Ruth's resilience and resourcefulness, presenting her as a model for single South African Christian women who face societal challenges. She emphasises how Ruth's story can inspire and empower women navigating issues such as economic hardship, social marginalization, and gender inequality, providing them with a framework for understanding their own struggles and the potential for overcoming them (Masenya, 2013:9).

In her thesis, Kondemo (2011) examines the security of women through heterosexual marriage in the Democratic Republic of Congo, using the Book of Ruth as a framework to discuss broader issues of women's rights and social security in postcolonial Africa. She posits that Ruth's story serves as a lens to explore the socio-economic securities and insecurities faced by women, highlighting the relevance of Ruth's experiences to contemporary African women's struggles (Kondemo, 2011:78).

Carlesso (2020) examines the Book of Ruth as a post-exilic text that reflects the socio-economic realities of the time, particularly concerning the plight of the poor under Persian rule. Carlesso argues that the narrative, likely originating from a female perspective, is contextualised within both its literary and historical settings, as well as within Jewish liturgical practices. He suggests that the Book of Ruth, while not traditionally categorized among the sapiential books, carries significant wisdom literature characteristics. Carlesso interprets the meaning of the characters' names and their relationships as symbolic representations of the people's experiences in the post-exilic period. He posits that the anonymous author of Ruth sought to offer solutions for the poor of that era, particularly by recovering and adapting clan-tribal laws, such as gleaning and the right to redemption, to address the socio-economic challenges of the time. These laws, which were not adequately addressed by the Law of Ezra, are reimagined in Ruth's narrative as a means of securing social justice and economic survival. Carlesso concludes that the resolution of the people's struggles, as depicted in Ruth, is portrayed as a process involving historical awareness, the redemption of social rights, and the restoration of land ownership, ultimately symbolized by the marriage of Ruth and Boaz (Carlesso, 2021:1-16).

### 2.3 Findings and research gap

The key studies we have covered on the Book of Ruth, while diverse in their thematic and methodological approaches, collectively contribute to the foundation needed to explore leadership lessons from the narrative—a gap that has not been explicitly addressed in existing scholarship. These studies offer crucial insights into themes of resilience, social justice, gender dynamics, covenantal faithfulness, and identity, all of which are integral to understanding leadership in a biblical context. Each of the key studies provides a unique perspective that opens up the possibility of exploring leadership as a central theme within the narrative.

### 2.3.1 Summation of review

Exploring the multifaceted narrative of the Book of Ruth, this section delves into the diverse exegetical, intertextual, cultural, theological, and ideological perspectives offered by scholars, identifying a critical gap: the opportunity to interpret the characters' actions as models of leadership that resonate across historical, cultural, and contemporary contexts.

**Exegetical Approaches and Literary Analysis:** The detailed literary and structural analyses provided by scholars like Hubbard Jr. and Lau highlight how the actions, decisions, and character development of Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz are central to the narrative of the Book of Ruth. These studies reveal that the characters exhibit qualities such as resilience, strategic decision-making, and the ability to influence others—traits that are foundational to leadership. However, while these qualities are clearly present, the existing scholarship tends to focus on the narrative's theological, literary, and cultural dimensions without explicitly framing these actions in terms of leadership.

This opens a significant gap in the current scholarship: the opportunity to develop a leadership theme specifically from the Book of Ruth. By reinterpreting the narrative through the lens of leadership, scholars can explore how Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz exemplify leadership in their responses to adversity, their ability to navigate social and legal structures, and their influence on the community around them. This approach would not only enrich the understanding of the Book of Ruth but also contribute valuable insights into biblical leadership models, providing lessons that are applicable to both historical and contemporary contexts.

In essence, the gap lies in the potential to reinterpret the existing analyses of character development and narrative techniques in Ruth as demonstrations of leadership, thereby expanding the scope of how this biblical text can be understood and applied.

**Inter-textual and Canonical Studies:** The work of scholars like Zakovitch (2013), who explore the intertextual connections between Ruth and other biblical texts, particularly Genesis and the New Testament, opens a significant gap for developing a leadership theme from the Book of Ruth. Their research reveals how Ruth's story is deeply intertwined with broader biblical themes of covenant, redemption, and leadership, particularly through her and Boaz's crucial roles in the lineage of David and the messianic expectations.

This intertextual approach suggests that Ruth and Boaz are more than just key figures in a personal narrative; they are pivotal leaders in the divine plan for Israel's future. By fulfilling strategic roles that ensure the preservation and continuation of Israel's heritage, Ruth and Boaz exemplify leadership as a divine mandate executed through human agency. However, while these connections are noted, the leadership implications have not been fully explored or articulated in existing scholarship.

This opens a gap for scholars to further develop a leadership theme by analysing how Ruth and Boaz's actions—guided by covenantal faithfulness and strategic decision-making—serve as models of leadership within the biblical tradition. Such an exploration would provide a richer understanding of how biblical leadership is portrayed, linking the personal qualities of these characters to their broader impact on Israel's history and future. This approach not only deepens the interpretation of Ruth's narrative but also contributes to the broader discourse on leadership within biblical literature.

**Historical and Cultural Context:** The contextual studies by scholars like Block (2015) and LaCocque (1990), which examine the socio-economic and legal practices of the time, such as kinsman redeemer marriage and gleaning, open an important gap for developing a leadership theme from the Book of Ruth. Their research highlights how Ruth and Naomi's decisions are not merely personal choices but are deeply informed by the cultural and historical context in which they lived. These actions—navigating legal structures, securing economic stability, and ensuring community survival—demonstrate key aspects of leadership. However, while these studies provide a rich understanding of the historical and cultural context, they do not explicitly frame Ruth and Naomi's actions as leadership within that context. This presents a gap in the scholarship: the opportunity to analyse Ruth and Naomi's decisions as forms of contextual leadership. By exploring how they lead within the constraints and opportunities of their society, scholars can develop a leadership theme that is deeply rooted in the socio-economic realities of the time.

This approach would allow for a nuanced exploration of leadership that is adaptive, context-sensitive, and deeply connected to the community's well-being. It would also expand the understanding of how leadership functions within specific cultural and legal frameworks, offering insights that are relevant both historically and in contemporary discussions of leadership in similar contexts.

**Theological Themes:** The theological studies by Panganiban (2020) and Lau (2023), which delve into themes of covenantal faithfulness, divine providence, and social justice in the Book of Ruth, open a significant gap for developing a leadership theme from this narrative. These studies emphasise how the actions of Ruth and Boaz are not just personal decisions but are deeply rooted in their ethical and covenantal obligations. This focus on the theological dimensions of the story—covenantal loyalty, divine providence, and social justice—presents leadership as an embodiment of spiritual and moral responsibility.

However, while these studies highlight the ethical and covenantal aspects of the characters' actions, they do not explicitly frame these actions within the concept of leadership. This opens a gap in the scholarship for exploring how Ruth and Boaz's adherence to covenantal faithfulness and their commitment to justice and compassion exemplify leadership. By positioning their actions as models of leadership grounded in faith, integrity, and responsibility, scholars can develop a framework for understanding biblical leadership that is deeply intertwined with spiritual and ethical principles.

This approach would allow for a richer interpretation of Ruth's narrative, where leadership is seen as a sacred duty that aligns with divine will. It also provides a foundation for exploring how leadership in biblical texts can be understood as a calling that involves guiding others with compassion, justice, and unwavering commitment to ethical standards, making the lessons from Ruth applicable to both historical and contemporary leadership contexts.

**Ideological Themes and Social Justice:** The ideological themes and social justice perspectives provided by scholars like Masenya (2023), Sakenfeld (1999), and Howard (2020), who approach the Book of Ruth from feminist and postcolonial viewpoints, open a significant gap for developing a leadership theme within the narrative. These scholars emphasize Ruth as a subversive figure who defies societal norms and advocates for the marginalised, highlighting her role in challenging traditional gender expectations and navigating complex power dynamics.

However, while these interpretations focus on Ruth's actions as forms of resistance and empowerment, they do not explicitly frame her actions as leadership within the broader narrative. This opens a gap for exploring how Ruth's defiance of societal expectations and her active role in securing her and Naomi's future can be understood as acts of leadership. By

analysing her actions through the lens of leadership, scholars can explore how Ruth exemplifies inclusive and ethical leadership—leadership that empowers others, advocates for social justice, and challenges oppressive structures.

This perspective allows for a broader and more nuanced understanding of leadership in the Book of Ruth, where leadership is not just about holding power but about using influence to uplift the marginalised and create positive change within the community. Such an approach is particularly relevant in both ancient and modern contexts, offering valuable insights into the nature of leadership that is deeply committed to justice, empowerment, and ethical action.

The Jewish and postcolonial interpretations of the Book of Ruth by scholars such as Eskenazi (2011), Frymer-Kensky (2008), and Dube (2001) emphasize the narrative's focus on justice, inclusion, and community cohesion. These interpretations present Ruth as a figure who transcends ethnic and social boundaries, thereby offering a model of leadership that is both inclusive and transformative. While these scholars highlight Ruth's role in promoting unity and continuity within the Israelite community, particularly through her integration into the Davidic lineage, they do not explicitly frame these aspects within the concept of leadership.

This opens a gap in the scholarship for developing a leadership theme that draws on Ruth's ability to unite diverse groups and foster a sense of community despite cultural and social divisions.

By exploring Ruth's actions and influence through the lens of leadership, scholars can examine how her ability to bridge ethnic and social divides serves as a model of transformative leadership. This perspective would position Ruth as a leader who exemplifies the power of inclusivity and the importance of fostering unity within a divided society. Additionally, this approach could provide valuable insights into the role of leadership in promoting social cohesion and continuity, making Ruth's story relevant not only within its historical context but also in contemporary discussions of leadership in diverse and multicultural settings.

This gap presents an opportunity to explore leadership as a force for unity, continuity, and transformation in the face of division and marginalization, drawing from the rich narrative and themes of the Book of Ruth.

### 2.3.2 Research gap

While none of the existing studies explicitly focus on leadership lessons from the Book of Ruth, they collectively provide the tools and insights necessary to address this gap. By synthesizing the themes of resilience, social justice, covenantal faithfulness, and cultural context explored in these studies, scholars can construct a framework for leadership based on the narrative of Ruth. Each of these studies contributes to the possibility of viewing leadership as a central theme by offering different lenses—literary analysis, theological reflection, socio-cultural context, and ideological critique—through which to analyse the characters’ actions, decisions, and influence. This approach not only fills a significant gap in Ruth scholarship but also enriches the understanding of biblical leadership principles, providing a foundation for developing a leadership framework that is deeply rooted in the text’s ethical, social, and theological underpinnings. Such a framework is relevant both in historical analysis and contemporary discussions, making Ruth's story a valuable resource for exploring leadership in diverse contexts.

The Book of Ruth is a rich narrative that has been extensively analysed through various scholarly lenses, including literary analysis, theological reflection, socio-cultural context, and ideological critique. However, despite the depth and breadth of these studies, one significant aspect remains under-explored: the explicit focus on leadership as a central theme. The narrative of Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz is replete with instances of strategic decision-making, resilience, advocacy for social justice, and the navigation of complex socio-cultural dynamics—all of which are critical components of effective leadership. Yet, these elements have not been fully examined through the lens of leadership, leaving a notable gap in both Ruth scholarship and the broader field of biblical studies.

Addressing this gap is not only an academic exercise but also a practical one. In an era where leadership principles are continuously sought after in various fields—ranging from organisational management to community building and ethical governance—drawing insights from ancient texts like the Book of Ruth can offer timeless lessons. The actions of Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz exemplify leadership that is grounded in ethical responsibility, compassion, and a deep commitment to justice and community welfare. These are leadership qualities that transcend historical and cultural boundaries, making them highly relevant to contemporary discussions on what it means to lead effectively.

Moreover, developing a leadership framework based on the Book of Ruth has the potential to enrich our understanding of biblical leadership as a concept that is both divinely inspired and

deeply human. It provides an opportunity to explore how leadership in the Bible is not merely about power or authority, but about service, integrity, and the ability to influence positive change within a community. By filling this gap, scholars can contribute to a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of leadership in biblical texts, offering valuable insights that can be applied to both historical analysis and modern-day leadership challenges.

Thus, the motivation to address this gap stems from the dual objectives of enriching biblical scholarship and providing practical leadership lessons that are rooted in ancient wisdom but applicable to today's world. This endeavour promises to not only deepen our appreciation of the Book of Ruth but also to broaden the scope of leadership studies by incorporating timeless principles from one of the most compelling narratives in the biblical canon.

## CHAPTER 3

### Portraiture of Ruth as a (female) leader

#### 3.1 Introduction

##### 3.1.1 Chapter overview

The primary objective of this chapter is to explore the leadership qualities of Ruth from a female leadership perspective, integrating both biblical exegesis and contemporary leadership theories. This approach will shed light on Ruth's actions, decisions, and influence as a leader within her socio-cultural and historical context, as well as her relevance for modern leadership discourse. The chapter aims to fill a gap in existing scholarship by explicitly focusing on leadership, a dimension that has often been overlooked in studies of the Book of Ruth. By incorporating hermeneutical methods, including Mburu's "Five Techniques Framework" (2019), and aligning Ruth's actions with Kouzes and Posner's "Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership" (2023), this chapter offers a comprehensive analysis of Ruth as a female leader.

While many themes like loyalty, love, and providence in the book of Ruth have been thoroughly explored, a closer examination reveals that Ruth, the Moabitess heroine, exhibits profound leadership qualities that significantly impact the narrative and its characters. The specific leadership lessons from the book have not been a primary focus. Scholarly attention has largely overlooked these aspects of Ruth's character and that of Naomi and Boaz.

Most studies touch on her decision-making and initiative only as part of broader themes rather than focusing on these aspects as manifestations of leadership. This leaves a significant opportunity to explore Ruth's leadership more explicitly and in depth, examining how her actions contribute to and define leadership within the narrative. This research would add a new layer to the understanding of Ruth, not just as a loyal daughter-in-law or a subject of divine intervention, but as an active leader who shapes her destiny and influences those around her. We seek to highlight and justify the leadership traits demonstrated in the book, addressing this gap in scholarship by illustrating her as a model of initiative, courage, influence, loyalty, and compassion. To analyse leadership in the book of Ruth, we will apply the Leadership challenge model as our analytical framework.

### 3.1.2 Contextual background

The Book of Ruth is set during the period of the Judges, a time characterised by social upheaval, moral decline, and political instability in ancient Israel. This setting highlights the precarious status of women, particularly widows and foreigners, who often lacked protection and were economically vulnerable. Ruth, a Moabite widow, enters this narrative context already disadvantaged due to her ethnicity, as Moabites were frequently viewed with suspicion by the Israelites, as noted by Southwood, (2014:102-131). Despite these challenges, Ruth demonstrates remarkable agency and determination, particularly in her decision to leave her homeland and accompany her mother-in-law Naomi back to Bethlehem. This bold choice reflects Ruth's loyalty to Naomi and her leadership in navigating a foreign culture and uncertain future. Her actions throughout the story illustrate a deeper engagement with the cultural norms of the time, including the practices of gleaning and kinsman redeemer marriage, which shaped the lives of vulnerable individuals in ancient Israel.

Scholars like Walton (2017:80) and Lau (2023:89) emphasize the socio-legal context of the narrative, focusing on Ruth's proactive role in ensuring survival through gleaning and Boaz's role as the kinsman-redeemer. Gleaning allowed the poor to collect leftover crops, offering Ruth a way to secure sustenance for herself and Naomi. Her strategic decision to glean in Boaz's field and her bold approach to him later in the narrative reveals her resourcefulness and ability to navigate complex social customs. Boaz's function as the kinsman-redeemer, which included marrying Ruth to maintain her deceased husband's family line, further highlights the socio-legal framework within which Ruth operated. Walton and Lau underscore the theological dimensions of Ruth's story, particularly themes of loyalty, redemption, and divine providence, demonstrating how Ruth's actions align with covenantal obligations and social justice (Lau, 2023:89-92).

The theological and cultural backdrop of the Book of Ruth is critical in understanding Ruth's leadership qualities, particularly her resilience, resourcefulness, and strategic decision-making. Ruth's initiative to glean in the fields and her bold proposal to Boaz reflect her ability to lead herself and Naomi through precarious social and economic conditions. Ruth's ability to work within and challenge the cultural and legal constraints of her time shows a form of leadership that is both compassionate and decisive. Her leadership extends beyond personal survival; it contributes to the preservation of her family and, ultimately, to the lineage of king David. As such, Ruth serves as a model of leadership rooted in loyalty, ethical action, and a commitment

to the well-being of her community, making her story relevant both within its ancient context and for contemporary discussions on leadership, particularly for women.

### 3.2 Analytical framework Mburu and Kouzes & Posner

In this section, the analysis will combine two key frameworks to explore leadership in the Book of Ruth. First, we will use Mburu's hermeneutical techniques (2019), which include (a) the theological context, (b) the literary context, (c) the historical and cultural context, and (d) parallels to the African context (Mburu, 2019:72). These techniques will be applied to understand the broader biblical narrative, situating Ruth's leadership within her socio-cultural and theological environment.

Secondly, we incorporate Kouzes and Posner's *The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership* to analyse Ruth's actions from a leadership perspective. The Five Practices are—Model the Way, Inspire a Shared Vision, Challenge the Process, Enable Others to Act, and Encourage the Heart, which will be used to interpret Ruth's decisions and influence throughout the narrative (Kouzes & Posner, 2017:26). These practices provide a contemporary lens to assess how Ruth's leadership qualities align with widely recognized leadership models.

By combining these two frameworks, we aim to present a comprehensive analysis of how Ruth exemplifies leadership that is both culturally contextualized and universally applicable. This chapter will highlight how Ruth's actions in the context of ancient Israelite society demonstrate her ability to lead through adversity, inspire loyalty, and affect change, all while drawing comparisons to modern leadership principles.

#### 3.2.1 Mburu's five techniques of hermeneutics

This section introduces Mburu's "*Five Techniques of Hermeneutics*", a methodological framework used to interpret biblical texts by exploring their theological, literary, historical, and cultural dimensions. Applying these techniques to the Book of Ruth allows us to examine how the narrative of Ruth reveals leadership traits through multiple lenses. This approach provides a holistic understanding of Ruth's leadership qualities and contextualises her actions within broader theological and socio-cultural frameworks. The application of Mburu's hermeneutical techniques is complemented by Kouzes and Posner's "*Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership*", which further enriches the analysis of Ruth's leadership.

(a) Theological context

In understanding Ruth's leadership through the theological context, we examine how the text reflects covenantal faithfulness and divine providence. Ruth's decision to stay with Naomi and her proactive role in ensuring their survival can be interpreted as acts of covenantal loyalty, which align with God's overarching plan for redemption, as shown through Ruth's inclusion in the lineage of David. This analysis allows us to explore how Ruth embodies the theological concept of *hesed* (loving-kindness) and how her leadership stems from her faith and moral integrity, emphasising the divine purpose guiding her actions. Scholars like Lau (2023:23-29) and Walton (2017:151-158) emphasise the role of divine providence in shaping Ruth's leadership, where her personal decisions are intertwined with God's greater plan for Israel.

(b) Literary context

Ruth's leadership qualities are further examined by analysing the narrative structure, dialogue, and symbolism within the text. The chiasmic structure of the book highlights pivotal moments, such as Ruth's declaration of loyalty (Ruth 1:16), which can be viewed as a leadership moment where she takes initiative and asserts control over her future. Literary techniques, such as irony and dialogue, reveal how Ruth influences the story's progression through her strategic actions. Hubbard Jr. (1988:40) and Lau (2023:28) explore how Ruth's character development reflects leadership traits like resourcefulness, resilience, and empathy. The literary analysis offers insight into how the narrative portrays Ruth as a leader who navigates complex social and personal dynamics.

(c) Historical and cultural context

Understanding the socio-economic and legal practices of ancient Israel is crucial for analysing the leadership decisions made by Ruth and Naomi. Practices such as kinsman-redeemer, levirate marriage and gleaning provided frameworks within which vulnerable individuals could ensure their survival. Ruth's leadership is evident in her ability to utilize these practices to secure her and Naomi's future. This context emphasises her ability to lead within the limitations of her time, demonstrating resilience and strategic thinking. Block (2015:115) and Frymer-Kensky (2008:123) highlight how these socio-legal contexts shape the narrative, with Ruth emerging as a leader who adapts to and overcomes the challenges of her environment.

#### (d) Parallels to the African context

Drawing connections between Ruth’s leadership and contemporary African contexts allows us to explore leadership within similar socio-cultural frameworks. In many African communities, leaders are often those who embody resilience, resourcefulness, and care for the marginalised—traits evident in Ruth’s narrative. Mburu’s technique of connecting biblical texts with African contexts emphasises how Ruth’s leadership qualities—especially her ability to navigate complex social and economic challenges—resonate with leadership challenges in modern African societies (Mburu, 2019:74). This parallel analysis provides a deeper understanding of how Ruth's story can serve as a model for contemporary leadership, particularly in addressing issues of social justice, gender roles, and communal responsibility.

This exegetical approach, using Mburu’s hermeneutical techniques, reveals the multiple layers of leadership in the Book of Ruth and establishes a framework for analysing Ruth’s actions and influence. By integrating Kouzes and Posner’s “Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership”, this analysis not only deepens our understanding of Ruth’s leadership in its historical context but also makes it relevant for contemporary discussions on leadership, particularly within African and faith-based contexts.

#### 3.2.2 Kouzes and Posner’s “five practices of exemplary leadership”

Kouzes and Posner’s Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership, as articulated in their influential work *The Leadership Challenge*, serve as a comprehensive framework for understanding leadership through actionable behaviours. These practices—(a) Model the Way, (b) Inspire a Shared Vision, (c) Challenge the Process, (d) Enable Others to Act, and (e) Encourage the Heart (Kouzes & Posner, 2017:14-23), are foundational for analysing leadership dynamics in both historical and contemporary contexts. Applying this model to the narrative of Ruth allows for an in-depth examination of her leadership qualities and how they manifest in various decisions and interactions throughout the text.

##### (a) Model the Way

Kouzes and Posner describe “*Model the Way*” as a practice where leaders set an example by aligning their actions with shared values (Kouzes & Posner, 2017:72-80). In the Book of Ruth, Ruth exemplifies this by demonstrating unwavering loyalty to Naomi. Her famous declaration, “Where you go, I will go” (Ruth 1:16), represents not only personal loyalty but a commitment

to living by shared principles of family and faith. By taking initiative to glean in Boaz's fields, Ruth models proactive decision-making that is both aligned with her values of hard work and dedication to Naomi's well-being (Ruth 2:2-3). Her leadership here reflects integrity and dedication, key traits that enable her to inspire trust and respect from those around her, including Boaz. This commitment to Naomi and her proactive decisions, showcase her adherence to strong ethical values. Her loyalty, initiative, and work ethic serve as examples of leading by action.

#### (b) Inspire a Shared Vision

*"Inspiring a shared vision"* involves imagining a future filled with possibilities and enlisting others in this vision (Kouzes & Posner, 2017:105-109). Ruth's actions demonstrate her vision for a secure future, not only for herself but also for Naomi. This is particularly evident when she seeks to secure Boaz's protection and, in turn, Naomi's security. Ruth's pursuit of a kinsman-redeemer reflects her desire to ensure their survival and prosperity, articulating a vision of security and hope that both she and Naomi share (Ruth 4:13). By inspiring Naomi to see beyond their immediate hardships, Ruth exemplifies how effective leaders must have a vision and the ability to share it with others to garner their commitment.

#### (c) Challenge the Process

Kouzes and Posner note that effective leaders are those who are willing to *Challenge the Process* by stepping outside of traditional boundaries and experimenting with new approaches (Kouzes & Posner, 2017:161-171). Ruth's boldness in approaching Boaz on the threshing floor (Ruth 3:6-9) serves as a clear example of this practice. Ruth's actions challenge the traditional gender norms of her time and take significant risks by proposing a solution to their social and economic vulnerability. By taking this bold step, Ruth demonstrates a willingness to challenge societal expectations to create new opportunities for herself and Naomi, thus exemplifying an essential quality of leadership: the courage to challenge established norms for the greater good. She also challenges the status quo on Moabites who were not allowed to intermarry with Israelis.

(d) Enable others to act

The image demonstrates the leadership quality of "*Enable Others to Act*" as conceptualized by Kouzes and Posner. This leadership practice emphasises fostering collaboration and empowering others by building trust and encouraging them to contribute (Kouzes & Posner, 2017:211-219). Ruth exemplifies this leadership quality by empowering Naomi and Boaz in different ways.

For Naomi, Ruth helps her regain a sense of hope and agency after experiencing profound loss. Ruth follows Naomi's advice regarding how to approach Boaz, which strengthens their bond and enables Naomi to view their future with optimism. Naomi's renewed sense of urgency is apparent as she advises Ruth on how to navigate their uncertain circumstances, showing how Ruth's loyalty and actions enabled Naomi to reclaim her role within the narrative.

Similarly, Ruth empowers Boaz by creating the opportunity for him to fulfil his duty as a kinsman-redeemer. By taking the initiative to seek out Boaz and making him pay attention on her (Ruth 3:7), Ruth allows Boaz to step into his role as a protector and provider, thus preserving the family line. Ruth's leadership, in this case, is about facilitating Boaz's ability to act, creating opportunities for him to step forward and make impactful decisions.

In both cases, Ruth's leadership style aligns with Kouzes and Posner's principle of *Enable Others to Act*, as she fosters collaboration, builds trust, and empowers those around her to play vital roles within their community. This practice demonstrates how effective leaders not only make decisions but also create environments where others can succeed and fulfil their potential.

(e) Encourage the heart

The practice of "*Encouraging the Heart*" from Kouzes & Posner's *The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership*, is about motivating and inspiring individuals by recognizing contributions, celebrating successes, and fostering a sense of community (Kouzes & Posner, 2017:277-287). This leadership characteristic is evident in Ruth's story, particularly in how her acts of kindness and loyalty create lasting positive impacts on those around her.

Ruth's loyalty to Naomi, as demonstrated in her willingness to leave Moab and accompany her back to Bethlehem, encourages Naomi's heart in a time of deep personal loss and bitterness. Through Ruth's selflessness and perseverance, Naomi's hope is eventually restored. This is a

clear example of how Ruth's compassion not only aids Naomi practically but emotionally as well, offering encouragement and hope amid her grief (Ruth 1:16-17).

Similarly, Ruth's union with Boaz leads to the redemption of Naomi's family line, ultimately culminating in the birth of king David. This act symbolizes how Ruth's leadership, characterised by perseverance and kindness, fosters communal healing and renewal, transforming not only her immediate family but impacting the entire community. The closing genealogy that traces Ruth's descendants to David emphasises the far-reaching influence of her actions and the leadership qualities she exemplifies in encouraging hope and redemption.

By highlighting these elements, Ruth demonstrates how leaders can inspire and uplift others, reinforcing "*Encouraging the Heart*" by showing that compassion, recognition, and kindness can restore individuals and entire communities. This echoes the core idea that leaders should foster environments where morale is maintained through celebration, kindness, and recognition of contributions.

In summary, integrating Kouzes and Posner's *Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership* into the analysis of Ruth's leadership allows for a multi-dimensional view of how leadership is manifested in her actions. Each of these practices—*Model the Way*, *Inspire a Shared Vision*, *Challenge the Process*, *Enable Others to Act*, and *Encourage the Heart*—offers a structured way to understand Ruth's leadership not only in the context of her immediate narrative but also in broader discussions of ethical and transformational leadership. These elements serve as a foundation for understanding how Ruth's leadership, grounded in loyalty, vision, courage, empowerment, and kindness, contributes significantly to both her personal story and her role in the larger biblical narrative.

### 3.3 Exegetical approach: Mburu's five techniques of hermeneutics

#### 3.3.1 Ruth's leadership actions

##### 3.3.1.1 Theological and literary context (Mburu)

When examining Ruth's leadership actions, it is essential to consider both the theological and literary contexts that shape her decisions. Mburu's hermeneutical techniques, specifically her focus on theological and literary context, offer a deeper understanding of Ruth's leadership actions by emphasising her covenantal faithfulness (Mburu, 2021:116).

Ruth's covenantal faithfulness is the foundation of her leadership, particularly in key passages such as Ruth 2:2-3, where Ruth independently chooses to glean in the fields of Boaz, and Ruth 3:6-9, where she boldly approaches Boaz on the threshing floor. These actions, viewed through a hermeneutical lens, reveal Ruth's deep theological commitment, aligning her with divine providence while navigating complex socio-cultural structures.

Scholars such as Southwood (2014:102-131), highlight Ruth's loyalty not only to Naomi but also to the Israelite God, underscoring her leadership within a broader theological framework. Ruth's devotion is portrayed as transcending personal relationships, positioning her leadership within the covenantal context of Israel's faith. This theological foundation underpins Ruth's resourcefulness and strategic decision-making, traits further explored by Lau (2023:89). Lau argues that Ruth's proactive efforts to secure Boaz's protection demonstrate her practical understanding of social dynamics, particularly for a foreign woman in Israel (Lau, 2023:89-92). Ruth's leadership, therefore, embodies both practical and visionary elements that defy conventional expectations.

Recent scholarship by Diko (2024:1-10) provides additional insight into the socio-cultural context in which Ruth's leadership emerges. Operating within a patriarchal society that marginalises women, particularly foreign women, Ruth's active decisions—such as choosing to glean and approaching Boaz—reflect her unconventional agency. Diko asserts that Ruth's actions subvert these societal norms, positioning her as a leader who exercises resilience and agency within a restrictive social order.

Ruth's leadership is also characterised by initiative, courage, strategic thinking, and sensitivity. In Ruth 2:2-3, her decision to glean in the fields showcases her proactive approach and willingness to take risks in an uncertain environment to secure survival for herself and Naomi. As Lu (2016) notes, this act reflects Ruth's pioneering spirit and daring, as she steps into a socially precarious situation. Similarly, in Ruth 3:6-9, where she approaches Boaz on the threshing floor, Ruth demonstrates her courage and ability to act strategically, positioning herself as a key player in securing a future for both her and Naomi (Lu, 2016:55-71).

In addition to her boldness, Ruth exhibits strategic thinking in her approach to Boaz, carefully planning her actions in accordance with social customs. This foresight and planning are hallmarks of effective leadership, enabling Ruth to navigate the complexities of her environment. Her leadership is further characterised by a balance of assertiveness and empathy, as she demonstrates sensitivity to the needs of Naomi and Boaz, embodying a transformational leadership style that values mutual responsibility and care (Kobal & Simsek, 2023:314-350).

Moreover, Ruth's leadership challenges traditional gender roles and societal expectations. Her proactive decisions subvert patriarchal norms, marking her as a leader who transcends societal boundaries. Mlamli Diko (2024:64-84) both underscore Ruth's story as demonstrating powerful female agency in a male-dominated context, promoting narratives of empowerment and justice.

However, it is important to acknowledge the complexities of Ruth's leadership within her patriarchal environment. As Yong Lu (2016):55-71 and Diko (2024:64-84) note, Ruth's proactive decisions are shaped and supported by Naomi's guidance and the existing social structures, illustrating the nuanced interplay between personal initiative and societal context.

### 3.3.1.2 Model the way (Kouzes & Posner)

Ruth's journey from Moab to Bethlehem (Ruth 1:16-17) mirrors Kouzes and Posner's *Model the Way leadership* practice, which focuses on setting an example through personal actions and values. Ruth's decision to remain with Naomi, despite the uncertainties of their future, demonstrates a commitment to integrity and purpose. This is further illustrated by her proactive initiative to glean in Boaz's fields, an act that showcases her resilience and moral responsibility. There is also the aspect of industry in the sense that the workers were surprised that she worked that long taking only water breaks. According to Kouzes and Posner (2017:34-36), *Model the Way* is about leading by example, and Ruth's consistent actions—whether it is her approach to Boaz or her determination to secure a future for Naomi—embody these leadership qualities. Ruth's leadership in this context is not solely about survival but also about upholding values of loyalty, kindness, and ethical decision-making in challenging circumstances.

Recent scholarship has contributed fresh insights into Ruth's leadership qualities. Laura Quick (2020: 47–66) examines Ruth's strategic interactions with Boaz, arguing that her initiative balances traditional loyalty with subtle negotiation of social norms. Quick highlights how Ruth defies the limitations imposed on her as a foreign woman, using her marginal status to advance her and Naomi's well-being. Likewise, Gafney (2017: 183–185) underscores Ruth's ability to transform her social vulnerability into courageous, constructive agency, portraying her as a figure who uses her marginalisation as a source of resilience and hope. Diko (2024:45) further demonstrates how Ruth's leadership emerges within a patriarchal culture that marginalises widows and foreign women; by choosing to glean and by approaching Boaz, she redefines what faithful agency looks like within oppressive structures. This proactive leadership aligns with

Mburu's hermeneutical approach, where Ruth's decisions reflect theological and socio-cultural awareness, demonstrating resilience and agency (Mburu, 2019:116).

From a theological perspective, Ruth's leadership is deeply intertwined with the concept of *hesed*, which denotes loyalty and loving-kindness. Masenya (2013:1-9) notes that Ruth's actions toward Naomi and her pursuit of a solution through Boaz are emblematic of her understanding of these theological principles. Her loyalty is not merely an emotional attachment but is rooted in covenantal obligations that influence her strategic decisions. Lu Yong (2016) supports this by noting that Ruth's leadership drives the narrative forward, especially in how her actions shape the outcome of the story, making her a dynamic figure in both personal and communal survival (Lu, 2016:55-71).

The integration of Kouzes and Posner's *Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership* provides a contemporary framework to analyse Ruth's leadership. Her loyalty to Naomi exemplifies *Model the Way*, where Ruth leads by example through unwavering commitment and moral integrity (Kouzes & Posner, 2017:47). Ruth's bold actions, particularly in her approach to Boaz on the threshing floor, demonstrate her ability to *Challenge the Process* by stepping outside traditional gender roles and ensuring her and Naomi's survival. As Walton (2017) suggests, Ruth's initiative in navigating socio-economic barriers within ancient Israelite society illustrates her capacity to lead within and beyond the constraints of her cultural environment (Walton, 2017:54).

### 3.3.2 Leadership traits and characteristics

#### 3.3.2.1 Historical and cultural context (Mburu)

Ruth's actions, as analysed through the historical and cultural framework provided by Mburu (2019:87), exemplify several essential leadership traits, including strategic decision-making, adaptability, and resilience. Ruth's leadership is firmly grounded in the socio-economic and legal structures of ancient Israel, and her adept navigation of these frameworks underscores her resourcefulness and practical wisdom.

##### (a) Strategic decision-making

Ruth's choice to engage in the act of gleaning within the fields of Boaz (Ruth 2:2-3) serves as a salient illustration of her strategic cognition amid the prevailing socio-economic circumstances. Gleaning constituted a legal provision embedded within Israelite jurisprudence, crafted to safeguard the welfare of widows and marginalised populations, as articulated by

Mburu (2019), who asserts that Ruth, by opting to glean, not only secures immediate sustenance but also exemplifies her adeptness at manoeuvring within the socio-legal structures accessible to her advantage (Mburu, 2019:79). Consequently, Ruth's decision transcends mere survival, representing a meticulously considered choice that highlights her leadership in executing informed decisions within the constraints imposed by her identity as a foreigner and widow.

Lau (2023) elaborates on this notion by examining how Ruth's endeavours manifest a profound comprehension of the socio-economic dynamics prevalent during her era. Lau observes that gleaning served as a protective measure; however, it was Ruth's initiative to pursue this opportunity specifically within Boaz's field that accentuates her strategic acumen. By aligning herself with Boaz, a kinsman-redeemer, Ruth not only secures material stability but also positions herself and Naomi for enhanced protection within a patriarchal societal framework (Lau, 2023:89-92). This illustrates Ruth's capacity to exploit existing legal and social mechanisms to forge a sustainable future for herself and her kin.

The scholarship of Diko Mlamli (2024) further corroborates this viewpoint, asserting that Ruth's leadership is defined by her capacity to enact strategic decisions that yield long-term ramifications for her household's well-being. As Diko notes, her proactive agency—evident in her choice to glean facilitated social and familial redemption, transforming opportunity into stability for Naomi and herself. (Diko, 2024:1-10)

(b) Proactive and assertive leadership

Ruth's initiative in proposing to Boaz to fulfil the role of the kinsman-redeemer (Ruth 3:6-9) exemplifies her assertive leadership within a socio-legal framework that often-limited women's agency. In a cultural context where women, especially foreign women, held restricted roles, Ruth's bold approach to Boaz is a remarkable demonstration of proactive leadership. By positioning herself in this manner, Ruth not only secures her and Naomi's future but also exemplifies a deep understanding of the social and legal obligations tied to kinsman redeemer and, as described in Lau (2023:89-92).

Quick (2020) underscores Ruth's ability to manoeuvre within the cultural and legal systems of ancient Israel. By recognising the opportunity presented through the kinsman-redeemer, Ruth asserts her right to protection and provision, challenging the traditional passive role expected of widowed women in her position (Quick 2020: 55). Her actions reveal a proactive approach

to leadership that leverages social and legal norms for personal and communal benefit, highlighting her strategic and assertive nature. Gafney (2017: 185) similarly frames Ruth's gleaned and bold approach to Boaz as a courageous reinterpretation of the Levirate and redemption laws, demonstrating subversive agency within a patriarchal system.

Savran (2016) further elaborates on Ruth's assertiveness, arguing that her actions break away from the passive roles typically assigned to widowed women. Ruth not only initiates the encounter with Boaz but also takes charge of the situation by clearly expressing her intentions and expectations. This leadership style is marked by her ability to act decisively in moments of vulnerability, reinforcing her role as a transformative figure in the narrative (Savran, 2016:7-23).

(c) Adaptability and resilience

Ruth's leadership also illustrates adaptability as she navigates the patriarchal and foreign cultural context to ensure both her survival and that of Naomi. Her resilience in the face of social and economic challenges is evident in her willingness to glean and her boldness in approaching Boaz. By working within established socio-legal frameworks, Ruth transforms potential vulnerabilities into opportunities, demonstrating her ability to adapt to difficult circumstances while remaining committed to her goals (Branch, 2012:1-11). Here, Ruth's actions reflect leadership traits characterised by a profound understanding of cultural norms, strategic foresight, and the courage to take initiative, even under challenging circumstances. Her adept use of socio-legal structures to secure not only survival but also long-term stability underscores her skilful leadership in the ancient context.

(d) Astuteness and foresight

Ruth's astuteness and foresight are evident through her actions and decisions, which reflect a deep understanding of her circumstances and the socio-cultural dynamics at play. Her commitment to Naomi and her proactive approach in securing her future with Boaz illustrate her strategic thinking and loyalty.

The book of Ruth stands as more than a pastoral tale of harvest romance; it is a profound testament to Ruth's astute navigation of the socio-legal frameworks of ancient Israel, showcasing her strategic thinking, practical ingenuity, and moral courage (Friedman & Birnbaum, 2012). Far from a passive figure, Ruth demonstrates an exceptional awareness of

the laws and customs that governed land, kinship, and family preservation — transforming them into tools for securing justice and stability for herself and Naomi.

Scholars observe that Ruth’s story unfolds as a kind of legal homily, carefully structured around the principles and tensions within the Deuteronomic laws (Berman, 2007). The narrative does not merely echo these laws but, as Braulik (1999) insightfully points out, it critiques and reinterprets them, revealing how Torah statutes could be creatively applied or subtly reimagined to protect the vulnerable. Ruth’s approach challenges the static reading of the law, showing that the spirit of the law — communal responsibility and covenantal kindness — must triumph over rigid literalism.

Ruth’s understanding of these legal provisions is no abstract knowledge. Her decision to glean in the fields reflects a precise grasp of the gleaning laws outlined in Leviticus and Deuteronomy a right reserved for the poor, widows, and foreigners (Reiss, 2007). Yet Ruth does not stop at passive dependence; she exercises discernment in choosing Boaz’s field, leveraging both custom and kinship ties to secure long-term protection.

This resourcefulness is nowhere clearer than in the dramatic threshing floor encounter, where Ruth’s bold night-time visit embodies her creative and courageous use of levirate customs. Here she positions herself under Boaz’s cloak — a symbolic appeal to the role of the kinsman-redeemer, whose duty was to preserve the family line and land. Instead of waiting for rescue, Ruth initiates the conversation, showing that true leadership sometimes dares to step outside social expectations to fulfil a higher moral duty.

The narrative goes further, exploring more complex legal issues such as the precedent set by the daughters of Zelophehad (Numbers 27), who claimed inheritance rights in the absence of male heirs. Embry (2016:31-34) notes that this regulation resonates within Ruth’s marriage to Boaz, which combines the laws of levirate marriage and property redemption to ensure Naomi’s family line endures. This legal entanglement underscores that Ruth’s actions are not reckless; they rest on an informed, almost prophetic grasp of Israel’s covenantal ethos.

Ultimately, Ruth’s story does not merely recount clever survival tactics; it presents a paradigm for moral leadership and covenantal faithfulness that transcends the field and the threshing floor. Her actions model what it means to embody *hesed* steadfast lovingkindness — in ways that renew family, community, and even the nation’s future (Friedman & Birnbaum, 2012; Hamilton, 2011). In an age where leadership so often mistakes force for influence, Ruth stands as an enduring reminder that astuteness, compassion, and courage to work within and beyond

structural constraints remain vital virtues for just leadership in every sphere of life business, community, and faith alike.

(e) Subversion of societal norms

Purcell (2020) highlight Ruth's ability to challenge and subvert societal norms, particularly those related to gender roles in a patriarchal society. Purcell points out that although Ruth operates within traditional practices, her boldness in initiating the proposal to Boaz defies typical expectations of women's roles, positioning her as a leader who is not confined by societal constraints.

This subversion of norms showcases Ruth's innovative leadership, as she finds ways to assert her agency in a restrictive context. This act not only empowers Ruth but also serves as a catalyst for change, inspiring others to reconsider their own positions within the societal framework (Purcell, 2020:486-508).

Furthermore, Ruth's actions highlight the potential for individual agency to reshape collective narratives, encouraging a re-evaluation of what it means to be a woman in her time (Norris & Inglehart, 2000:45). By challenging the status quo, she paves the way for future generations to embrace their own voices and assert their rights, ultimately transforming the landscape of gender dynamics in her community (Norris & Inglehart, 2000:50).

(f) Courage and resourcefulness

Williams (2020:14–46) underscores Ruth's courage in challenging entrenched gender roles through her bold approach to Boaz and the transformative “contract” she forges in the liminal space of the threshing floor. In a society where foreign women were often marginalised; Ruth's actions demonstrate a striking defiance of societal expectations. Williams argues that Ruth's self-care and calculated negotiation reframe her marginalised status as a source of agency, positioning her as a leader who demonstrates resourcefulness and covenantal wisdom within her community.

Masenya (2013:9) explores how marginalised figures like Ruth model a resilient, strategic defiance of oppressive norms — a theme that resonates deeply for African Christian women negotiating patriarchal contexts today. Ruth's approach to Boaz not only breaks cultural taboos

but also asserts her dignity and agency, redefining what it means to be a “foreigner” who shapes her destiny. Similarly, Panganiban (2020:182–197) highlights Ruth’s “theology of resilience amidst vulnerability,” showing how her willingness to act from a place of risk transforms weakness into strength and generates new possibilities for community flourishing.

The contributions of Reiss (2007) and Masenya (2013) enrich our understanding of Ruth’s leadership traits by emphasising her boldness in defying patriarchal constraints and her strategic foresight in navigating complex socio-cultural frameworks. Both scholars point to Ruth’s leadership as a quiet yet radical model of covenantal kindness (*hesed*) that is deeply practical and visionary. Her story reveals how courage in moments of vulnerability, when rooted in loyalty and moral integrity, can transform not only a household but the moral imagination of an entire community.

### 3.3.2.2 Inspire a shared vision (Kouzes & Posner)

Ruth’s leadership aligns with the model of Inspiring a *Shared Vision*, as articulated by Kouzes & Posner (2017:116). According to this model, effective leaders inspire others by creating a compelling vision for the future, motivating individuals to work together toward common goals (Kouzes & Posner, 2017:116-160).

Ruth embodies this leadership practice through her commitment to Naomi, as seen in her declaration, “Where you go, I will go” (Ruth 1:16). This statement reflects Ruth’s shared vision for a future of hope, security, and survival for Naomi’s household. Ruth’s leadership goes beyond personal survival; she envisions and works toward collective well-being and prosperity

Ruth’s leadership is evident not only in her personal actions but also in her ability to inspire and motivate others toward a common purpose. Kouzes & Posner (2017:116) emphasise that leaders who inspire a shared vision can paint a future that is both compelling and attainable. Ruth’s decisions, such as gleaning in Boaz’s fields and securing his role as kinsman-redeemer, reflect her vision for a secure future for herself and Naomi. Her ability to align both Naomi and Boaz with this shared vision demonstrates her capacity to unite individuals in pursuit of a common goal, showcasing her inclusive and transformative leadership.

Recent scholarship reinforces this perspective. Panganiban (2020:182–197) highlights Ruth’s “theology of resilience amidst vulnerability,” showing how her unwavering hope and courageous actions inspire Naomi to see the possibility of restoration, even after bitter loss.

Masenya (2013:9) draws connections between Ruth’s story and the experiences of African women today, arguing that Ruth models how marginalised women can envision a stable future for their families by mobilising cultural norms to their advantage. Similarly, Williams (2020:14–46) demonstrates how Ruth’s strategic “contracts” with Naomi and Boaz reflect her deep commitment to communal well-being and her capacity to negotiate shared futures in a society that offered her few formal avenues for agency.

Additionally, Frymer-Kensky (2008:240–247) underscores Ruth’s remarkable astuteness and moral courage in navigating restrictive socio-legal frameworks while challenging the limitations placed on women and foreigners. She argues that Ruth transforms her marginal status into a source of influence, inspiring others to act in ways that bring about restoration and covenantal faithfulness. Through her foresight, loyalty, and bold initiative, Ruth emerges as a leader who not only imagines a better future but actively gathers others into that vision embodying what it means to inspire a shared vision in contexts that seem utterly barren of hope. These traits—foresight, boldness, and the ability to inspire others—are central to Kouzes & Posner’s (2017) leadership model of inspiring a shared vision.

Ruth’s leadership is multifaceted, characterised by strategic decision-making, resourcefulness, and the ability to inspire and unite others around a shared vision of hope and security. Her commitment to Naomi and her successful alignment with Boaz reflect her inclusive and transformative leadership. Through her actions, Ruth not only ensures her own survival but also creates a future of collective well-being, embodying the qualities of a visionary leader as outlined by Kouzes & Posner (2017:64-281).

### 3.3.3 Impact and influence

Parallels to African Context (Mburu, 2019:149): The leadership demonstrated by Ruth in the biblical narrative exhibits striking similarities to the communal leadership paradigms widely observed in numerous African societies, wherein the emphasis is placed predominantly on the collective well-being of the community rather than on individual pursuit of success and recognition. Through the lens of Mburu’s hermeneutical framework, it becomes evident that Ruth’s actions, such as securing the support of Boaz and ensuring the welfare of her mother-in-law Naomi, manifest the ethos of communal responsibility and resilience. These are fundamental principles underpinning African leadership ideologies. Ruth’s remarkable ability to mobilize resources for Naomi’s benefit not only illustrates her commitment to these values but also aligns with characteristics of African communal leadership. In such contexts,

individuals, particularly women, often assume leadership roles within patriarchal structures to elevate their families and enhance the well-being of their communities.

Ruth's leadership reflects the lived experiences of African women who skilfully navigate patriarchal systems to secure the survival and prosperity of their families. Ruth epitomises a leadership model anchored in resilience, resourcefulness, and the strategic use of available opportunities within cultural constraints, mirroring the experiences of contemporary African women leaders.

Although Mercy Amba Oduyoye does not write directly on the Book of Ruth, her insights into African women's resilience within patriarchal systems illuminate the significance of Ruth's story for African feminist theology. Oduyoye (1999) argues that African women continually exercise resourcefulness and courage to ensure the survival and prosperity of their families, despite restrictive cultural norms (Oduyoye, 1999:17–19). This perspective resonates with Ruth's narrative, in which a marginalised Moabite woman navigates socio-legal constraints to secure her household's future. In this way, Ruth's leadership can be seen to embody what Oduyoye describes as African women's capacity to transform vulnerability into collective strength and well-being.

This connection between Ruth's narrative and contemporary African leadership practices illustrates the enduring relevance of her leadership in addressing socio-economic challenges within patriarchal societies.

*Encourage the Heart* (Kouzes & Posner) shows Ruth's unwavering loyalty, profound kindness, and resilience not only transform her own circumstances but also play a crucial role in changing Naomi's outlook on life, exemplifying Kouzes and Posner's leadership practice of *Encourage the Heart*. In their seminal work, Kouzes and Posner (2017:281) emphasize the importance of leaders recognizing and celebrating the contributions of those they lead, fostering emotional well-being and resilience. Ruth's commitment to Naomi, vividly illustrated through her acts of loyalty and kindness, revitalizes Naomi's sense of hope and purpose in a world previously devoid of both. This transformation is poignantly depicted through Naomi's blessing of Boaz and her renewed sense of purpose, symbolizing the profound emotional and spiritual renewal Ruth's leadership facilitated (Ruth 4:14).

Recent scholarship has built upon this idea by examining the emotional and relational dimensions of Ruth's leadership. Njoroge (2005) highlights how African women theologians

practise a form of leadership grounded in emotional intelligence and relational trust, arguing that effective leaders inspire and restore communal hope by nurturing resilience and instilling confidence in those they serve (Njoroge, 2005:29–46). This perspective resonates with Ruth’s ability to revive Naomi’s sense of hope and security after profound loss, illustrating how her actions parallel contemporary models of transformative, relational leadership.

Similarly, Panganiban (2020:185–188) explores how Ruth’s leadership is rooted in empathy and a nuanced understanding of relational dynamics, suggesting that her actions extend beyond mere survival strategy to cultivate community cohesion and emotional well-being. By stepping into risky spaces, initiating covenantal ties, and embodying steadfast kindness (*hesed*), Ruth exemplifies how compassionate, emotionally intelligent leadership can rebuild trust and inspire collective flourishing.

Together, these analyses position Ruth’s leadership as not only vital for physical survival but also for emotional and spiritual restoration demonstrating the transformative power of compassionate, relational leadership in contexts of marginalisation and loss.

By integrating ancient biblical wisdom with contemporary African leadership values, this analysis of Ruth’s leadership offers a profound model for understanding how leaders can foster communal resilience, instil hope, and promote emotional restoration. Ruth’s leadership serves as a timeless and cross-cultural archetype, emphasizing the importance of collective well-being, strategic resourcefulness, and emotional support to inspire and sustain communities during crises and adversity.

### 3.4 Exegetical analysis from a female leadership perspective

Ruth’s leadership attributes within the biblical narrative significantly influence her decision-making framework, embodying transformational leadership and personal conviction. Her narrative serves as an exemplar of the interaction between leadership methodology and inherent characteristics in determining decision-making results, a dynamic frequently analysed in leadership research. The decisions made by Ruth, characterised by fidelity, bravery, and strategic insight, are congruent with the principles of transformational leadership, which highlight the significance of vision, motivation, and dedication to shared objectives.

Ruth’s leadership is manifested through her actions, discourse, and interpersonal relationships, particularly her integrity, fidelity, and proactive approach. These attributes are discernible in pivotal passages that depict her as an archetypal leader, especially in the context of her

engagements with Naomi and Boaz. The subsequent analysis examines these dimensions, elucidating how her leadership transcends the personal sphere and engenders social transformation, exemplifying the manner in which her character influences outcomes and impacts those in her vicinity.

### 3.4.1 Detailed analysis of key passages

Ruth's leadership qualities in the biblical narrative are demonstrated through her actions, words, and relationships, which reflect her integrity, loyalty, and initiative. These qualities are highlighted in several key passages that showcase her as a model of leadership, particularly in the context of her interactions with Naomi and Boaz. The following sections explore these aspects in more detail.

#### 3.4.1.1 (Ruth 1:16-17) Loyalty and commitment to Naomi

In the biblical narrative of Ruth, the passage in Ruth 1:16-17 stands as a critical moment that reveals Ruth's profound loyalty and commitment to her mother-in-law, Naomi. Following the deaths of their husbands, Naomi urges Ruth to return to her homeland for a better chance at life, yet Ruth adamantly chooses to remain by Naomi's side, declaring:

*“But Ruth replied, “Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go, I will go, and where you stay, I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me”* (Ruth 1:16-17, NIV).

#### Ruth 1:16-17 (Hebrew text)

וְתֹאמַר רוּת אֶל־תִּפְגַּעֵי־בִי לְעֹזְבָה לָשׁוּב מֵאֲחֵרָיִךְ כִּי אֶל־אֲשֶׁר תִּלְכִּי אֵלָי וּבְאֲשֶׁר תִּלְיִנִי אֵלָיו עַמִּי וְאֵלֹהֶיךָ 16  
אֵלֶיךָ:

. בְּאֲשֶׁר תָּמוּתִי אָמוּת וְשָׁם אֶקְבֹּר כֹּה יַעֲשֶׂה יְהוָה לִי וְכֹה יִסֶּיף כִּי הִמְנוֹת יִפְרִיד בֵּינִי וּבֵינֶךָ: 17

This passage exemplifies Ruth's unwavering loyalty, devotion, and responsibility—attributes that are fundamental to strong leadership. Ruth's decision to stay with Naomi, a vulnerable widow, illustrates not only personal conviction but also a commitment to the well-being of others, a core aspect of transformational leadership. By choosing to sacrifice her own prospects to ensure Naomi's welfare, Ruth's actions reflect principles of selflessness and communal care

that inspire others. Ruth's leadership is characterised by her ability to prioritise the needs of others over her own, embodying key tenets of transformational leadership, such as vision and personal commitment to collective goals (Lu, 2017:55-71). Ruth's journey with Naomi not only underscores the strength of their relationship but also illustrates the profound impact that compassionate leadership can have on both individuals and entire communities. Through their shared experiences, they cultivate a sense of belonging that empowers others to rise above adversity, reinforcing the idea that leadership is not merely about authority but about uplifting those around us (Potgieter & Taute, 2020:1-10).

This narrative illustrates how genuine concern for others can foster resilience and unity, ultimately leading to transformative change within a community. As Ruth navigates their challenges, her unwavering support for Naomi becomes a beacon of hope, demonstrating that true leadership is rooted in empathy and shared purpose.

Moreover, Ruth's declaration to Naomi is not simply a personal vow, but a pivotal narrative moment that underscores her steadfastness and persuasive leadership. Naomi's repeated attempts to convince Ruth to return to her own people are met with Ruth's articulate and heartfelt commitment, eventually leading Naomi to accept her companionship. This interaction is frequently cited as a classic example of loyalty and selflessness, demonstrating Ruth's leadership through her unwavering devotion to Naomi and her embodiment of solidarity and shared faith (Savran 2016:7-23). Their bond not only demonstrates the strength of their relationship but also reminds of the profound impact that love and loyalty can have in navigating moments of uncertainty. As they journey together, their shared experiences deepen their connection, illustrating how adversity can forge unbreakable ties and inspire resilience in the face of challenges (Lu, 2017:104).

Through a theological and literary lens, scholars such as Mburu provide further insight into Ruth's leadership. One of the defining elements of Ruth's leadership is found in this very passage, where her decision to remain with Naomi reflects not only loyalty but also self-sacrifice and resilience. Using Mburu's hermeneutical framework, Ruth's actions can be interpreted as aligning with theological concepts such as *hesed* (covenantal loyalty), which serves to deepen her bond with Naomi while simultaneously positioning her within the larger divine narrative of Israel. Mburu's analysis reveals that Ruth's understanding of her role within this broader context showcases her alignment with divine providence and theological virtues, qualities that are foundational to her leadership (Mburu, 2019:116). This alignment not only elevates her character but also sets a precedent for future leaders who seek to embody similar

virtues in their own contexts. Furthermore, Ruth's commitment to Naomi exemplifies the transformative power of loyalty, illustrating how personal relationships can influence communal identity and faithfulness in times of adversity (Reiss, 2007:82).

Recent scholarship supports this view, as de Villiers (2021:3–6) highlights how Ruth's leadership is defined by her capacity to act decisively in moments of crisis. In choosing to remain with Naomi, Ruth ensures not only their survival but the continuity of their household. De Villiers emphasizes that Ruth's actions resonate with the broader theme of divine providence and covenantal faithfulness, demonstrating her leadership as both spiritually grounded and practically effective (de Villiers, 2021:3–6). Through her unwavering loyalty, negotiation within communal structures, and risk-taking, Ruth's leadership emerges as deeply rooted in theological principles while addressing real-world challenges—making her an enduring model of faith-driven leadership. (Branch, 2012:89).

As Ruth navigates the complexities of her situation, she exemplifies the power of loyalty and commitment, inspiring those around her to embrace resilience in the face of adversity. Her journey encourages a collective response to hardship, urging communities to unite in support and compassion, thereby fostering an environment where faith and action intertwine seamlessly. Through her actions, Ruth demonstrates that true leadership is not merely about authority but about serving others with humility and grace, creating a legacy that transcends individual achievements (Branch, 2012:1-11).

Kouzes and Posner's Practice: Model the Way: In the context of Ruth 1:16-17, Ruth's actions exemplify Kouzes and Posner's leadership practice of Model the Way, which emphasises the importance of leading by example. According to Kouzes and Posner (2017), effective leaders establish principles concerning how people should be treated and the way goals should be pursued, setting a personal example through their own behaviour. Ruth's unwavering commitment to Naomi in a time of crisis embodies this principle by demonstrating the values of loyalty, selflessness, and dedication, all of which she expects others to follow through her own actions. This profound bond between Ruth and Naomi highlights the importance of empathy and compassion in relationships, reminding us that leadership is not merely about authority but about fostering a sense of community and belonging.

Ruth does not merely profess loyalty but lives it through her decisions. Her declaration, "Where you go, I will go, and where you stay, I will stay" (Ruth 1:16, NIV), transcends mere verbal affirmation and serves as a practical illustration of the principle of Model the Way. She harmonizes her behaviours with her core beliefs, thereby providing a compelling exemplar to

Naomi and others of the essence of authentic commitment and effective leadership. This further exemplifies how genuine leadership is fundamentally anchored in the readiness to assist and elevate those whom we cherish.

Recent discourses surrounding Model the Way underscore that effective leaders motivate through their lived experiences. Flashpoint Leadership (2024) accentuates that “Model the Way” constitutes one of the essential practices of exemplary leadership, wherein leaders delineate explicit values and synchronize their actions accordingly. Ruth’s conduct encapsulates these tenets, demonstrating that leadership necessitates more than mere verbal assurances; it requires dedication manifested through consistent behaviours (Flashpoint Leadership, 2024:37). In a similar vein, Farenga (2023) underscores the significance of authenticity in leadership and the practice of role-modelling as a potent mechanism for empowering and directing teams towards collective aspirations (Farenga, 2023:15).

In this sense, Ruth’s leadership is not just about what she says but what she does, demonstrating to Naomi—and to future generations of readers—how to lead through action and personal sacrifice (Kouzes & Posner, 2017:43).

Ruth’s leadership in this passage also serves to inspire Naomi, who, in her grief and despair, had initially pushed Ruth away, encouraging her to return to her homeland. Ruth’s actions, however, model the values of commitment and perseverance, ultimately leading Naomi to accept her companionship. This influence mirrors Kouzes and Posner’s concept of leading by example, where leaders model the way forward by aligning their values with their behaviour, thus inspiring and guiding others to do the same (Kouzes & Posner, 2017:47-64). Ruth’s unwavering loyalty not only strengthens their bond but also highlights the transformative power of supportive relationships in overcoming adversity. As they journey together, Naomi begins to see the world through Ruth’s eyes, recognizing that their shared experiences can forge a new path filled with hope and resilience. This newfound perspective empowers Naomi to embrace her identity, allowing her to confront the challenges ahead with renewed strength and determination (Quick, 2019:46).

#### 3.4.1.2 (Ruth 2:2-3) Ruth’s initiative and work ethic

Upon her arrival in Bethlehem, Ruth promptly exhibits her initiative by soliciting permission from Naomi to glean in the agricultural fields:

*“Let me go to the fields and pick up the leftover grain behind anyone in whose eyes I find favour” (Ruth 2:2, NIV).*

Ruth 2:2 (Hebrew text)

וַתֹּאמֶר רוּת הַמּוֹאֲבִיָּה אֶל-נָעֳמִי אֶלְכֶה-נָּא הַשָּׂדֶה וְאֶלְקַטְתִּי בַשְּׂבָלִים אַחַר אִשֶׁר אֶמְצָא-הֵן בְּעֵינָיו וַתֹּאמֶר לָהּ לְכִי בְתִי: 2

This excerpt elucidates Ruth’s proactive disposition and robust work ethic. Her choice to engage in gleaning signifies her audacity and resolve, as gleaning was predominantly designated for the most impoverished segments of society and encompassed inherent physical hazards. By opting to undertake this arduous task, Ruth epitomises essential leadership qualities such as initiative and resilience. Her practical sagacity is manifest in her readiness to take prompt action under challenging conditions to secure the survival and welfare of her family (Lu 2017:104). Ruth’s endeavours not only illustrate her dedication to her family but also establish the groundwork for her eventual metamorphosis and influence within the community. Her leadership shines through an innate capacity to adapt to shifting circumstances and seize opportunity in adversity—foundational traits for empowering others. In fact, researchers like Yong Lu (2016:68) specifically commend Ruth for her ability to transform vulnerability into proactive decision-making, noting that each strategic move she makes from gleaning in Boaz’s field to asserting her claim as kinsman-redeemer catalyses broader, long-term benefits—not only for herself, but for those she leads and serves.

Ruth’s endeavours not only illustrate her dedication to her family but also lay the groundwork for her transformation and influence within the community starting with her encounter with Boaz. In *Learning from the Leadership of Boaz in the Book of Ruth*, Sia Kok Sin (2021:120–124) observes that Boaz acknowledges Ruth’s “diligence and integrity” at the threshing floor, indicating a reciprocal relationship where her consistent hard work gains his trust and respect. This recognition by Boaz signals a pivotal shift in Ruth’s social capital and underscores how her industriousness and character open doors for future opportunity and leadership within the community.

Ruth’s resolution to glean can be construed as a courageous, proactive endeavour aimed at providing sustenance for both her and Naomi. This reflects a trailblazing spirit, as Ruth not only accepts her circumstances but also undertakes risks to secure their future. Her aptitude for manoeuvring through challenging situations with valour and ingenuity distinguishes her as a leader who acts resolutely and prioritises the needs of others, even at personal peril (Lu, 2017:104). This moment encapsulates Ruth’s leadership in action, showcasing her formidable work ethic and dedication to the welfare of her household. As she collects the residual grain,

Ruth not only sustains them physically but also interweaves a narrative of resilience and hope that galvanises those around her (Quick, 2020:47-66). Her capability to adapt, persevere, and lead through tangible actions becomes a pivotal aspect of transformation in her narrative and for the larger community.

Ruth's actions resonate profoundly within the community, cultivating a sense of solidarity and prompting others to assist one another during periods of adversity. Her narrative exemplifies the potency of individual leadership in fostering collective resilience. By embodying principles of diligence, humility, and perseverance, Ruth stands as a paragon for others in the community, illustrating how individual efforts can inspire a spirit of collaboration and mutual support (Fewell, & Gunn, 1989:55-56)

Ruth's narrative functions as a significant reminder of the profound effect that a single individual can exert, fostering a spirit of collaboration and benevolence that surpasses individual adversities. Her industriousness and leadership not only alter her situation but also facilitate a more extensive transformation within her community, thereby illuminating the intricate interrelationship among leadership, communal support, and resilience (Jordaan, 2006:5-6).

Mburu's Hermeneutical Techniques: *Theological and Socio-Cultural Context*: Mburu's hermeneutical techniques, particularly his focus on the theological and socio-cultural context, can be effectively applied to Ruth's initiative and work ethic in Ruth 2:2-3. Ruth's decision to glean in the fields demonstrates personal initiative and resilience and is deeply embedded in ancient Israel's socio-cultural and religious practices. Gleaning was a practice mandated by the Torah, intended to provide for the poor, widows, and foreigners (Lev 19:9-10, Deut 24:19-21), which places Ruth's actions within a broader theological framework of covenantal faithfulness and social justice.

According to Mburu's approach, Ruth's decision to glean reflects her understanding of her role within this divine order. Her initiative aligns with the theological concept of *hesed* (covenantal loyalty), where her actions are motivated by both personal loyalty to Naomi and a commitment to fulfilling her obligations under the socio-religious structures of her time. This demonstrates Ruth's leadership as one that integrates theological understanding with practical action. Mburu's framework highlights how Ruth's proactive engagement with the gleaning laws reflects her participation in the communal and divine provisions for the vulnerable, reinforcing her role as a leader who embodies theological virtues within the socio-cultural realities of her context (Branch, 2012:1-11).

Furthermore, Mburu's emphasis on the socio-cultural dynamics of leadership helps to situate Ruth's actions within the patriarchal society of ancient Israel, where women, especially foreign women, were marginalised. Despite these social barriers, Ruth's decision to glean demonstrates her resourcefulness and courage in navigating the cultural constraints imposed on her, aligning with Mburu's interpretation of leadership in biblical narratives as not only theological but also deeply rooted in socio-cultural resilience.

Kouzes and Posner's Practice: *Challenge the Process*: In Ruth's decision to glean in the fields (Ruth 2:2-3) and challenge the process, one of Kouzes and Posner's leadership practices, is exemplified. This leadership model emphasises the importance of seeking opportunities, taking risks, and challenging the status quo to innovate and improve situations. Ruth's proactive decision to go out and glean reflects her willingness to take initiative and step outside of traditional roles, challenging the societal expectations placed on her as a poor, foreign widow.

According to Kouzes and Posner (2017:165), effective leaders are those who are willing to take bold actions to address challenges and seek new solutions. In this instance, Ruth embodies this leadership model by taking the initiative to provide for herself and Naomi through gleaning, a physically demanding and potentially dangerous activity reserved for society's marginalised members. Her actions demonstrate the courage to confront adversity, challenging the limitations imposed by her circumstances.

Ruth's decision to go into the fields and glean demonstrates her ability to challenge both societal and personal obstacles, aligning with Challenge the Process. She actively seeks a solution to the problem of survival, even though this involves stepping into a vulnerable role. This practice highlights her resilience and innovative thinking, key components of leadership as described by Kouzes and Posner (2017:165).

#### 3.4.1.3 (Ruth 3:6-9) Ruth's courage and strategic thinking

In Ruth 3:6-9, Ruth exemplifies both courage and strategic thinking as she approaches Boaz at the threshing floor, a culturally significant and potentially risky move aimed at securing her and Naomi's future. The passage states:

*“So, she went down to the threshing floor and did everything her mother-in-law told her to do. When Boaz had finished eating and drinking and was in good spirits, he went over to lie down*

*at the far end of the grain pile. Ruth approached quietly, uncovered his feet and lay down”* (Ruth 3:6-7, NIV).

Ruth 3:6-7 (Hebrew text)

וַתֵּרֶד הַגֶּרֶן וַתַּעֲשֶׂה כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר-צִוְתָהּ הַמֹּתֵהָ: 6  
וַיֵּאכַל בָּעֵז וַיִּשְׁתְּ וַיֵּיטֵב לָבֹו וַיֵּבֵא לְשֹׁכֵב בְּקִצְצָה הָעֲרֻמָּה וַתִּבֶּא בִלְטָ וַתִּגְלַל מִרְגְּלֵתָיו וַתִּשְׁכָּב: 7

By following Naomi’s instructions, Ruth positions herself in a situation where Boaz, as their kinsman-redeemer, can make a decision that would secure their future. This scene highlights Ruth’s ability to take calculated risks, demonstrating both her courage and strategic thinking. Approaching Boaz in this intimate and vulnerable context was a bold move that could have led to social rejection or misinterpretation. However, Ruth’s actions reflect her deep understanding of cultural norms and her ability to navigate them to achieve long-term security for herself and Naomi. Her courage in the face of potential social risk underscores her leadership capacity, as she shows a willingness to take risks for a greater purpose (Lu, 2017:108). This pivotal moment not only showcases Ruth’s determination but also sets the stage for a transformative change in their lives. Her boldness ultimately paves the way for redemption and hope, deepening the bond between Ruth and Naomi, and illustrating the power of loyalty and love in overcoming adversity (Fewell & Gunn, 1988:102-104).

Ruth’s obedience to Naomi’s guidance, as seen in Ruth 3:5, and her deference to Boaz in Ruth 2:10 further reinforce her leadership qualities. Despite the potential risks, Ruth follows Naomi’s instructions carefully, trusting her mother-in-law’s wisdom. This demonstrates her ability to balance obedience with strategic decision-making. Additionally, her respectful and humble demeanour when interacting with Boaz showcases her understanding of servant leadership, a style characterised by humility and a focus on the well-being of others (Block, 1999:677-690). This approach not only strengthens her relationships but also sets a powerful example for those around her, illustrating that true leadership often lies in selflessness and the willingness to serve.

Ruth’s actions illustrate that effective leadership is not merely about authority but also about fostering trust and collaboration within a community. As Panganiban (2020) notes, leaders who prioritise relationship-building and respect, as Ruth does with Boaz and Naomi, create environments where collaboration thrives (Panganiban, 2020:85). Ruth’s courage, rooted in both personal conviction and cultural understanding, allows her to act decisively while still considering the broader community’s welfare.

Ruth’s ability to balance deference with decisive action is a testament to her effectiveness as a leader, as she skilfully combines obedience with strategic thinking to achieve her goals (Lu,

2017:108). This balance of boldness and humility demonstrates a sophisticated form of leadership that goes beyond mere compliance, reflecting her ability to lead by example while navigating complex social dynamics. Ruth's leadership encourages others to embrace their strengths and fosters environments where innovation and creativity can flourish. This approach not only enhances team morale but also drives collective success, as individuals feel empowered to contribute their unique perspectives and skills.

Mburu's Hermeneutical Technique: *The Historical and Cultural Context*: In analysing Ruth 3:6-9, Mburu's hermeneutical technique focusing on the historical and cultural context is highly applicable. Ruth's approach to Boaz at the threshing floor must be understood within the framework of the ancient Israelite custom of the kinsman-redeemer (*go'el*), a practice deeply embedded in the cultural and legal structures of the time. This custom emphasised familial responsibility, where close relatives had a duty to ensure the welfare of vulnerable family members, particularly widows. By situating Ruth's actions in this historical and cultural context, we can appreciate her leadership and strategic thinking more fully (Mburu, 2019:115).

Ruth's bold initiative in approaching Boaz reflects her understanding of the nuances of these customs, as she skilfully positions herself within the narrative of redemption and loyalty that defines her story. Her willingness to take risks in pursuit of security for herself and Naomi demonstrates her commitment to family, while also challenging the traditional gender roles of her time (Quick, 2019:354). Her actions reveal her capacity to navigate societal norms with courage and intent, showcasing her ability to turn cultural constraints into opportunities for change.

Moreover, Ruth's boldness in approaching Boaz highlights the agency of women in these cultural contexts. While women in ancient Israel, especially foreign widows, were often in vulnerable positions, Ruth's proactive engagement with Boaz shows how she navigates these societal norms with both courage and a profound understanding of the socio-legal framework (Bediako, 2016:94-96). Her actions challenge gender expectations and redefine her role, turning her into a symbol of resilience and empowerment for future generations (De Villiers, 2019:1-6).

According to Mburu, understanding the socio-legal environment of ancient Israel is essential for interpreting Ruth's decision to follow Naomi's advice. The role of the kinsman-redeemer was designed to preserve family lineage and ensure the welfare of vulnerable individuals. Ruth's actions were culturally appropriate but carried significant risks. Her decision to appeal to Boaz's legal and cultural obligations demonstrates her strategic thinking, as she exercised

her agency within the boundaries of her society. By placing herself at the threshing floor, Ruth not only invoked Boaz's legal duty but also underscored the importance of kinship ties in determining legal and social outcomes (Mburu, 2019:115). This act reveals the intricate balance between vulnerability and power, as Ruth leverages her position to secure a future for herself and Naomi (Norris & Inglehart, 2022:71).

Furthermore, Ruth's actions challenge traditional gender norms. Women, particularly foreign widows, were socially and economically vulnerable. Yet, Ruth's boldness in taking this step reveals her capacity to adapt and lead within the cultural expectations of her time (Kanyoro, 1995:18). This duality in her character highlights her resilience and catalyses change, inspiring others to reconsider their roles within the community and see the potential for transformation through solidarity (Bediako 2016:84). Ruth's journey exemplifies the power of individual agency in reshaping one's destiny through calculated risks and unwavering faith.

Thus, Mburu's focus on the historical and cultural context reveals the significance of Ruth's leadership as she balances her courage with a deep understanding of the cultural and legal structures in which she operates. Her ability to adapt and innovate becomes a beacon for those around her, inspiring a movement that champions inclusivity and resilience in the pursuit of justice (Levenson, 2010:4). This interpretation underscores Ruth's capacity to transcend the limitations imposed by her social status and gender, highlighting how her actions catalyse meaningful change within her community.

Further analysis of Ruth 3, where she approaches Boaz at the threshing floor, exemplifies her strategic leadership in seeking security for herself and Naomi. Kanyoro (2019) argues that this passage reflects Ruth's ability to navigate the socio-legal norms of ancient Israel while exhibiting initiative and boldness, traits that are crucial in leadership (Kanyoro, 2019:56). Her actions secure their future and challenge the prevailing gender norms, illustrating how women can wield power and influence in transformative ways (Lu, 2017:10). Ruth's encounter with Boaz catalyses a change, demonstrating that leadership often requires courage to step outside traditional boundaries and advocate for oneself and others (Beattie, 1974:251).

This dynamic relationship underscores the importance of collaboration and mutual respect in leadership, as both Ruth and Boaz navigate their roles within a patriarchal society while fostering a sense of community and support.

Kouzes and Posner's *Practice: Challenge the Process*: Within the intricate narrative framework of Ruth 3:6-9, the leadership practice identified as challenging the process, which constitutes

one of the five pivotal practices delineated by Kouzes and Posner in their comprehensive exploration of exemplary leadership, can be effectively and insightfully applied. This particular practice underscores the essential willingness of leaders to actively seek out opportunities for growth and transformation, embrace the inherent risks associated with those endeavours, and audaciously challenge the prevailing norms and conventions that exist within their societal context to foster meaningful change. Ruth's courageous decision to approach Boaz on the threshing floor serves as a strikingly bold and defiant action that directly confronts and challenges the deeply entrenched social and cultural expectations that were prevalent during her historical epoch.

By undertaking this audacious action, Ruth transcends the restrictive boundaries of traditional gender roles and the myriad limitations that were imposed upon her status as a foreign widow navigating the complexities of a patriarchal society. Her resolute decision to heed Naomi's counsel and initiate an approach towards Boaz is illustrative of her remarkable willingness to engage in a calculated risk, one that is fundamentally aimed at securing a viable future for both her and her mother-in-law Naomi. This scenario serves as a compelling and clear exemplar of the practice of challenging the process—wherein Ruth consciously deviates from the anticipated passivity associated with her socially prescribed role and instead proactively seeks out a viable solution, even amidst a potentially precarious and vulnerable circumstance (Kouzes & Posner, 2017:165-171).

Moreover, Ruth's adeptness in deftly navigating the multifaceted risks inherent in her situation while also appealing to the established legal and cultural obligations that Boaz is bound to fulfil as their kinsman-redeemer significantly underscores her profound strategic thinking and acumen. Her actions not only exemplify the critical notion of pursuing innovative and transformative solutions in the face of challenging circumstances, but they also align seamlessly with the core principles encapsulated within the *Challenge of the Process model*. In executing these actions, she effectively engenders an opportunity for substantive change that ultimately secures a more promising future for her family unit.

#### 3.4.1.4 (Ruth 4:9-10) Ruth's leadership in securing Boaz's support

In Ruth 4, Boaz takes formal legal steps to redeem the property of Naomi's family and marry Ruth, thereby securing their future. While Boaz's actions are the final legal resolution, Ruth's

leadership, demonstrated by her initiative in approaching Boaz earlier in Chapter 3, is pivotal to the outcome. Boaz’s public declaration states:

*“Today you are witnesses that I have bought from Naomi all the property of Elimelek, Kilion, and Mahlon. I have also acquired Ruth the Moabite, Mahlon’s widow, as my wife, to maintain the name of the dead with his property, so that his name will not disappear from among his family or from his hometown. Today you are witnesses!”* (Ruth 4:9-10, NIV).

Ruth 4:9-10 (Hebrew text)

וַיֹּאמֶר בְּעֵז לְזַקְנִים וְכָל־הָעָם עֲדִים אַתֶּם הַיּוֹם כִּי קָנִיתִי אֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר לְאֵלִימֶלֶךְ וְאֶת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר לְכִלְיוֹן וּמַחְלוֹן מִיַּד 9  
 בְּעָמִי:  
 וְגַם אֶת־רוּת הַמֹּאבִּיָּה אִשְׁתׁ מַחְלוֹן קָנִיתִי לִי לְאִשָּׁה לְהַקְדִּים שְׂם־הַמַּת עַל־גַּחְלָתוֹ וְלֹא־יִכָּרֵת שְׂם־הַמַּת מֵעַם אֲחֵיו 10  
 וּמִשְׁעַר מְקוֹמוֹ עֲדִים אַתֶּם הַיּוֹם:

This passage highlights the culmination of Ruth’s leadership, as her earlier courage and strategic thinking directly contribute to the securing of a future for both her and Naomi. Ruth’s proactive engagement with Boaz, a man of influence and legal authority, creates the conditions necessary for him to act as kinsman-redeemer. Her leadership, though subtle, drives the narrative forward and leads to a positive and legally recognised outcome for her family (Esler, 1989:85). This act of redemption not only restores their family lineage but also emphasises the importance of community and social responsibility in ancient Israelite culture.

This theme of communal obligation resonates throughout the text, illustrating how individual actions can ripple through society, fostering connections and ensuring the survival of familial ties. (Beattie, 1974:251-267). As Ruth navigates these complex social dynamics, her determination and faith serve as a testament to the strength of women in shaping their destinies, ultimately highlighting the transformative power of loyalty and love within the community. Through her unwavering commitment, Ruth becomes a symbol of resilience, inspiring others to embrace their roles in the collective narrative of their people. (De Vaal Stanton, 2015:674).

Ruth’s interactions with Boaz also reveal her integrity and loving-kindness, qualities that enhance her leadership. Boaz acknowledges Ruth’s noble character, shaped by her reputation within the community, saying, “All the people of my town know that you are a woman of noble character” (Ruth 3:11, NIV). This positive perception of Ruth’s character is rooted in her consistent actions and words, which reflect her integrity, earning her respect and favour in the eyes of others. Boaz’s recognition of Ruth’s character plays a critical role in his decision to marry her, further demonstrating the influence Ruth’s leadership and reputation have on the outcome of the narrative. This union not only solidifies Ruth’s place in the community but also

serves as a testament to the transformative power of integrity and kindness in relationships, ultimately leading to a legacy that transcends their time. (Hess, Block & Manor, 2016:440–443). Ruth’s ability to inspire trust and command respect, both through her actions and reputation, showcases her as a leader who navigates challenging socio-cultural dynamics with wisdom and moral strength, ultimately ensuring the preservation and prosperity of Naomi’s family.

**Mburu’s Hermeneutical Technique: *The Theological Context*:** Mburu’s technique of interpreting through the theological context can be effectively applied to Ruth’s leadership in securing Boaz’s support in Ruth 4:9-10. The concept of the kinsman-redeemer (*go’el*) is deeply rooted in Israelite theology, reflecting the divine provision for vulnerable members of society, such as widows and orphans, and ensuring the continuation of family lines. By understanding Ruth’s actions within this theological framework, her leadership takes on a deeper significance, as it aligns with the divine mandate of covenantal faithfulness (*hesed*) and protection for the vulnerable (Mburu, 2019:16).

Ruth’s initiative in approaching Boaz, and Boaz’s subsequent legal actions, can be seen as fulfilling the divine purpose of redemption, both in a familial and theological sense. Ruth’s leadership is not merely about securing material well-being but is also an embodiment of divine principles, where human action participates in God’s redemptive work. Mburu’s focus on the theological context emphasises that Ruth’s actions contribute to the unfolding of God’s covenantal promises, highlighting her role as an instrument of divine providence (Mburu, 2019:118).

Through this theological lens, Ruth’s leadership is seen as aligning with God’s larger plan for justice and mercy, reinforcing the idea that her courage and initiative are integral to fulfilling the covenantal obligations that ensure the survival and prosperity of Naomi’s family. This deep connection to the theological context underscores the spiritual dimensions of Ruth’s leadership, making her a key figure in advancing God’s purposes.

**Kouzes and Posner’s Practice: *Enable Others to Act*:** In the context of Ruth 4:9-10, the leadership practice of “Enable Others to Act” from Kouzes and Posner’s Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership can be applied. This practice emphasises fostering collaboration, building trust, and empowering others to act. Ruth’s leadership, though subtle, plays a critical role in enabling Boaz to take legal steps as the kinsman-redeemer, fulfilling his role in securing a future for Ruth and Naomi. Ruth’s initiative in approaching Boaz and following Naomi’s guidance creates the conditions for Boaz to act on behalf of the family. By positioning herself

in alignment with cultural and legal expectations, Ruth effectively empowers Boaz to fulfil his role in redeeming Naomi's property and marrying Ruth. Her leadership is collaborative in nature, as she works within the social and legal structures of her time to influence Boaz's decisions (Kouzes & Posner, 2017:220).

Additionally, Ruth's actions inspire trust in Boaz, which is essential for fostering collaboration. Boaz acknowledges Ruth's noble character and integrity, and this recognition encourages him to act. By setting the stage for Boaz to act, Ruth demonstrates how enabling others to take leadership roles can lead to collective success and secure the well-being of the community.

Ruth's ability to enable Boaz to act exemplifies the principles of shared leadership, where individuals work together to achieve common goals, ensuring long-term security and prosperity for their families (Kouzes & Posner, 2017:223).

#### 3.4.1.5 (Ruth 4:13-17) The enduring legacy and profound influence of Ruth

*13 And Boaz took Ruth, and she was his wife. And when he went into her, Jehovah made her conceive. And she bore a son. 14 And the women said to Naomi, Blessed be Jehovah, who has not left you this day without a redeemer, so that his name may be famous in Israel. 15 And he shall be to you as a restorer of life, and one who cheers your old age. For your daughter-in-law who loves you has borne him, she who is better to you than seven sons. 16 And Naomi took the child and laid it in her bosom and became nurse to it. 17 And the women, her neighbours, gave it a name, saying, there is a son born to Naomi. And they called his name Obed. He is the father of Jesse, the father of David. (Rut 4:13-17 (MKJV))*

Ruth 4:13-17 (Hebrew text)

וַיִּקַּח בֹּעַז אֶת־רוּת וַתְּהִי־לּוֹ לְאִשָּׁה וַיָּבֵא אֵלֶיהָ וַיִּתֵּן יְהוָה לָּהּ הַרְיוֹן וַתֵּלֶד בֶּן: 13  
 וַתֹּאמְרֵנָה הַנְּשִׁימֹת אֶל־נְעֻמִי בְּרוּךְ יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא הִשְׁבִּית לָּהּ גֹּאֵל הַיּוֹם וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל: 14  
 וַתִּזְכֹּר לָּהּ לְמַשְׁיב נְפֹשׁ וּלְכַלְכֵּל אֶת־שִׁבְתָּהּ כִּי כָלְתָהּ אֲשֶׁר־אֶהְבֶּתָּהּ יְלִדְתוֹ אֲשֶׁר־הִיא טוֹבָה לָּהּ מִשִּׁבְעָה בָּנִים: 15  
 וַתִּקַּח נְעֻמִי אֶת־הַיֶּלֶד וַתִּשְׁתָּהוּ בְּחִיקָהּ וַתְּהִי־לּוֹ לְאִמָּנָה: 16  
 וַתִּקְרָאנָהּ לוֹ הַשְּׂכֵנֹת שֵׁם לְאִמֶּר יְלִד־בֶּן לְנְעֻמִי וַתִּקְרָאנָהּ שְׁמוֹ עוֹבֵד הוּא אֲבִי־יִשָׁי אֲבִי דָוִד: פ 17

The concluding verses of the Book of Ruth (Ruth 4:13-17) illustrate the profound and lasting legacy associated with Ruth's exemplary leadership, extending beyond her immediate familial obligations to influence Israel's broader historical and theological narrative. Nelson (2024) emphasises how Ruth's union with Boaz, culminating in the birth of Obed, represents more than the preservation of Naomi's family line. The birth of Obed, the grandfather of king David,

secures a lineage that would later include the Messiah (Jesus), thus embedding Ruth's story within the greater biblical tradition of redemption and covenant promises (Nelson, 2024:397-400).

Similarly, Branch (2012) notes how the women's declaration to Naomi in Ruth 4:14-15 "The women said to Naomi: 'Praise be to the Lord, who this day has not left you without a guardian-redeemer. May he become famous throughout Israel! He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth'" (Ruth 4:14-15, NIV). This underlines the social and communal recognition of Ruth's actions, praising her loyalty and her role as a redeemer-like figure herself. This declaration underscores the transformative impact of Ruth's leadership, which is characterised by her resilience, resourcefulness, and unwavering commitment to Naomi's well-being (Branch, 2012:1-15).

Furthermore, Gebarowski-Shafer (2024) argues that Ruth's influence not only affects the trajectory of her own family but serves as a template for understanding female leadership in biblical narratives, showing how individual actions resonate through generations, shaping the future of Israel and beyond (Gebarowski-Shafer, 2024:40). Ruth's story invites reflection on how decisions, even seemingly small ones, can create ripples of influence across history, affirming the potential of leadership exercised through humility and devotion.

The influence exerted by Ruth extends well beyond her immediate actions, as her enduring legacy becomes intricately woven into the genealogical lineage that leads directly to King David, a foundational and pivotal figure in Israel's historical narrative, and, as recognised within Christian theological frameworks, to Jesus Christ himself. This connection underscores the profound truth that each individual's choices can resonate through time, inspiring future generations to pursue their own paths of purpose and significance (Norris & Inglehart, 2000:112).

Ruth's leadership and the far-reaching impact it engenders resonate on multiple levels and dimensions. Her decisive actions not only assured the survival and subsequent prosperity of her family unit, but they also strategically positioned her as an essential figure within the broader divine narrative that encompasses the history of the nation of Israel. The women within the community's recognition of Ruth's exceptional worth—articulated through their description of her as "*better than seven sons*" (Rut 4:15)—reflects a societal acknowledgment of her extraordinary contributions. This highlights how her inherent character and leadership qualities were integral to the shaping of both the future of her family and the nation at large (Esler,

1989:70). Ruth's legacy transcends her immediate circumstances, positioning her as a figure of enduring significance whose leadership continues to influence not only the fate of her household but also the broader trajectory of Israel's historical and theological evolution.

Thus, the leadership exhibited by Ruth, characterised by her unwavering loyalty, insightful foresight, and steadfast commitment to her familial obligations, bequeaths a lasting legacy that extends into the very formation of Israel's royal lineage. This establishes her as a central and pivotal figure within both Jewish and Christian traditions, which continue to venerate her contributions and significance throughout the ages. Her story serves as a testament to the power of resilience and faith, inspiring countless generations to embrace the values of compassion and dedication in their own lives (Matheny, 2022:43-60).

Mburu's Hermeneutical Technique: *The Theological Context*: In the analysis of Ruth 4:13-17, Mburu's theological context technique is particularly applicable. This passage reveals Ruth's pivotal role in the continuation of Naomi's family line, which culminates in the birth of Obed, the grandfather of king David. From a theological perspective, Ruth's actions and leadership are aligned with God's overarching redemptive plan for Israel. Mburu's focus on the theological context emphasises how Ruth's leadership fits into the broader divine narrative, demonstrating her role in the fulfilment of God's covenantal promises to Israel (Mburu, 2019:118).

Ruth's marriage to Boaz and the birth of Obed symbolises divine intervention and blessing, as her leadership results in the preservation and continuation of a lineage that plays a crucial role in Israel's history. Theologically, this passage highlights the concept of *hesed* (covenantal loyalty), as Ruth's actions contribute to the manifestation of God's faithfulness in ensuring the survival and flourishing of Naomi's family. In Christian theology, Ruth's inclusion in the Davidic lineage extends her influence on the genealogy of Jesus Christ (Mathew 1:1-17), further emphasising her significance in the divine plan.

By applying Mburu's theological context technique, Ruth's legacy is seen not only as a matter of personal loyalty and family redemption but as a key element in God's covenantal relationship with Israel, making her leadership both spiritually and historically significant (Mburu 2019:120). This dual significance invites deeper reflection on the roles women play in biblical narratives, often serving as pivotal figures in the unfolding of divine purpose. Their stories challenge traditional interpretations and highlight the necessity of recognising female agency within scriptural accounts, urging contemporary readers to reconsider the impact of women in shaping faith and community.

This revaluation not only enriches our understanding of biblical texts but also empowers modern believers to draw inspiration from these narratives, fostering a more inclusive approach to faith that honours the contributions of women throughout history (Masenya, 1995:149).

Kouzes and Posner's Practice: Inspire a Shared Vision: In the context of Ruth 4:13-17, the leadership practice of Inspire a *Shared Vision* from Kouzes and Posner's Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership is particularly applicable. This practice emphasises the importance of envisioning a future that aligns with shared goals and values and inspiring others to work toward that vision. Ruth's leadership is characterised by her ability to see beyond her immediate challenges and work toward securing a stable and prosperous future for Naomi and her family.

Ruth's actions in securing Boaz's support and her willingness to integrate into Naomi's family and cultural context reflect her long-term vision of ensuring the continuation of Naomi's lineage. By marrying Boaz and giving birth to Obed, Ruth's leadership results in a future that is not only secure for her immediate family but also foundational to the future of Israel, as her son becomes the grandfather of King David. In this way, Ruth embodies Inspire a *Shared Vision* by creating a future where her family thrives, and she plays a pivotal role in the larger divine plan for Israel (Kouzes & Posner, 2017:105).

Moreover, Ruth's actions inspire those around her. The women of the community praise her for her loyalty and recognise the significance of her role in shaping a prosperous future. Ruth's ability to align her actions with a broader vision of redemption and restoration demonstrates how leaders can inspire others to contribute toward a collective future that aligns with shared values of loyalty, community, and faith.

#### 3.4.1.6 Obedience and deference as leadership qualities

Ruth's unwavering obedience to Naomi's guidance, particularly in Ruth 3:5, and her respectful deference to Boaz in Ruth 2:10 highlight essential leadership qualities rooted in servant leadership theory. Ruth's actions reflect her humble and respectful demeanour, which, combined with her willingness to follow wise counsel, exemplifies a servant leadership model that is both effective and highly regarded in leadership scholarship.

In Ruth 3:5, Ruth responds to Naomi's instructions with, "*I will do whatever you say,*" demonstrating her openness to guidance and trust in Naomi's wisdom. This obedience is not passive but a deliberate and strategic choice that aligns with her long-term goals of securing

stability for herself and Naomi. Ruth's ability to listen and follow counsel underscores the relational aspects of leadership, where mutual trust and humility contribute to achieving positive outcomes. Lu (2017) emphasises that this exemplifies a servant leadership approach, where the leader prioritises the needs of others while demonstrating a deep commitment to ethical behaviour and humility (Lu, 2017:108).

Similarly, Ruth's deference to Boaz in Ruth 2:10, where she bows down and expresses gratitude for his kindness, demonstrates respectful engagement with those in positions of authority. This deference does not diminish her leadership; instead, it strengthens it by showing her ability to navigate power dynamics with grace and humility. Ruth's respectful demeanour, coupled with her strategic actions, positions her as a leader who understands the importance of fostering positive relationships to achieve collective goals.

Mburu's Hermeneutical Technique: *Parallels to the African Context*: Mburu's technique of drawing parallels to the African context can be applied here to emphasise how Ruth's obedience and deference reflect values of communal leadership and respect for elders that are prominent in many African societies. In such contexts, deference to those with wisdom, such as Naomi and Boaz, is not seen as a weakness but as a demonstration of strong leadership, particularly in societies that value collective responsibility and relational dynamics. Mburu argues that Ruth's behaviour reflects an ethic of covenantal loyalty (*hesed*), which aligns with the communal ethos of African leadership, where listening to and respecting the wisdom of elders is an integral part of leading with integrity and foresight (Mburu, 2019:119). Ruth's obedience and deference, therefore, align with traditional African values of leadership, where the leader is not only one who commands but also one who listens and follows the wisdom of others.

Kouzes and Posner's Practice: *Model the Way*: *Model the Way* leadership practice is particularly relevant to Ruth's obedience and deference. According to Kouzes and Posner (2017), effective leaders lead by example and set the standard for others through their own behaviour. Ruth exemplifies this leadership practice by demonstrating humility, respect, and a commitment to ethical actions. Through her obedience to Naomi's guidance and her deference to Boaz, Ruth sets an example of integrity, kindness, and responsibility. She models the way for others by embodying values of respect, humility, and servant leadership, showing how effective leadership is not about dominating others but about setting an example of character and commitment (Kouzes & Posner, 2017:48). By modelling these values, Ruth inspires trust and loyalty, leading not through force but through her example of how to engage with others

respectfully and thoughtfully. Her actions illustrate how leadership can be enacted through deference and obedience, providing a model for how to lead with humility and grace.

While the positive traits exhibited by Ruth are frequently emphasised in discussions surrounding her leadership capabilities, it is essential to broaden the analytical lens to encompass the larger narrative context within which her story unfolds. The overarching narrative of Ruth not only illustrates the merging of traditionally masculine and feminine perceptions of leadership but also highlights how Ruth's commendable qualities serve to complement the justice-oriented and rules-based approach that is often associated with masculine leadership paradigms. This intricate integration of diverse leadership styles significantly enriches the narrative and offers a more holistic perspective on the concept of leadership as it is portrayed within the biblical context (Matheny, 2020:8-35).

### 3.4.2 Cultural and social implications of Mburu

In this section, we apply Mburu's hermeneutical framework to explore the leadership aspects of Ruth, focusing on both the *Historical and Cultural Context* and the *Parallels to the African Context*. Mburu's approach provides a comprehensive understanding of how Ruth's actions and decisions were shaped by, and in turn influenced, the socio-economic and legal realities of ancient Israel. Additionally, it draws meaningful connections between Ruth's leadership qualities and contemporary African leadership values, particularly concerning gender roles and social justice. By employing these two dimensions of Mburu's technique, we aim to understand Ruth not only as a leader within her own historical setting but also as a symbol whose values and actions resonate deeply with current leadership ideals in African societies. This dual perspective allows us to appreciate the cultural and social implications of Ruth's leadership and the ways in which her story continues to inspire resilience, communal responsibility, and ethical leadership across time and culture.

#### 3.4.2.1 Historical and cultural context

Socio-Economic and Legal Realities in Ancient Israel and their Impact: Ruth's exercise of leadership is intricately rooted in the socio-economic and legal frameworks of ancient Israel, particularly evident through her strategic involvement in gleaning rights and the institution of kinsman-redeemer marriage. Walton argues that these socio-legal systems were designed to

support marginalised groups, such as widows, by ensuring their access to resources and social protection (Walton, 2017:93). Ruth's proactive decision to glean in Boaz's fields (Ruth 2:2-3) and her strategic marriage proposal to Boaz (Ruth 3:9-13) illustrate her ability to navigate and utilize these legal and cultural norms to secure a future for herself and Naomi. This highlights her as an active agent within a patriarchal society.

Lau elaborates on Ruth's resilience and resourcefulness, noting how Ruth used Israel's legal structures to improve her and Naomi's conditions. Her understanding of Israelite traditions, particularly the kinsman-redeemer practice and her ability to sustain Naomi's family line, underscores her strategic thinking and effective leadership in addressing social obligations (Lau, 2011: 92–95). In a subsequent analysis, Lau (2011) also emphasises Ruth's intercultural adaptability, which allowed her to align with traditional Israelite norms while subtly challenging them, given her Moabite heritage. This adaptability highlights Ruth's role as a dynamic decision-maker capable of navigating complex socio-cultural dynamics (Lau, 2011: 102–105).

Eskenazi and Frymer-Kensky (2011) provide further insight into Ruth's strategic use of Israel's legal frameworks, arguing that she effectively leveraged these laws to ensure the continuity of Naomi's lineage. This reveals her deep understanding of Israelite legal mechanisms and reflects her ability to assert influence within a structured society (Eskenazi & Frymer-Kensky, 2011:77). Similarly, Fewell and Gunn (1989) explore the dynamics of female leadership in the ancient Near East, noting that women like Ruth, despite operating under restrictive legal constraints, often emerged as significant decision-makers, particularly in matters related to kinship and property (Fewell & Gunn, 1989: 76–78).

Ruth's ability to adapt and lead within these socio-legal frameworks highlights her capacity to assert agency and navigate the complexities of a patriarchal society. Her leadership reflects not just a response to immediate circumstances but a strategic engagement with cultural and legal norms to secure her and Naomi's welfare. By effectively navigating these systems, Ruth exemplifies a nuanced understanding of the socio-cultural realities of her time, positioning herself as a transformative leader whose resourcefulness allowed her to reshape her circumstances.

Ruth's leadership also has significant intercultural implications. Her Moabite identity added complexity to her actions, as she had to integrate into the Israelite community while challenging some of its traditional norms. Dube points out that Ruth's ability to align herself within the cultural framework of Israel while using her outsider status to influence the community

underscores her intercultural adaptability. This trait allowed Ruth to navigate and redefine her role in a new cultural setting, setting a precedent for future generations of women confronting similar systemic challenges (Dube, 2020:198).

Ruth's legacy, therefore, extends far beyond her immediate historical context, demonstrating how one can exercise agency even within restrictive socio-political systems. Her actions continue to inspire future generations by showing how resilience, ingenuity, and strategic engagement with social norms can lead to empowerment and significant change, even within patriarchal structures.

Influence of socio-economic and legal realities on Ruth's leadership and decision-making.

The socio-economic and legal realities of ancient Israel significantly shaped Ruth's leadership and decision-making processes, deeply influenced by the interplay of religion, social structures, and economic conditions. Ruth's story is a testament to how these factors shaped her actions within her community.

(a) Religious and social context: The religious landscape of ancient Israel evolved from polytheistic practices towards monotheism, particularly with the rise of the Yahweh movement. This evolution influenced the social norms and values that shaped leadership roles during Ruth's time. Stahl argues that the religious title "God of Israel" served various social and political agendas, influencing individuals like Ruth to navigate complex socio-religious landscapes effectively, thus impacting her leadership and decision-making (Stahl, 2020:721-745).

(b) Economic and administrative structures: Ancient Israel's economy was largely agrarian, with regions such as Judah characterised by small agricultural settlements like Mordot Arnona. These settlements were not only centers of agricultural production but also administrative hubs that maintained socio-political stability. Langgut & Gadot (2024) highlight the role of these centers, emphasizing how the economic and administrative structures influenced decisions for individuals like Ruth. Ruth's decision to glean in Boaz's fields was influenced by the structured economic framework and her need to secure resources, reflecting both necessity and strategic adaptability Langgut & Gadot (2024:57).

- (c) Legal and socio-political framework: The socio-political framework of ancient Israel was inseparable from religious beliefs, unlike modern societies where religion is often distinct from state affairs. In ancient Israel, religious practices shaped legal and social decisions, which deeply affected Ruth's actions (Stiebing & Helft, 2023:451-489). The Hebrew Bible, serving as both a cultural and legal document, provided norms for social conduct and leadership that structured Ruth's actions (Macias & Rezension, 2022:562). As Stahl (2020:721-745) notes, the shift from polytheism to monotheism and the reforms led by figures like Hosea influenced societal values and legal expectations, which Ruth adeptly navigated to create a future for herself and Naomi.
- (d) Cultural and historical factors shaping Ruth's leadership style: Ruth's leadership style was shaped by a variety of socio-cultural and historical influences in ancient Israel. Her role as a Moabite widow in an Israelite society presented significant socio-cultural challenges, but her resilience and strategic leadership allowed her to integrate effectively and even thrive within a community that was initially suspicious of her presence. One of the central cultural influences on Ruth's leadership was her ability to embody *hesed*, a form of loving-kindness or covenant loyalty. Sakenfeld describes Ruth's loyalty to Naomi and her willingness to leave her homeland as acts of *hesed*, which reflected a deep understanding of the communal obligations and covenant relationships valued in Israel (Sakenfeld, 1999:48). Ruth's demonstration of *hesed* not only fostered trust within her new community but also positioned her as a leader who exemplified relational loyalty and communal responsibility.

Ruth's strategic actions, such as her approaching to Boaz, reveal her deep understanding of the kinsman redeemer marriage law, which required a close male relative to marry the widow to preserve family lineage. By invoking Boaz's role as a kinsman-redeemer, Ruth navigated the socio-legal frameworks of her time with skill, showcasing her ability to assert agency even in constrained circumstances. Ruth's interactions with Naomi and Boaz further highlight her role in fostering communal relationships. As Masenya suggests, Ruth's leadership reflected communal values, where the well-being of the family and the community took precedence over individual gains (Masenya, 2023:189). This communal leadership aligns closely with African leadership traits, emphasizing collective welfare and inclusivity. Ruth's story thus serves as a powerful testament to the strength of community bonds and the importance of mutual support in times of need, illustrating how individual actions can resonate within a larger social framework. Ruth's commitment to her family and community not only underscores her

personal integrity but also sets a precedent for future generations, demonstrating that true leadership is rooted in selflessness and the ability to uplift others. This legacy of compassion and solidarity fosters resilience, encouraging others to follow in her footsteps and reinforcing the idea that a thriving community is built on shared values and collective responsibility.

Using the hermeneutical technique as articulated by Mburu, one can discern that the multifaceted cultural and social implications associated with Ruth's leadership are best understood as a complex interplay that exists between the historical socio-economic realities of her time and her strategic adaptation to the prevailing cultural norms that governed her society. Ruth adeptly maneuvered through the intricate socio-cultural dynamics of ancient Israel, leveraging her marginalised identity as a Moabite to ultimately secure her position as a vital and integral component of the Israelite lineage, an achievement that epitomizes not only resilience and ingenuity but also a profound sense of communal leadership that transcends her individual circumstances.

The narrative of her life provides invaluable insights into the manner in which effective leadership can emerge through a strategic navigation of entrenched societal structures, coupled with an intentional cultivation of relational trust and a commitment to the welfare of the community as a whole. Dewey (2020) argues that leadership grounded in empathy and community-building creates an environment where relational trust becomes a key driver for collaborative success. This particular narrative serves to illuminate the transformative potential inherent in individual agency while emphasizing the critical importance of inclusivity and collaborative efforts within the realm of leadership (Dewey, 2020:34).

Similarly, Ferdman, Prime, and Riggio (2020) highlight the importance of collective leadership, asserting that true leadership arises when a diverse array of perspectives is unified toward a common purpose. They argue that the capacity to recognize and integrate differences among individuals fosters environments where all voices contribute meaningfully to a shared vision (Ferdman, Prime & Riggio, 2020: 83–85). This overarching theme resonates profoundly across a multitude of cultures and historical periods, illustrating that the essence of effective leadership is frequently anchored in deep-seated empathy and a genuine willingness to embrace differences.

Moreover, Northouse (2021) discusses how leaders who cultivate a sense of belonging and collaboration within their communities inspire innovation and resilience. His study suggests that by fostering inclusion and mutual respect, leaders can create fertile ground for innovation,

enabling communities to thrive and progress even in the face of challenges (Northouse, 2021:78–81). This nuanced understanding serves to inspire leaders to actively cultivate a profound sense of belonging, wherein collaboration thrives, thereby propelling progress and resilience in the face of various challenges.

In this light, the role of a leader transforms into that of a facilitator, guiding individuals toward realizing their potential while nurturing a culture of trust and mutual respect. Northouse (2021) emphasises that leaders who empower others and create collaborative spaces achieve greater collective impact, making leadership not just about wielding authority but about facilitating growth and community-driven progress (Northouse, 2021:59–63).

#### 3.4.2.2 Parallels between Ruth’s leadership and African leadership styles.

Ruth’s leadership qualities strongly resonate within contemporary African contexts, where communal leadership, resilience, and social justice are often emphasized. In many African societies, leaders are expected to foster collective well-being and protect the vulnerable, much like Ruth did for Naomi. Recent scholarship, such as Dube (2001), highlights how Ruth’s narrative serves as a model for African women leaders, emphasizing the importance of resilience, communal responsibility, and ethical leadership. Ruth’s ability to act decisively and compassionately, as demonstrated by her securing of both her and Naomi’s futures, provides a framework for African women navigating patriarchal and socio-economic challenges (Dube, 2001:87–89). In African cultures, leadership is often measured by one’s capacity to protect and uplift the community rather than by individual accomplishments, a quality embodied in Ruth’s actions.

Ruth’s leadership parallels core values in African leadership styles, particularly in prioritizing community welfare and resilience. Masenya (2013) contends that Ruth’s commitment to Naomi’s well-being exemplifies the African concept of *ubuntu*— “I am because we are.” This philosophy emphasises collective well-being over individual success, reflecting a fundamental principle of African leadership where the well-being of the community is paramount (Masenya, 2013:23). Ruth’s actions—sacrificing her own prospects to ensure Naomi’s security—are illustrative of the *ubuntu* ethic, highlighting how her leadership is based on relational dynamics and communal welfare, rather than self-centered pursuits.

Mburu's hermeneutical approach further explores these connections by analyzing Ruth's actions through the lens of communal leadership and collective responsibility seen in African cultures. Mburu emphasises that in African leadership, leaders are often viewed as stewards of their community's welfare, much like Ruth's proactive role in securing stability for herself and Naomi (Mburu, 2019:116-119). By taking on the responsibility for Naomi's future, Ruth reflects the African ethos that leaders are accountable not only for their actions but for the well-being of those they lead.

Furthermore, Dube asserts that biblical characters like Ruth serve as inspirational figures for African women, particularly in demonstrating leadership within communal frameworks while navigating systemic challenges. Ruth's journey from a foreign widow to a pivotal figure in the lineage of King David provides a model for African women leaders who operate within patriarchal systems while striving for social and economic stability (Dube, 2020:198). This parallel is particularly relevant in contexts where African women must leverage community networks and relationships to achieve leadership outcomes, despite socio-cultural barriers.

The concept of ubuntu, which underpins many African leadership models, reinforces the idea of shared humanity and interconnectedness, emphasizing the importance of community cohesion and support. Ruth's prioritization of Naomi's welfare is an embodiment of ubuntu, as her decisions were motivated by her commitment to Naomi's well-being, rather than her gain. Kanyoro (1995) supports this interpretation, suggesting that African leadership is inherently communal, valuing interconnectedness and emphasizing collective progress over individual success (Kanyoro, 1995:18–28). This perspective aligns well with Ruth's narrative, where her leadership style is driven by compassion, loyalty, and a deep sense of duty to those around her.

Additionally, Masenya (2023) discusses the importance of resilience and adaptability in African women's leadership, highlighting how women must often navigate patriarchal and restrictive socio-economic systems to enact change. Ruth's actions, including her proactive decision to glean in Boaz's fields and her courageous approach to Boaz at the threshing floor, mirror the resilience required of African women leaders, who often operate within complex socio-cultural landscapes while striving for community upliftment (Masenya, 2023:87–89). Ruth's strategy of integrating into the Israelite community, while subtly challenging its norms to improve her circumstances, speaks to her adaptability—an essential trait for leadership in any context marked by socio-cultural constraints.

Masenya's examination of Ruth's intercultural adaptability further reinforces her as a model of leadership in African contexts. Ruth's Moabite heritage, initially a source of marginalization, becomes a strength as she uses her unique perspective to navigate Israelite norms, demonstrating a form of leadership that is both inclusive and transformative (Masenya, 2023:145). This intercultural competence is particularly relevant in African societies where diverse cultural identities often converge, requiring leaders to navigate multiple norms and expectations. Ruth's leadership, therefore, is not merely about survival but is also about transforming her identity and community through strategic engagement with societal norms.

Eskenazi and Frymer-Kensky (2011) also emphasize that Ruth's strategic engagement with Israelite legal practices—such as her request for Boaz's role as a kinsman-redeemer—reflects her understanding of communal responsibilities and kinship obligations. Her leadership emerges not from a position of formal power but from her ability to leverage relationships and legal frameworks to create stability for herself and Naomi (Eskenazi & Frymer-Kensky, 2011:77). This mirrors African leadership contexts, where influence is often exercised through relational power rather than through hierarchical structures.

In conclusion, Ruth's leadership style resonates with contemporary African leadership models, which emphasize communal welfare, resilience, adaptability, and the pursuit of social justice. Her actions embody the concept of ubuntu, prioritizing the well-being of her community and showcasing leadership that is inherently relational and oriented towards collective progress. Ruth's story, thus, serves as an enduring model of leadership that reflects the values and strategies employed by African women leaders navigating patriarchal and socio-economic challenges, inspiring resilience, and communal solidarity.

### 3.5 Contemporary relevance and applications

In this section, we explore the contemporary relevance of Ruth's leadership story and its applications in modern contexts, particularly focusing on the lessons that can be drawn for today's leaders. Utilizing Mburu's parallels to the African context alongside Kouzes and Posner's *Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership*, we aim to identify key leadership lessons embedded within Ruth's narrative that remain pertinent to modern leadership discourses.

Ruth's journey is not merely a historical or theological account; it resonates with enduring qualities essential for effective leadership today, particularly in the face of socio-economic challenges and cultural expectations. Ruth's actions can be viewed through the lens of African

leadership, particularly emphasizing values such as communal responsibility, resilience, and ethical decision-making. By examining Ruth's actions and decisions through Mburu's African contextual lens, we see how her leadership parallels the concept of ubuntu, which underscores the principle of "I am because we are." This highlights Ruth's dedication to collective welfare and social justice—core tenets of many African leadership paradigms that prioritize community well-being over individual success (Kanyoro, 1995:23; Ferdman, Prime & Riggio, 2020:198).

In addition, Kouzes and Posner's *Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership* provide a practical framework to understand the broader significance of Ruth's actions in terms of modern leadership behaviours. These practices—*Model the Way, Inspire a Shared Vision, Challenge the Process, Enable Others to Act, and Encourage the Heart*—are useful in understanding Ruth's role as a leader whose influence transcends her personal context. Ruth's determination to secure Naomi's welfare, her strategic initiative in approaching Boaz, and her steadfast loyalty demonstrate behaviours that align closely with these exemplary leadership practices, making her an enduring example for leaders across generations (Kouzes & Posner 2017:47-52). Ruth's story can be viewed as an example of what Kouzes and Posner (2017) describe as the ability to inspire a shared vision, as her resilience and proactive engagement motivate Naomi and Boaz towards a secure joint future (Masenya, 2023:78–81; Kouzes & Posner, 2017)

The intersection of Mburu's hermeneutical approach and Kouzes and Posner's leadership practices provides a comprehensive foundation for analysing Ruth's leadership in a way that is meaningful for modern leaders seeking to foster community, challenge norms, and lead with empathy. Ruth's story highlights that true leadership often involves balancing individual agency with collective welfare. Her actions demonstrate how resilience, strategic adaptability, and the courage to challenge societal limitations are critical leadership qualities, particularly in culturally complex environments.

This section will thus delve into the broader lessons that Ruth's narrative offers for contemporary leadership, focusing on how her story continues to inspire resilience, empowerment, and inclusive leadership that transcends cultural and temporal boundaries. By leveraging these frameworks, we will identify the enduring principles in Ruth's narrative that are crucial for guiding modern leadership practices—principles that are especially relevant in diverse and culturally rich environments where effective leadership is about fostering inclusivity and collective growth.

### 3.5.1 Lessons for modern leaders: parallels to African leadership lessons (Mburu)

The story of Ruth offers several leadership lessons that can be effectively applied to contemporary leadership in African societies, particularly in the areas of resilience, community building, and empowerment. Here are some key lessons:

#### 3.5.1.1 Concept of resilience amidst adversity

Ruth's unwavering commitment to accompany Naomi, despite the bereavement of her spouse and the complexities associated with her status as a foreigner in Bethlehem, offers a profound illustration of resilience. In African societies, this concept of resilience is deeply ingrained within leadership models, as leaders are often faced with socio-political and economic challenges that require endurance and the ability to inspire their communities to persist through adversity. Panganiban (2020:182–185) highlights how Ruth's story exemplifies a theology of resilience amidst vulnerability, demonstrating how marginalised individuals can find strength and agency within oppressive contexts. Leaders in African contexts can glean insights from Ruth's story by exemplifying the capacity to endure while motivating their communities to remain resolute in the face of challenges. This type of resilience is vital for fostering an ethos of fortitude and tenacity among community members, allowing them to navigate difficult circumstances collectively.

Resilience in African leadership is often rooted in the shared experience of overcoming colonialism, political instability, and economic hardship. Leaders like Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia, who led her country through post-conflict recovery, embody this type of resilience. Sirleaf's leadership, much like Ruth's, was characterised by an unyielding commitment to rebuilding her nation despite the overwhelming challenges she faced as Africa's first female president. Her resilience fostered hope and inspired her community to work towards national reconstruction (Sirleaf, 2009:245).

In addition, African leadership often involves fostering environments where individuals feel empowered to share their struggles and triumphs. This approach encourages the community to draw strength from shared adversity, much like Ruth and Naomi did. For example, Rwandan President Paul Kagame's post-genocide leadership is often cited as a model of resilience, where a leader's determination to rebuild the country not only restored peace but also fostered unity and economic growth. Clark (2010:215–218) illustrates how Kagame's leadership promoted

resilience by encouraging the nation to rise from the ashes of tragedy and to work together for collective progress.

This discourse on resilience functions as a profound reminder that fortitude can arise from fragility, and leaders can leverage these collective narratives to foster a sense of cohesion. By engaging in this manner, they elevate individuals whilst concurrently fortifying the structural integrity of the entire community. This shared odyssey of resilience not only facilitates personal development but also lays the groundwork for the emergence of innovative solutions, as varied perspectives converge to address shared challenges.

In the context of contemporary African leadership, resilience transcends mere endurance of adversities; it encompasses the transformation of challenges into avenues for development and innovation. Recent scholarly investigations substantiate this assertion, including research on sustainable leadership development in Africa (Chanda & Chitondo, 2024), which underscores the significance of leaders harnessing their resilience to navigate obstacles and forge sustainable trajectories for their communities (Chanda & Chitondo, 2024:12–14). Likewise, the Africa Adaptation Acceleration Program (AAP) accentuates how African leaders are converting crises, such as the pandemic, into opportunities for enhancing climate resilience and fostering sustainable development, with the endorsement of this vision by all 54 African leaders (Global Centre on Adaptation, 2023:31). These instances illustrate that resilience within African leadership encompasses not merely survival but also proactive and innovative strategies in addressing challenges.

### 3.5.1.2 Dedication to community

Ruth's unwavering allegiance to Naomi underscores the significance of communal bonds and supportive networks. Modern leaders have the capacity to emphasize the development of robust, nurturing communities through the cultivation of relationships and the promotion of collaborative efforts. This initiative may encompass the establishment of networks that empower individuals and enhance collective welfare, an aspect that holds particular importance in various African contexts where the principle of communal living is esteemed (Njoroge, 2005:29). Such initiatives can lead to sustainable development, fostering resilience and adaptability among community members while addressing local challenges through shared resources and knowledge. These initiatives not only reinforce social connections but also foster a profound sense of belonging, which is imperative for the emotional and psychological health

of individuals residing within the community (Hingston, 2016:74). Moreover, through the amalgamation of traditional customs with contemporary methodologies, communities are able to leverage their distinct cultural heritage while devising solutions that are both pertinent and efficacious in the context of today's swiftly evolving environment.

In African leadership traditions, the value of communalism or dedication to the collective well-being of the community is a core trait. African societies have long emphasized the importance of the community over the individual, which aligns closely with Ruth's loyalty to Naomi and her determination to ensure both their survival. This mirrors the African philosophy of ubuntu, which emphasises that "a person is a person through other people." African leaders are expected to act as stewards of their communities, ensuring that their leadership benefits not just themselves, but the entire group. This is evident in the roles of traditional African leaders, such as chiefs and elders, who often prioritize the welfare of their community by mediating conflicts, ensuring that resources are fairly distributed, and fostering unity (Mbigi, 2005:27-29).

Nelson Mandela's leadership in South Africa epitomizes this trait, where his dedication to community and reconciliation after apartheid was central to his efforts to rebuild the nation. Mandela's leadership was characterised by his emphasis on collective healing, inclusivity, and the building of strong national ties, mirroring Ruth's dedication to Naomi and her broader community. His commitment to ubuntu—the interconnectedness of humanity—guided his leadership style, promoting social cohesion and national unity (Louw, 2010:296). Similarly, in many African nations, leadership is seen not merely as a position of authority but as a responsibility to serve the community. Leaders in rural settings, for example, are often tasked with facilitating community development projects, organizing communal labour (as seen in traditional harambee gatherings in Kenya), and ensuring that the most vulnerable are cared for. This dedication to community well-being, as demonstrated by Ruth's actions, resonates deeply with the African notion that leadership is about nurturing, supporting, and sustaining the collective (Njoroge, 2005:46).

By emphasizing the value of community dedication, African leaders foster environments where individuals feel a deep sense of belonging and responsibility toward their community's success. This shared cognitive framework facilitates the implementation of leadership practices that bolster both personal development and the collective welfare of the group, thereby enhancing the comprehensive resilience of the community. As Ruth's actions demonstrate, leadership that is rooted in service to others, rather than self-interest, creates a foundation for lasting community development and harmony.

### 3.5.1.3 Embracing diversity

The narrative of Ruth illustrates the critical importance of fostering diversity within communal settings. It is imperative for leaders to acknowledge and celebrate the distinct contributions of individuals hailing from diverse backgrounds, as such inclusivity can catalyse innovative problem-solving and enrich the cultural fabric of society. By advancing understanding and mutual respect among disparate groups, leaders can cultivate an atmosphere in which each individual feels esteemed and empowered to contribute to the collective welfare (Branch, 2012:145-148).

Newer studies further emphasize the importance of inclusivity. Ferdman, Prime and Riggio (2020) argue that fostering diversity within organizations not only enhances collaboration but also fosters a more equitable and vibrant environment. They highlight that building inclusive teams contributes to long-term organizational success and collective well-being (Ferdman, Prime & Riggio, 2020:32–35). Furthermore, Kanyoro (1995) addresses the critical role that diverse representation in educational materials plays in promoting inclusivity from a young age. Kanyoro points out that children’s exposure to different cultural narratives helps instil respect for diversity and equips future generations to appreciate varied perspectives (Kanyoro, 1995:45–47).

Furthermore, research by Deloitte (2023) underscores that diversity climates, wherein inclusivity is embedded in leadership practices, encourage organizations to thrive in globalized environments. Deloitte argues that fostering such climates not only ensures fairness but also improves innovation and resilience, with diverse groups providing broader perspectives (Deloitte, 2023:17-19).

Through the allocation of resources toward educational and outreach initiatives, leaders can further fortify these connections, ensuring that the principles of inclusivity and cooperation are perpetuated and embraced universally. This dedication to diversity can also inspire future generations to value differences and pursue collaborative goals.

In the context of African leadership, the embrace of diversity has been pivotal in sustaining unity within culturally diverse and multi-ethnic nations. The African ethos of ubuntu, which translates to “I am because we are,” underscores the interdependence of all individuals and prioritizes the collective over the individual. This philosophical framework inherently endorses diversity by acknowledging that the resilience of a community is rooted in the contributions of

all its constituents, irrespective of their backgrounds, ethnicities, or social standings (Bradley, 2020:266).

Leaders within various African societies, exemplified by Nelson Mandela in post-apartheid South Africa, have leveraged this philosophy to promote unity and reconciliation among fragmented groups. Mandela's leadership was crucial in advancing inclusivity, concentrating on bridging racial and cultural chasms while advocating for mutual respect, forgiveness, and collaboration across diverse communities (Louw, 2010:300–305; Metz, 2020:50–52). Moreover, contemporary African leaders such as Paul Kagame of Rwanda have actively embraced diversity by implementing inclusive policies designed to integrate various ethnic groups and enhance women's participation in governance. Kagame's stewardship in the reconstruction of Rwanda following the 1994 genocide exemplifies how the embrace of diversity—both ethnically and socio-economically—can facilitate national unity and sustainable development (Clark, 2010:215–220; Metz, 2020:50–52). The policies instituted by his administration regarding ethnic reconciliation and inclusivity, particularly in the realms of political representation and social services, have significantly contributed to Rwanda's notable advancements in peacebuilding and economic development.

In many African nations, traditional leadership practices emphasize the importance of inclusivity and diversity within decision-making processes. Community councils, a central feature of traditional governance, often consist of elders from various ethnic, clan, and cultural backgrounds, ensuring that the perspectives of all community members are represented in the leadership framework. This system allows for a balanced governance approach, where the voices of different groups contribute to collective decision-making (Ayittey, 2011:47). According to Wiredu (1996:132-135), “the essence of traditional leadership in Africa lies in its inclusivity,” as these councils bring together elders from diverse ethnic backgrounds to create a governance structure that mirrors the community's pluralism. This method of inclusive governance highlights the fundamental role that diversity plays in maintaining social harmony and fostering unity within African societies.

This collective methodology resonates with Ruth's assimilation into a new community, highlighting that the embrace of diversity fortifies social cohesion and enhances the overall efficacy of the community. By cultivating environments that celebrate diversity, African leaders can guarantee that a multitude of perspectives and skills are effectively harnessed to address complex societal challenges. This inclusivity not only stimulates innovation and creativity but also contributes to the establishment of resilient communities capable of enduring

challenges through solidarity and reciprocal support. The African paradigm of leadership, deeply entrenched in collective well-being and inclusivity, reinforces the assertion that diversity constitutes a vital source of strength, which, when embraced, engenders progress and harmony.

#### 3.5.1.4 Empowerment through inclusivity

Ruth, a Moabite woman, was accepted into the community of Bethlehem, showcasing the importance of inclusivity. Leaders today should strive to empower marginalised groups by ensuring their voices are heard and valued. This can lead to more equitable societies where everyone has the opportunity to contribute and thrive, reflecting the diverse fabric of African societies. This approach not only fosters social cohesion but also enhances creativity and problem-solving, as diverse perspectives often lead to more comprehensive solutions to complex challenges. By embracing diversity, leaders can cultivate environments where innovation flourishes, ultimately driving progress and resilience within their communities.

In African leadership traditions, inclusivity plays a crucial role in fostering unity and promoting communal progress. Historically, African societies have placed a high value on inclusivity through practices such as traditional councils or “*indaba*” in Southern Africa, where all voices in the community are heard before decisions are made. The African philosophy of ubuntu, meaning “I am because we are,” emphasises the interconnectedness of people and highlights the importance of inclusivity in community leadership. This principle reinforces that leadership is not about individual power but about empowering others and ensuring everyone’s contributions are recognized and valued (Wiredu, 1966:132-135). Leaders like Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia, the first elected female head of state in Africa, have demonstrated how inclusive leadership can transform societies. Sirleaf focused on the inclusion of women and marginalised groups in Liberia’s post-conflict reconstruction, recognizing that sustainable development and peace required the active participation of all societal groups, particularly those historically excluded from power (Sirleaf, 2009:145-148). By creating spaces where underrepresented voices were valued, Sirleaf’s administration was able to foster social cohesion and encourage innovation, much like Ruth’s integration into the Israelite community fostered her acceptance and future security.

Furthermore, African leadership practices in countries like Rwanda under President Paul Kagame emphasize the inclusion of marginalised groups, particularly in political participation and economic development. The Rwandan government’s focus on empowering women and ensuring gender inclusivity in leadership roles has led to one of the highest rates of female

parliamentary representation globally, showcasing how inclusivity can drive societal progress (Clark, 2010:215-220). This mirrors Ruth's experience, where her acceptance as a foreign woman into the community not only enhanced her own future but also contributed to the broader communal well-being.

Investing in education and training programs that specifically target underrepresented groups, as seen in initiatives across African countries, is another manifestation of inclusive leadership. In Kenya, programs focused on empowering youth and women in business and education have significantly bridged gaps in opportunity, leading to increased economic participation and societal development (Njoroge, 2005:122-124). These initiatives strengthen the overall economic landscape, creating a more equitable society where everyone can participate in and benefit from growth. Similarly, Ruth's acceptance into the Bethlehem community highlights how inclusivity empowers individuals to contribute meaningfully, benefiting both the individual and the community at large.

By embracing inclusivity as a leadership trait, African leaders continue to demonstrate the transformative power of creating spaces for marginalised groups to thrive. This not only drives societal progress but also enhances the resilience of communities, ensuring that the diverse talents and perspectives of all members are harnessed for the collective good.

#### 3.5.1.5 Mentorship and guidance

Ruth's relationship with Naomi serves as a powerful example of mentorship, where experienced individuals provide valuable guidance, support, and encouragement to help others navigate their challenges. In African societies, mentorship is deeply rooted in traditional leadership structures, where elders and experienced leaders are seen as custodians of wisdom, offering guidance to the younger generation. This mentoring dynamic fosters a culture of learning and growth, ensuring the continuity of knowledge and leadership within the community.

In many African cultures, the role of elders as mentors is an established tradition, deeply embedded in the governance and social fabric of communities. This tradition highlights the intergenerational transfer of wisdom, where elders play a pivotal role in guiding younger leaders, ensuring that they are prepared to lead with integrity and knowledge. According to Nabudere (2006), African leadership structures have long relied on elders to pass down cultural values and leadership principles, reinforcing the importance of mentorship as a communal

rather than individual responsibility. In this system, leadership is seen as a continuum, where the current leaders are tasked with nurturing and preparing the next generation to preserve the community's values and handle future challenges (Nabudere, 2006:135–138).

The mentoring role of elders is particularly evident in African decision-making processes, where the knowledge of past experiences helps guide contemporary issues. Nabudere (2006) argues that the presence of elder mentors ensures that younger leaders remain connected to the history and cultural heritage of their communities, enabling them to make informed and strategic decisions (Nabudere, 2006:135–138). This tradition reflects the African communal philosophy of ubuntu—the belief that one's humanity is bound up in others—where leaders are shaped by those who came before them and are responsible for shaping those who come after (Louw, 2010:300–305). Mandela's own account reveals how he mentored younger leaders like Thabo Mbeki, guiding him during the transition to democratic rule (Mandela, 1994:435–440).

Mentorship in Africa is also gender-inclusive, as seen in the work of women theologians and leaders who actively mentor younger women. Njoroge (2005) highlights how African women's leadership is strengthened by mentorship, encouraging women to break through patriarchal barriers and contribute meaningfully to their communities (Njoroge, 2005:45–47). In this sense, the mentorship between Ruth and Naomi reflects an African leadership trait where knowledge transfer, wisdom-sharing, and guidance are crucial to the success and sustainability of leadership.

#### 3.5.1.6 Courage to take risks

Ruth's decision to glean in the fields of Boaz demonstrates courage and initiative, which contemporary leaders can learn from. Her actions reflect the kind of calculated risk-taking that is often necessary for survival and progress in challenging environments. Metz (2020:50–52) discusses how African leadership frameworks often value the courage to take risks for the greater good, showing that ethical leadership is not passive but proactive in confronting uncertainty. Ayittey (2011:110–112) further supports this by demonstrating how indigenous African institutions historically adapted to change through bold, communal decisions.

Modern examples abound. Clark (2010:215–220) highlights how Rwanda's President Paul Kagame exemplified calculated risk-taking by embracing digital transformation and decentralisation to rebuild a fractured nation. Fragouli and Chukwudum (2019:76) show how

responsible leadership fosters a risk-positive culture that promotes sustainable innovation — an approach evident in how Kagame’s policies spurred technological growth and resilience.

In sectors like fintech, Jack and Suri (2014:190–195) detail how Kenya’s M-Pesa revolution illustrates the power of bold leadership decisions that embrace technological risk to solve complex social issues like financial exclusion. Meanwhile, Guo and Zhang (2024:530–533) demonstrate that empowering leadership — grounded in trust — increases employees’ willingness to take initiative and innovate, reinforcing that calculated risk-taking is vital for organisational growth.

African women leaders, too, have modelled this courage. Sirleaf (2009:300–305) recounts how Ellen Johnson Sirleaf took audacious steps to tackle corruption and rebuild Liberia’s institutions after civil war, proving that bold, visionary risks can transform fragile states. Likewise, Falola and Yacob-Haliso (2025:150–153) show that African leaders are increasingly embracing risk in agriculture and renewable energy to address climate resilience and food security, demonstrating the ripple effect of courageous leadership.

Finally, Twyford and Le Fevre (2019:310–315) highlight how leaders in education foster risk-positive environments, encouraging innovation even in uncertain contexts. By creating cultures where calculated risks are supported, contemporary leaders inspire communities to push boundaries, challenge the status quo, and unlock transformative solutions that advance collective well-being.

### 3.5.1.7 Building resilience

Ruth’s journey emphasises the critical role of resilience in overcoming adversity, a trait essential for both individuals and communities. Modern African leaders must cultivate this resilience by empowering their communities to navigate challenges and adapt to changing circumstances. Leaders like Ellen Johnson Sirleaf in Liberia have demonstrated resilience in post-conflict reconstruction, rebuilding the country’s institutions and fostering stability after years of civil war. Similarly, in South Africa, leaders such as Cyril Ramaphosa have worked to build economic and social resilience in the face of political instability and economic inequality, promoting reforms that aim to empower citizens and strengthen governance (Habib, 2019:120–125).

In Kenya, Wangari Maathai's leadership in environmental conservation demonstrated how resilience can be built through community-led initiatives. Her work with the Green Belt Movement not only addressed environmental degradation but also empowered local women, illustrating how resilience can be cultivated at the grassroots level to drive long-term societal change (Ochieng, 2024:4599-4610).

Resilience in African leadership is also seen in responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, where leaders like Ghana's President Nana Akufo-Addo promoted public health measures and economic support systems that helped communities adapt to the rapidly evolving crisis (Sikanku & Osei Fordjour, 2023:70–72).

By cultivating resilience, African leaders empower their communities to withstand adversity and flourish amid uncertainty. This capacity to endure and adapt is vital for advancing collective success and promoting sustainable development throughout the continent (Khoza & Mothiba, 2021:102–105).

### 3.5.1.8 Value of hard work.

Ruth's dedication to providing for Naomi through her labour in the fields exemplifies the value of diligence and perseverance. This commitment to hard work is a leadership trait that resonates deeply within African leadership traditions, where leaders often emphasize the importance of individual effort and collective prosperity. In African societies, hard work is viewed not only as a personal virtue but also as a way to contribute to the community's success.

African leaders, such as former Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere, championed the concept of Ujamaa (familyhood), which was built on the principles of hard work and self-reliance as foundations for national development (Lembuka, 2024:4–6).

Contemporary African leaders also continue to highlight the importance of a strong work ethic. For instance, Rwanda's Paul Kagame is well-known for fostering a culture of discipline and hard work, which has been pivotal in the country's remarkable socio-economic recovery after the 1994 genocide (Straus & Waldorf, 2011:6–8). His leadership emphasises that hard work, combined with strategic governance, can transform a nation and lift people out of poverty.

Additionally, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, the first African and first woman to serve as Director General of the World Trade Organization (WTO), embodies the principle of hard work. Throughout her career, Okonjo-Iweala has demonstrated that diligence and a commitment to

excellence can break barriers, inspiring others to work towards personal and communal success (Agwu, 2021:137-154)). Her leadership showcases the importance of individual effort in achieving global recognition and creating pathways for economic growth in African nations. Hard work, in African leadership, is not just about individual achievement but is deeply tied to the collective good. Leaders who promote diligence encourage their communities to invest in their own development and contribute to the overall progress of their societies. By fostering a culture of hard work, African leaders inspire both individual and collective success, which is essential for sustainable development and national growth.

#### 3.5.1.9 Building bridges.

Ruth's ability to integrate into the Israelite community despite being a Moabite demonstrates the significance of building bridges between different cultures, groups, and communities. Her story offers a powerful lesson for leaders on the importance of fostering understanding, cooperation, and unity in diverse environments. In contemporary African contexts, where many countries are home to diverse ethnicities, languages, and cultures, the ability to bridge divides and promote social harmony is a critical leadership trait.

African societies, historically and traditionally, have placed a strong emphasis on communal values and collective responsibility. Leaders in African settings are often tasked with the challenge of uniting different cultural or ethnic groups to foster peace and development. Ruth's story parallels this African leadership model, where leaders are seen as mediators who build bridges across societal divisions to ensure collective well-being and harmony.

One prominent example of an African leader who embodied this bridge-building approach is Nelson Mandela. After the end of apartheid in South Africa, Mandela's leadership was characterised by his focus on reconciliation between the country's deeply divided racial groups. His efforts to foster dialogue, mutual respect, and cooperation among the black and white populations played a pivotal role in preventing further conflict and promoting national unity. Mandela's ability to build bridges through inclusivity and his commitment to reconciliation have become a model for leadership across the continent and the world.

Similarly, in Rwanda, following the 1994 genocide, President Paul Kagame's leadership focused on bridging ethnic divides between Hutus and Tutsis to rebuild the nation. His government emphasized unity and reconciliation, rejecting ethnic labels and promoting national identity as Rwandans above all else (Clark, 2010:142–145). This approach, which

encouraged dialogue and cooperation among previously warring groups, has been instrumental in transforming Rwanda into one of Africa's fastest-growing economies. By fostering cooperation between diverse groups, Kagame exemplifies the African leadership model of bridge-building.

Many African communities, traditional leaders, such as chiefs and elders, have long played the role of mediators between conflicting groups. These leaders use culturally grounded conflict resolution techniques to build bridges, promote understanding, and maintain social harmony. This method of leadership is deeply ingrained in African traditions, where leaders are expected to foster unity among diverse populations for the greater good of the community (Kiyala, 2024:47–52).

Ruth's ability to seamlessly integrate into a foreign culture and work towards the collective good mirrors this African model of leadership. Her story reinforces the idea that effective leadership requires the capacity to bring together individuals or groups with differing backgrounds to work towards common goals. In African leadership, the ability to navigate cultural, ethnic, and social diversity is crucial for maintaining peace and fostering development, as seen in the examples of Mandela, Kagame, and traditional African leaders.

By building bridges between different groups, African leaders can promote a sense of shared identity and purpose, which is vital for long-term stability and progress. In the same way that Ruth worked to secure harmony in her new community, African leaders can help diverse populations work together to overcome challenges, achieve collective success, and sustain social harmony.

#### 3.5.1.10 Empowering women

Ruth's story underscores the significant role women play in the development and sustainability of society. In the biblical narrative, Ruth's actions demonstrate resilience, resourcefulness, and leadership, which contribute to the well-being of her family and community. Similarly, empowering women in contemporary African societies is crucial to driving social and economic progress. By creating educational and economic opportunities for women, leaders can harness their potential to enact transformative change, leading to stronger, more resilient communities.

Empowering women is not just a developmental goal but a model of leadership that has deep roots in African societies. In many African cultures, women have historically been the backbone of communities, managing both the household and agricultural activities while also playing pivotal roles in conflict resolution and economic ventures. African leadership models that emphasize the inclusion and empowerment of women can be seen as a reflection of this deep-seated cultural understanding of women's centrality to social cohesion and economic sustainability. For instance, Masenya (2023:189) points out that African societies often mirror Ruth's qualities of resilience and resourcefulness, particularly in the way women manage to navigate patriarchal structures while ensuring the survival and well-being of their families.

African leaders like Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia have shown that empowering women can transform entire nations. As the first female African head of state, Sirleaf implemented policies that focused on rebuilding post-war Liberia by prioritizing education, healthcare, and women's rights, effectively demonstrating that when women are empowered, they drive national development (Spiker, 2024:155). Her leadership serves as a contemporary model of how women can contribute to societal transformation when provided with the necessary tools and support.

In Rwanda, President Paul Kagame's government has made substantial efforts in empowering women, especially in governance, where women hold more than 60% of parliamentary seats—one of the highest representations in the world (Burnet, 2011:304–308). This model of leadership reflects a commitment to gender equality and the recognition that empowering women is critical for sustained national development. Women's economic participation in Rwanda has significantly contributed to the country's post-genocide recovery, highlighting the long-term benefits of inclusive leadership practices.

Empowering women through education is another key driver of societal progress in Africa. Educational programs targeted at women can break the cycle of poverty, allowing women to gain skills, participate in the workforce, and contribute to their communities' development. This is evident in countries like Kenya, where initiatives such as "Wings to Fly" have provided scholarships for girls from disadvantaged backgrounds, leading to higher educational attainment and greater economic independence (Baumgartner & Stefanuto, 2020:16–20).

Thus, empowering women is a leadership model that reflects Africa's communal and inclusive values. By providing women with access to education, economic resources, and leadership opportunities, African leaders can harness their potential to drive economic growth and social stability. This model not only uplifts women but also strengthens communities, aligning with

the broader African philosophy of ubuntu “I am because we are”, which emphasises collective well-being over individual success.

#### 3.5.1.11 Sustainable development

Ruth’s story, though rooted in an ancient agrarian context, demonstrates enduring principles of stewardship, responsibility, and care for both people and the land — principles that resonate deeply with today’s understanding of sustainability in leadership. By choosing to glean in the fields rather than depend solely on charity, Ruth models responsible use of available resources. Boaz, too, embodies sustainable leadership by ensuring that his workers leave enough for gleaners, balancing profit with provision for the vulnerable.

These actions highlight a community ethic where leaders are not exploiters but caretakers, ensuring that what is harvested today does not compromise tomorrow’s supply. In leadership practice, this calls for policies and actions that protect resources, empower communities, and promote intergenerational equity. Ruth’s unwavering commitment to Naomi also teaches that sustainable leadership is relational — it sustains people as much as it sustains material resources.

A practical African example is the concept of *Ubuntu* leadership, evident in rural farming cooperatives where land and produce are shared to benefit families beyond the individual household (Lutz, 2009:314–316; Mbigi, 2005:27–29). For instance, in parts of East Africa, village elders guide communities in rotating crops and managing communal grazing lands so that soil fertility and livelihoods are protected for future generations. Just as Boaz ensured gleaners had access to grain, modern African leaders are called to champion systems that protect both the environment and the dignity of their people. *Ubuntu* thus echoes Ruth’s ethic of relational sustainability, reminding us that true stewardship preserves not just resources but the bonds that hold communities together.

Contemporary African leaders must prioritize sustainable development to ensure that resources are managed wisely for the benefit of future generations. This aligns with the growing global emphasis on environmental stewardship, as African nations face significant challenges such as climate change, deforestation, and resource depletion. By promoting eco-friendly initiatives, leaders can create a legacy of responsibility, ensuring that the continent’s rich natural resources are preserved while fostering economic growth.

African leaders such as Wangari Maathai, the founder of the Green Belt Movement, exemplify the importance of sustainable practices in leadership. Maathai's leadership in environmental conservation and reforestation in Kenya not only addressed immediate ecological concerns but also empowered communities, particularly women, to take ownership of their environment (Ochieng, 2024:4599). Her work highlights how sustainable development can serve as a catalyst for social and economic empowerment, as communities are taught to preserve their resources while developing sustainable livelihoods.

Additionally, Rwanda's Paul Kagame has prioritized sustainability as part of his broader vision for national development. His government has implemented policies aimed at environmental conservation, including banning plastic bags, and promoting renewable energy sources, which have positioned Rwanda as a leader in green innovation in Africa (Straus & Waldorf, 2011:25-87). This approach reflects how leaders can integrate environmental stewardship into national policies, fostering a culture of sustainability that ensures long-term prosperity.

Furthermore, in South Africa, the shift towards sustainable mining practices under the leadership of Cyril Ramaphosa is another example of how African leaders are integrating sustainability into their development agendas. By advocating for environmentally responsible mining methods, Ramaphosa aims to balance economic growth with the need to protect the country's natural resources for future generations (Ramaphosa, 2022).

By prioritizing eco-friendly initiatives, African leaders can not only address immediate environmental challenges but also create a sustainable foundation for future generations. This focus on sustainability is essential for building resilient economies and societies that are capable of adapting to the changing global landscape. As Sheidu (2023:2–5) argues, sustainable leadership in Africa especially in food systems and climate resilience requires innovation, inclusivity, and long-term vision. Leaders must adopt forward-thinking environmental strategies that promote equity, adaptability, and intergenerational responsibility.

#### 3.5.1.12 Sustainable practices

Sustainable practices are essential for long-term growth. Leaders must advocate for environmental stewardship, ensuring that resources are managed wisely to benefit future generations while also addressing immediate community needs. By fostering collaboration between various sectors, leaders can implement innovative solutions that balance economic development with ecological preservation, ultimately leading to a more resilient and equitable

society. This holistic approach not only enhances community well-being but also encourages a culture of sustainability that can inspire future leaders to continue these vital efforts.

By embracing these lessons from Ruth's story, contemporary leaders in African contexts can strengthen their communities, empower individuals, and foster resilience, ultimately contributing to the development and prosperity of their societies. This approach not only enhances social cohesion but also encourages collaborative efforts that can lead to innovative solutions for common challenges.

### 3.5.2 Five practices for modern leadership (Kouzes and Posner)

Ruth's leadership, as portrayed in the biblical narrative, provides timeless lessons that resonate strongly with modern leadership frameworks, particularly Kouzes and Posner's *Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership*. Her story offers a powerful example of how resilience, courage, and empathy can shape effective leadership, making her a model for contemporary leaders, especially women, in various fields. By embodying the key practices of *Model the Way*, *Inspire a Shared Vision*, *Challenge the Process*, *Enable Others to Act*, and *Encourage the Heart*, Ruth demonstrates how strong leadership can drive collective success, foster collaboration, and inspire others to achieve their potential. Ruth's journey serves as a blueprint for modern leaders navigating complex challenges, showing how leadership that is grounded in compassion and bold decision-making can create lasting impact both personally and professionally.

#### 3.5.2.1 Model the way

Ruth's capacity to *Model the Way* is evident in her consistent loyalty, ethical decision-making, and proactive efforts to support Naomi. Her actions, such as her willingness to glean in the fields and her ethical approach to securing their future, set a personal example of integrity and strength that others could follow. According to Kouzes and Posner (2017:49-52), exemplary leaders lead by example, demonstrating behaviours that they wish to see reflected in their followers. Ruth's leadership during challenging circumstances, such as accompanying Naomi back to Bethlehem and taking responsibility for their livelihood, demonstrates the importance of modelling strong, ethical leadership. Ruth's commitment to Naomi and her ability to consistently act with integrity provides a model for modern leaders, emphasizing that leadership is grounded in personal behaviour and values.

### 3.5.2.2 Inspire a shared vision

Ruth also *Inspires a Shared Vision*, particularly in her determination to secure a stable future for herself and Naomi. Her actions motivate those around her—particularly Naomi and Boaz—to work towards a shared goal of ensuring their survival and prosperity. Ruth’s visionary leadership is evident in her capacity to inspire hope in Naomi, who had previously lost her sense of purpose. Ruth’s commitment to securing a future for both of them transforms her into a beacon of resilience and strategic foresight. By inspiring others to join her in pursuing this shared vision, Ruth demonstrates the essence of visionary leadership—one that is both compassionate and action-oriented. According to Taylor, Cornelius and Colvin (2014:571), visionary leadership involves articulating a compelling future and motivating others to act collectively toward that vision. Ruth’s actions, therefore, align closely with these principles, showing how vision, courage, and loyalty can mobilize change even in adverse circumstances.

### 3.5.2.3 Challenge the process

Ruth’s leadership also embodies the practice of *Challenging the Process*. She steps outside of traditional gender roles by boldly approaching Boaz at the threshing floor, a move that reflects her willingness to break from societal conventions to ensure security for her and Naomi. Lau (2023:112) highlights this moment as a prime example of Ruth’s willingness to challenge established norms, demonstrating that effective leadership often involves pushing boundaries and taking risks to achieve meaningful outcomes. Ruth’s decision to challenge societal expectations mirrors modern leaders who innovate and challenge existing processes to foster progress and drive transformation, especially in patriarchal or restrictive environments.

### 3.5.2.4 Enable others to act

Ruth’s leadership extends beyond her personal actions, as she also exemplifies the practice of *Enabling Others to Act*. Her empowerment of Naomi through her decisive actions highlights how effective leadership is not only about achieving personal goals but also about inspiring and enabling others to realize their potential. By taking initiative and securing Boaz’s help, Ruth indirectly restores Naomi’s hope and position within the community. This form of leadership is particularly relevant in contexts where leaders must lift others up and foster collaboration to

achieve shared success. Kouzes and Posner (2017:47-49) emphasize that leaders must foster collaboration and strengthen others, which Ruth does by creating an environment where Naomi can regain her dignity and sense of belonging.

### 3.5.2.5 Encourage the heart

Finally, Ruth's leadership exemplifies *Encouraging the Heart*, as her kindness towards both Naomi and Boaz consistently fosters hope and emotional well-being. Kouzes and Posner (2017:47-49) argue that leaders must recognize contributions and celebrate achievements to keep people motivated and focused. Ruth's compassion and empathy for Naomi, along with her willingness to go the extra mile for their well-being, reflect this practice. Her ability to care for and encourage Naomi highlights the emotional intelligence required of effective leaders. As Raghvendra (2024:1413) observes, emotional intelligence enables leaders to build trust, respond sensitively to others' needs, and create cohesive, supportive relationships key qualities exemplified in Ruth's actions throughout her journey. African women leaders, much like Ruth, often play key roles in fostering emotional resilience within their communities by offering encouragement and support during challenging times.

In conclusion, Ruth's leadership embodies all of Kouzes and Posner's *Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership*, providing a powerful framework for modern leaders, particularly women in various fields. By modelling ethical behaviour, inspiring shared visions, challenging societal norms, enabling others to act, and encouraging emotional resilience, Ruth's leadership remains relevant today. Her story offers timeless lessons for leaders who seek to navigate complex social and political landscapes while fostering collaboration, resilience, and empathy within their communities.

### 3.5.3 Empowerment and representation

In *Female Empowerment in Leadership*, Ruth's portrayal as a leader holds significant implications for female empowerment today. Tribble (2022) argues that Ruth represents a leadership model that actively challenges patriarchal norms while promoting resilience and vision. This perspective is particularly crucial in modern contexts, where female leaders often navigate the tension between upholding tradition and driving innovation (Tribble, 2022:88). Ruth's actions, such as her decision to glean in the fields and her subsequent marriage proposal

to Boaz, defy societal expectations and demonstrate how women can exercise leadership from marginalised positions.

Eskenazi & Frymer-Kensky (2011) emphasize that Ruth's proactive engagement and decision-making inspire other women, showing that leadership can emerge from places of vulnerability and that women can lead with both integrity and compassion (Eskenazi & Frymer-Kensky, 2011:96). Ruth's story serves as a powerful framework for female leaders today, underscoring the idea that true leadership is rooted in resilience and the courage to redefine one's role in society, even in the face of restrictive norms.

While Graves (2024) does not explicitly discuss Ruth, her framework for understanding inclusive leadership through a biblical lens offers valuable insights for interpreting Ruth's narrative. Graves explores how principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion are reflected in biblical texts, especially through the full participation and recognition of women whose contributions defy social marginalisation. Applying this framework to Ruth's story allows readers to view Ruth's integration into Israelite society not despite but because of her character and resilience as an illustration of inclusive values in action. Ruth's willingness to cross cultural boundaries and her eventual acceptance in Bethlehem can thus be interpreted as aligning with the kind of intentional inclusion that Graves advocates, where leadership is defined not by status but by commitment, loyalty, and community impact (Graves, 2024:241–254).

Ruth's narrative is presented as a source of empowerment for women in leadership. Ruth's boldness in pursuing a better future for herself and Naomi, and her assertive negotiation of social structures, positions her as a role model for women leaders today, particularly in patriarchal contexts where decisive actions by women are often constrained. Ruth's journey provides a template for female leaders on how to balance assertiveness with empathy, demonstrating that transformative leadership is possible even when faced with systemic limitations. (Cahyono, 2024:1794-1804).

**Contemporary Lessons from Ruth's Leadership:** The lessons drawn from Ruth's leadership are highly relevant for leaders today, particularly in contexts that require resilience, communal support, and the ability to navigate socio-political complexities. Ruth's unwavering loyalty, her strategic decision-making, and her ability to inspire others reflect qualities that are essential for effective leadership in both community-focused and organizational settings. By combining a commitment to the collective welfare with personal integrity and strategic courage, Ruth's story provides a timeless example of how leaders can effect positive change, even when faced with structural barriers and cultural constraints.

## 3.6 Synthesis

### 3.6.1 Summary of key findings

This chapter synthesizes Mburu's hermeneutical techniques with Kouzes and Posner's *Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership* to form a comprehensive framework for analysing leadership in the Book of Ruth. Mburu's hermeneutical approach—focusing on the *theological, literary, historical, and cultural contexts*—provides a multifaceted understanding of the leadership qualities exhibited by Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz (Mburu, 2019:116-120). These contexts highlight how Ruth's actions were deeply embedded in the socio-economic and legal realities of ancient Israel, showcasing her ability to navigate cultural norms, challenge traditional gender roles, and exert agency within a patriarchal framework. Through this lens, Ruth's resilience, resourcefulness, and intercultural adaptability are illuminated as key traits of her leadership.

The integration of Kouzes and Posner's *Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership*—*Model the Way, inspire a Shared Vision, Challenge the Process, Enable Others to Act, and Encourage the Heart*—aligns Ruth's leadership with contemporary models of effective leadership (Kouzes & Posner, 2017:47-49). Ruth exemplifies *Model the Way* through her consistent loyalty and ethical behaviour, particularly in her steadfast support of Naomi. Her ability to *Inspire a Shared Vision* is reflected in her strategic efforts to secure a stable future for both her and Naomi, motivating those around her, including Boaz, to work toward a common goal. Ruth's boldness in approaching Boaz, which defied conventional social norms, exemplifies *Challenging the Process*, while her empowerment of Naomi through her actions aligns with *Enabling Others to Act* (Lau, 2023:112). Furthermore, Ruth's kindness and empathy toward both Naomi and Boaz reflect the practice of *Encouraging the Heart*, fostering hope and resilience within her community (Kouzes & Posner, 2017:47-49).

By combining these two analytical frameworks, this chapter provides a nuanced exploration of Ruth's leadership within the cultural and theological contexts of her time while making relevant connections to modern leadership practices. Ruth's leadership traits, such as integrity, resilience, and the empowerment of others, emerge as timeless qualities that resonate in contemporary discussions of leadership, particularly in contexts where social and cultural challenges must be navigated with vision and courage. This integrated approach offers valuable insights not only into Ruth's leadership but also into broader leadership models that inspire individuals and communities to act with compassion, integrity, and a shared sense of purpose.

### 3.6.2 Contribution to scholarship

This chapter offers a significant contribution to biblical scholarship by employing an interdisciplinary approach that combines leadership studies with biblical exegesis, a methodology that is becoming increasingly important in contemporary theological and leadership discourse. Recent scholarship, such as the works of Dube (2020:198-202) and Adamo, (2015:59-72), underscores the importance of integrating African leadership models and postcolonial feminist interpretations to enrich the understanding of biblical texts. By incorporating Mburu's (2017:116-120) hermeneutical approach, this chapter situates the leadership of Ruth within a broader theological and cultural framework, offering insights that resonate with African leadership contexts, where communal responsibility, resilience, and inclusivity are central values.

The application of Kouzes and Posner's (2017:47-49) *Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership* further enhances this interdisciplinary approach, bridging the gap between ancient biblical narratives and modern leadership theory. This is particularly important in discussions surrounding women in leadership, as Ruth's story exemplifies how female leaders can navigate patriarchal structures with integrity, vision, and courage. Scholars such as Lau (2023:112) have highlighted the relevance of using modern leadership frameworks to analyse biblical figures, noting that these frameworks help to draw practical lessons for contemporary leaders, especially women (Lau, 2023:112-115).

Additionally, this chapter contributes to scholarship by positioning Ruth as a model of leadership that transcends both time and culture. Tribble (2022:85-90) has noted the need for leadership analysis in biblical narratives, and this study builds on such scholarship by offering a nuanced understanding of Ruth's leadership qualities through the integration of theological, literary, and leadership theories. By doing so, the chapter highlights the enduring relevance of biblical narratives in informing leadership practices today, particularly within African and feminist contexts.

Moreover, the interdisciplinary nature of this chapter also aligns with the growing demand for inclusivity in leadership studies. As noted by Dube (2020:198-202), the exploration of gender and leadership in biblical contexts helps to address the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles, making this chapter not only a contribution to biblical scholarship but also to broader discussions of gender and leadership in both theological and secular arenas.

Through its combination of Mburu's (2019:74-159) African hermeneutical techniques and Kouzes and Posner's (2017:27-281) leadership practices, this chapter adds depth to our understanding of Ruth as a leader, demonstrating how ancient narratives continue to offer valuable insights for contemporary leadership discussions. This approach enriches both biblical and leadership scholarship, providing a model for future interdisciplinary studies that seek to connect ancient wisdom with modern leadership challenges.

### 3.6.3 Benefits of this structure

The integration of Mburu's hermeneutical techniques and Kouzes and Posner's *Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership* throughout the chapter enables a comprehensive exploration of Ruth's leadership in both theological and socio-cultural and contemporary contexts. Mburu's hermeneutical framework provides critical insights into the theological, literary, historical, and cultural aspects of the text, offering a layered understanding that is particularly relevant to African leadership scholarship. By examining the narrative through these lenses, the analysis not only uncovers the intrinsic qualities of Ruth's leadership but also places them within a broader African leadership paradigm, where communal values and resilience are paramount (Mburu, 2019:116-120).

Moreover, the application of Kouzes and Posner's framework demonstrates how Ruth's actions, such as her loyalty to Naomi and her proactive engagement with Boaz, align with modern leadership theory. For instance, Ruth's ability to *Model the Way* through her actions of loyalty and courage and her capacity to *Inspire a Shared Vision* for Naomi and Boaz make her a timeless figure of leadership that resonates with contemporary leaders, especially women (Kouzes & Posner, 2017:47-49). This linkage of ancient biblical narratives to modern leadership principles has been supported by recent scholarship, such as that of Tribble (2022:85-90), who argue that biblical figures like Ruth exemplify leadership qualities that remain applicable today. The structured approach of this chapter progressively builds from foundational theological and literary analyses to a detailed exegetical study, culminating in contemporary applications. This ensures that the study remains thorough and multifaceted, engaging with both academic and practical aspects of leadership. By linking Ruth's leadership qualities to modern frameworks, the chapter not only contributes to biblical scholarship but also engages with contemporary leadership discourse, particularly within African contexts where women's leadership is increasingly significant. Madsen and Ngunjiri (2023:104-107) highlight the need for inclusive and transformative leadership models in African settings, and

Ruth's example offers a paradigm for empowering women leaders through resilience, adaptability, and communal responsibility. This dual approach allows the analysis to be robust and versatile, connecting ancient theological insights with practical leadership applications, making the study highly relevant for both biblical scholars and modern leadership theorists. Additionally, it adds to the growing body of literature on the intersection of gender, leadership, and theology, further demonstrating the enduring impact of Ruth's narrative in contemporary leadership studies.

## CHAPTER 4

### **Patriarchal perspectives on women in leadership**

#### 4.1 Introduction

##### 4.1.1 Chapter overview

This chapter examines the intricate interplay between patriarchal structures and women's leadership as depicted in the Book of Ruth. By analysing the narrative within its historical and cultural context, I seek to uncover how patriarchal perspectives shaped the roles and opportunities available to women, especially in leadership. By closely examining Ruth's character and actions alongside those of other key figures like Naomi and Boaz, the chapter reveals how leadership is portrayed, contested, and redefined within a traditionally male-dominated setting.

The focus of this chapter is to explore how cultural, legal, and social norms of the time influenced perceptions of women's roles and how characters like Ruth and Naomi navigated these expectations to assert their agency and leadership. Recent scholarship highlights the importance of re-reading biblical texts through a gender-sensitive lens to understand the nuanced portrayals of women's resilience and leadership (Claassens, 2012:57-58; Pathak, 2019:39-58). Such interpretations allow for a nuanced understanding of Ruth's leadership, which emerges not by confrontation but through strategic navigation of societal norms.

Similarly, Pathak (2019:39–58) offers insights into how the story of Ruth and Naomi reflects a form of compassion-driven agency and solidarity that challenges patriarchal structures. Her postcolonial feminist reading frames their collaboration not merely as survival but as a conscious act of resistance and mutual empowerment within a restrictive socio-cultural framework. This interpretation enriches our understanding of Ruth's narrative as one that embodies strategic leadership through relational and ethical solidarity.

Furthermore, Pathak (2019) provides a postcolonial feminist reading of the text, revealing how narrative strategies subtly oppose patriarchal control, positioning Ruth as a symbol of leadership through resilience and adaptability. This analysis highlights how Ruth's actions, though seemingly conformist, serve as forms of resistance and leadership (Pathak, 2019:22-23). Additionally, Naicker (2024:1-12) explores how socioeconomic factors and issues of food insecurity are intertwined with patriarchal limitations. Ruth's ability to navigate these challenges demonstrates a form of leadership that is adaptive and responsive to socio-cultural restrictions (Naicker, 2024:1-12).

The chapter will also analyse the role of other characters, such as Naomi and Boaz, and how their interactions with Ruth illuminate the dynamics of leadership within a patriarchal setting. Naomi's guidance and support, combined with Boaz's recognition of Ruth's initiative, illustrate how collaborative efforts and alliances can be essential for leadership, especially within restrictive societal structures. Scholars like Laffey and Leonard-Fleckman (2022:34) emphasize the continued relevance of Ruth's story, suggesting that its engagement with patriarchal structures offers critical insights into how leadership can manifest even within systems designed to limit it (Laffey & Leonard-Fleckman, 2022:34-35).

The objective is then to bridge the historical context of Ruth's story with modern discussions on leadership, particularly regarding how women can lead within, and often despite, patriarchal constraints. By examining the text through both historical and contemporary lenses, the chapter will highlight the enduring relevance of Ruth's story in understanding resilience, adaptability, and collaboration in leadership contexts today. Ultimately, this chapter aims to explore how Ruth, as a woman, navigates the constraints imposed by a patriarchal society, and how her story provides insights into leadership dynamics that transcend time.

#### 4.1.2 Contextual background

To understand the patriarchal perspectives on women in leadership within the Book of Ruth, it is essential to explore the historical and cultural context of ancient Israel during the period of the narrative. Traditionally, the story of Ruth is set during the time of the judges, a period marked by social instability and decentralized tribal governance. This era, which spans roughly from the 12th to the 11th century BCE (before common era), was characterised by recurring cycles of crisis and restoration, influencing social structures and community interactions (Younger, 2002:413-417).

Recent scholarly investigations have illuminated the complex web of socio-political dynamics during the era of the Judges, revealing intricate relationships and influences that shaped governance and community norms. Younger (2002:413–417) underscores the decentralized tribal structure of governance, noting how the lack of central authority led to internal fragmentation and repeated cycles of violence. This contributed to instability across Israelite territories.

Additionally, Soggin (1981:19–23) highlights inter-tribal conflicts, particularly disputes over territory and leadership among tribes like Ephraim and Benjamin, which weakened national cohesion. These struggles were compounded by external threats. Block (1999:40–45) details the Philistine incursions and military pressures that forced temporary tribal coalitions, influencing both political and social order during the period.

Famine also shaped the narrative landscape of Ruth. Hess (2005:13–16) emphasizes that famine was a common reality in ancient Palestine, often leading to regional migrations. In this context, Elimelech’s move to Moab aligns with broader survival patterns. LaCocque (2004:42) further notes that famine disrupted economic and familial structures, influencing decision-making, and heightening the vulnerability of women and widows like Naomi and Ruth.

Recent scholarly investigations have illuminated the socio-political dynamics that defined the era of the Judges, revealing how the absence of centralized governance fostered instability across Israelite society. Block (1999:37) notes that the period was marked by a tribal confederation model, where local clans operated autonomously without a unifying national authority. This decentralized leadership structure often led to internal strife and inconsistent legal and moral standards. Similarly, Younger (2002:25) argues that the fragmentation of tribal authority contributed to frequent conflicts between tribes and a cyclical pattern of disobedience and deliverance, which reflected broader social disintegration. The narrative setting of *Ruth* placed during this turbulent period further underscores the societal challenges of the time, including famine and migration. These conditions, as seen in Elimelech’s decision to relocate to Moab, reflect the widespread socio-economic hardship and the precarious nature of life in Israel during the Judges era.

While the narrative is set during the time of the judges, many scholars contend that the Book of Ruth was actually written in the post-exilic period, likely during the fifth or fourth century BCE. This distinction between the narrated time and the time of composition is crucial, as the post-exilic context may have shaped the story’s emphasis on themes such as loyalty, inclusion of foreigners, and the preservation of family lineage (Campbell, 1975:30–32; Hubbard, 1988:25). Recognising this possibility allows for a more nuanced understanding of how the narrative speaks to its original audience while reflecting on an earlier historical setting.

The patriarchal structure prevalent in ancient Israel was profoundly ingrained within the sociocultural, legalistic, and religious frameworks. Men held authority over most aspects of public and family life, while women’s roles were primarily confined to domestic responsibilities and maintaining the household. Recent research further elucidates the depth of

this system. Bosman (2022) highlights that patriarchal norms were reinforced through legal structures that restricted women's economic independence, making their social standing largely dependent on their male relatives (Bosman, 2022: 1–20). This legal framework was not just a matter of custom but was integrated into the religious and social fabric of the society. In a comparable manner, Dube (2001: 75–80) examines how patriarchal frameworks were sustained through religious customs, wherein legal codes and ceremonial practices frequently highlighted male dominance, consequently relegating women's involvement in both religious and societal spheres (Dube, 2001: 75–80). For example, the exclusion of women from priestly roles and their limited access to religious education were institutionalized methods that reinforced male dominance in religious life. This connection between religious norms and social control helped maintain a system where women's roles were predominantly seen in the context of their duties within the home and family.

Ademiluka (2018) further explains that the patriarchal system was not static but adapted over time, influencing various aspects of community life, including inheritance laws, marriage customs, and legal protections, all of which prioritized male leadership and authority (Ademiluka, 2018:339-362). This adaptability ensured the persistence of patriarchal structures across different periods, even as society changed. Furthermore, Marsman (2021) posits that patriarchal domination was similarly manifest in the restricted legal entitlements granted to women, as exemplified by statutes governing property and inheritance rights. These laws explicitly favoured men, thus institutionalizing economic and social dependency for women (Marsman, 2021:39). The ramifications of these legislative measures were extensive, influencing women's accessibility to resources and their capacity for decision-making, both within the domestic sphere and beyond.

This intricate web of social, legal, and religious practices created a society where women like Ruth and Naomi had to navigate significant constraints. The narrative of Ruth provides a glimpse into how women could still exercise agency and leadership within these patriarchal limitations by leveraging social norms to their advantage (Nielson, 2020:52-66). Understanding these dynamics is essential for appreciating how characters like Ruth and Naomi managed to assert their presence and influence in a male-dominated context.

Legal frameworks, such as inheritance laws, further reinforced this system, as women could not directly own or inherit property unless under exceptional circumstances (Trible, 1973:30-48). Recent scholarship continues to highlight these legal restrictions. Ulrich (1998) discusses how the laws were designed to ensure that property remained within the male lineage, reinforcing patriarchal control over land and assets (Ulrich, 1998:529). Women's inheritance was often restricted to cases where no male heirs existed, as seen in the biblical example of the daughters of Zelophehad, which set a rare legal precedent rather than a norm (Resane, 2021:8). In Numbers 27:1-11, Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah, after their father died without sons, requested the right to inherit his property. God instructed Moses to grant their request, establishing a precedent that allowed daughters to inherit if there were no male heirs (Siquans, 2024:49). This principle was further refined in Numbers 36:1-12, where it was stipulated that daughters who inherited must marry within their tribe to keep the land within the family line. The final affirmation of their inheritance is recorded in Joshua 17:3-6, emphasizing the adaptability of the law to ensure justice and fairness within the community (Meyers, 2013:187). Moreover, MacHaffie (2006) notes that these inheritance rights were primarily protective mechanisms that allowed women to hold temporary custodianship rather than full ownership, ensuring that property would revert to male relatives upon the woman's death or remarriage (MacHaffie, 2006:48). As such, a woman's socio-economic security was typically tied to her relationships with male relatives whether a father, husband, or son. This dependency underscores the precariousness of Ruth's situation as a foreign widow without a male protector, highlighting the social vulnerabilities faced by women during this period (MacHaffie, 2006:48).

Lipka and Wells, (2020) elaborates that the patriarchal legal system not only restricted property rights but also limited the legal autonomy of women, making their social and economic stability contingent upon the goodwill of male relatives. This legal dependency placed women like Ruth and Naomi at a significant disadvantage, as they often had to navigate complex social and legal systems to secure their livelihoods (Lipka & Wells, 2020:194). For example, in the Book of Ruth, Naomi advises Ruth to approach Boaz on the threshing floor, leveraging the practice of kinsman redeemer marriage to secure their future (Ruth 3:1-18). Understanding these legal frameworks provides a clearer picture of the socio-economic dynamics in Ruth's story, demonstrating how she, alongside Naomi, had to strategically use existing laws to secure their future.

Furthermore, it is imperative to understand that the intricate and multifaceted society of ancient Israel was deeply rooted in agricultural practices and traditions, wherein the ownership and

cultivation of land were not merely beneficial but vital for ensuring both a robust economic foundation and the elevation of one's social status within the community. The practice of kinsman redeemer custom as outlined in Levitical and Deuteronomic law, was one of the mechanisms designed to preserve family lineage and property within the male line. This sociocultural custom imposed an obligation upon a male individual to enter matrimony with the widow of his deceased sibling, a practice primarily aimed at ensuring the perpetuation of the family name and simultaneously safeguarding the social standing of the bereaved widow within the community (Claassens, 2012:50-51). Within the narrative of Ruth, this practice plays a pivotal role, as it becomes the means through which Ruth and Naomi seek to secure their future, navigating the constraints of patriarchal norms.

Cultural standards also significantly influenced the expectations of appropriate conduct for women. Modesty, obedience, and loyalty were highly valued traits, particularly in women. Any deviation from these expectations could lead to social ostracization or vulnerability (Pathak, 2019:24-25). Within this context, Ruth's actions—her decision to leave her homeland, her bold approach to Boaz, and her initiative in gleaning fields—can be seen as acts that both align with and subtly challenge these cultural expectations. Scholars have noted that Ruth's story reflects both conformity to and subversion of these norms, offering a nuanced view of agency within patriarchal confines.

The socio-political backdrop of the time also included significant interaction with surrounding cultures. As a Moabite, Ruth's foreign status adds another layer of complexity to her story. Moabites were often viewed with suspicion and contempt by the Israelites, and her inclusion in the narrative raises questions about identity, ethnicity, and belonging within a patriarchal society (Meyers, 2014:1-27). Her story challenges prevailing notions of purity and exclusivity, highlighting how cross-cultural alliances could be formed even within a restrictive societal framework.

Understanding these contextual elements is essential for appreciating the depth of Ruth's leadership and agency. Despite the patriarchal constraints, Ruth's story illustrates how women could navigate social norms, economic systems, and legal frameworks to secure their well-being and assert their presence. The historical background provides a foundation for analysing the leadership themes that emerge in the narrative, allowing for a deeper exploration of how Ruth's resilience and strategic decisions offer insights into leadership within restrictive social structures.

## 4.2 Patriarchal perspectives in the book of Ruth

### 4.2.1 Authorship and literary context

The traditional understanding of the authorship of the Book of Ruth attributes it to a male author, presumably created during the post-exilic epoch. This presumption arises from the overarching framework of patriarchal authorship conventions prevalent in ancient Israelite culture, wherein male figures predominantly undertook the responsibility for religious and historical discourses (Dolansky, 2020:133). In the historical context of ancient Israel, the prevailing social hierarchy was characterised by a pronounced patriarchal framework, wherein males occupied the predominant positions of authority and influence, thereby serving as the principal stewards and guardians of the intricate religious and cultural narratives that shaped the identity of the community; these men were fundamentally entrusted with the critical responsibility of diligently preserving and skilfully conveying the rich tapestry of history, the foundational laws, and the core values that underpinned the social fabric of their society. Consequently, the narrative of Ruth, including its character portrayals and thematic elements, is often interpreted as reflective of these male-dominant perspectives. Scholars have argued that the representation of events, the prominence of certain characters, and the underlying values presented in the Book of Ruth are influenced by a worldview that seeks to reinforce male dominance, ensuring the continuity of societal norms that placed men at the centre of leadership and decision-making (George, 2022:55).

This perspective suggests that the Book of Ruth was shaped to maintain and legitimise existing power structures, portraying men as the primary agents of decision-making and authority. For instance, Boaz, a central male figure, is depicted as the redeemer and protector, which underscores the traditional patriarchal emphasis on male guardianship and provision (George, 2022:55). The characterizations of Ruth and Naomi, while significant, are framed in a way that positions their actions within a broader male-governed narrative. As such, the motivations, behaviours, and outcomes in the story often align with a worldview that seeks to sustain the patriarchal status quo, implicitly validating the social order of the time. The fact that Ruth's ultimate redemption and integration into the community are mediated through Boaz further reflects a narrative that emphasises male control and agency over women's lives, thereby endorsing a cultural norm where women's survival and success are contingent upon male intervention.

Nevertheless, contemporary scholarship presents a more intricate viewpoint regarding the depiction of these patriarchal norms. Laffey and Leonard-Fleckman (2022:84) contend that the narrative, although crafted within a male-prevalent tradition, concurrently offers a platform for female agency through figures such as Ruth and Naomi. The literary framework permits these women to exert influence within the limitations of their societal roles, implying that the text engages in a nuanced subversion of conventional gender norms by emphasizing the ingenuity and fortitude of its female characters (Laffey & Leonard-Fleckman, 2022:84).

Siquans (2024:49) highlights how certain biblical narratives, including that of the daughters of Zelophehad, provide a lens through which to examine the subversion of patriarchal structures in ancient Israel. Though her study focuses on a different text, the interpretive framework she applies supports a feminist reading of the Book of Ruth. In this light, the bond between Ruth and Naomi may be seen as a reciprocal support system that quietly challenges male-dominated norms. Their partnership becomes a model of resilience and mutual empowerment within a context of systemic gender-based vulnerability, reflecting a subtle but powerful critique of patriarchal expectations. The tone of the Book of Ruth significantly influences its patriarchal or potentially counter-patriarchal interpretations.

As noted by Savran and Doan (2016), there exist instances of irony and linguistic play that seemingly critique the constrictive societal frameworks that inhibit female autonomy. For instance, the episode wherein Ruth approaches Boaz on the threshing floor can be construed as a moment in which traditional gender roles are subverted, with Ruth assuming an assertive position typically reserved for males (Savran, 2016:7-23) This employment of literary techniques insinuates that the narrative may not merely reinforce patriarchal norms but also partake in a sophisticated discourse concerning the constraints and opportunities available to women within such a framework. In a similar vein, Jaeggi-Wong (2021) observes that Ruth's actions underscore her capability to navigate existing power dynamics to her advantage, exemplifying resilience, and adaptability within a repressive societal milieu (Jaeggi-Wong, 2021:20).

Another pivotal element is the deliberate positioning of the narrative focus on Ruth and Naomi. Pressler (2002) elaborates on how this narrative decision foregrounds female perspectives in a literary context where women were frequently marginalised. By emphasizing Ruth's journey, the text subtly contests the patriarchal convention that side-lines women's experiences, facilitating an investigation into female leadership, resilience, and collaboration (Pressler, 2002:186-199). This emphasis contributes to a broader discourse surrounding female

authorship or the potential influence of women on the text, with certain scholars positing that the narrative's understated defiance of gender norms could imply an intention to challenge patriarchal expectations, even if composed by a male author (Dolansky, 2020:133).

Moreover, the narrative architecture of the Book of Ruth serves as a pivotal mechanism in both reflecting and contesting patriarchal paradigms. Dolansky (2020) argues that while the text is embedded within a male-dominated cultural and legal framework, it strategically utilizes narrative elements to interrogate rigid gender constructs. Similarly, Chapman (2023) highlights how the portrayal of Ruth's bold initiative, Naomi's tactical acumen, and Boaz's deference to Ruth's actions represents a nuanced subversion of normative gender expectations. These depictions enable the narrative to function as more than a domestic tale—they illustrate the potential for women to exercise influence and agency within constrained social settings. The subtle reconfiguration of gender roles thus challenges the assumption of male monopoly on leadership and decision-making in ancient Israelite society. Such an examination elucidates how the narrative navigates patriarchal anticipations, occasionally affirming them but frequently subverting them through the depiction of formidable female figures who exercise autonomy within their limited contexts.

The significance of Boaz, as the male redeemer, is also paramount in scrutinizing the patriarchal dynamics embedded within the narrative. His behaviours are frequently perceived as gracious and in alignment with conventional norms; however, his engagement with Ruth contests the traditional passive role ascribed to women. Dolansky (2020) argues that the Book of Ruth presents a subtle yet effective challenge to patriarchal expectations through narrative choices that foreground female initiative. Ruth's proactive stance towards Boaz on the threshing floor thus positions her in a locus of authority, instigating actions that ultimately influence the narrative's resolution (Dolansky, 2020:133). This interplay illustrates the dichotomy between societal norms and individual autonomy, unveiling deeper understandings of the intricacies of gender roles within the text.

While conventional assumptions regarding the authorship of the Book of Ruth imply a patriarchal framework, the narrative itself affords opportunities for alternative interpretations. Through its tonal quality, literary devices, and character emphasis, the text facilitates a sophisticated examination of gender roles, subtly contesting patriarchal conventions while simultaneously operating within them. This intricacy has engendered a variety of interpretations, rendering the Book of Ruth a fertile arena for discourse on the intersections of gender, authorship, and literary subversion. The interaction between male and female

characters, the strategic deployment of narrative techniques, and the representation of Ruth and Naomi's tenacity collectively contribute to a multifaceted narrative that engages with and frequently subverts traditional patriarchal standards.

#### 4.2.2 Gender roles and leadership expectations

In ancient Israel, gender roles were clearly defined, with societal expectations confining women primarily to domestic and familial responsibilities. The presence of women in leadership roles was generally rare, particularly within the spheres of public administration or religious authority. This patriarchal structure is evident in the Book of Ruth, where the role of women is initially framed within traditional expectations (Santoso, Sindoro, Putrawan, 2022:103). However, through characters like Ruth and Naomi, the narrative explores how women can navigate, and at times subvert, these gender norms, revealing a complex interplay between societal constraints and personal agency. Their resilience and resourcefulness challenge the status quo, illustrating that even within restrictive frameworks, women can carve out their paths and assert their influence in ways that resonate beyond their immediate circumstances.

Ruth and Naomi's actions are pivotal in challenging the expected roles of women. Jaeggi-Wong (2021) notes that Naomi's strategic thinking and Ruth's proactive behaviour demonstrate a nuanced form of leadership that defies traditional gender roles. By advising Ruth to take bold steps, such as seeking out Boaz on the threshing floor, Naomi exhibits agency in manipulating existing social norms to secure a future for them both (Jaeggi-Wong, 2021:22). Ruth's willingness to follow Naomi's advice and act assertively also subverts the expectation of passivity traditionally associated with women, positioning her as a character who takes control of her destiny within a restrictive societal structure. This dynamic interplay between the two women not only highlights their strengths but also emphasizes the importance of mentorship and solidarity among women in navigating patriarchal systems (Chua & Lessing, 2013:85). Their relationship serves as a powerful reminder that collaboration and support can lead to transformative outcomes, challenging the status quo and redefining what it means to be a woman in their time (Yadav, Sharma, & Nguyen, 2024:195-220). This theme resonates throughout the narrative, illustrating how their combined efforts enable them to overcome obstacles that would otherwise confine them, ultimately paving the way for future generations of women to assert their agency and pursue their aspirations with confidence.

The leadership exhibited by Ruth and Naomi is further highlighted by how they engage with the patriarchal system rather than entirely reject it. According to Lee (2021), Ruth's actions can be seen as navigating within the boundaries of societal norms, using them to her advantage. By performing the culturally expected role of a loyal daughter-in-law, Ruth gains access to resources and a social network that enables her to secure her and Naomi's futures (Lee, 2021:7-30). This strategic adherence to, yet manipulation of, patriarchal expectations showcase a sophisticated form of resilience and leadership. This duality in Ruth's approach not only underscores her intelligence but also reflects a broader commentary on the complexities faced by women in similar positions throughout history. This nuanced understanding of Ruth's character invites a reevaluation of traditional narratives surrounding female agency, suggesting that compliance and resistance can coexist in powerful ways (Bauckham, 2002:127). Moreover, it challenges us to consider how societal structures can be navigated and reshaped by those who appear to conform, revealing the intricate dance between power and vulnerability that defines many women's experiences. In this light, Ruth emerges not merely as a passive figure but as an active participant in her destiny, skilfully leveraging the very systems that seek to limit her (Ackerman, 2016:45).

The interactions between Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz also serve to highlight the tension between individual desires and societal constraints. Boaz's role as a male redeemer aligns with traditional patriarchal norms, yet it is Ruth's initiative that sets the process into motion. While Boaz is portrayed as a protector who operates within the cultural frameworks of male authority, it is ultimately Ruth's actions that drive the narrative forward, suggesting a subtle critique of the male-dominated redemption system, thus, the text presents a scenario where female agency subtly undermines the very system that seeks to restrict it. These dynamic invites readers to reconsider the roles of women in biblical narratives, emphasising that their contributions, though often overshadowed, are crucial to the unfolding of events and the realization of redemption (Diko, 2024:64).

Furthermore, the relationship between Ruth and Naomi emphasises collaboration and mutual support, which contrasts with the hierarchical dynamics typically seen in patriarchal settings. Their partnership demonstrates a form of relational leadership that relies on solidarity, strategic planning, and adaptability. Naomi's role as a mentor to Ruth also disrupts the passive, supportive roles often assigned to women, revealing how female characters can assert leadership even within a society that limits their autonomy (Randolph, 2006:1081-1087). This

interplay not only enhances the narrative but also compels readers to re-evaluate the mechanisms through which women's voices and actions influence historical trajectories, contesting conventional interpretations that frequently diminish their experiences. Moreover, this collaboration acts as a significant reminder that the synergy among women can yield transformative results, promoting resilience and innovation amidst challenges.

The Book of Ruth provides a layered examination of gender roles and leadership expectations. While it operates within a patriarchal context, the actions of Ruth and Naomi reveal a counter-narrative that highlights female resilience, agency, and strategic leadership. Their ability to navigate and occasionally subvert societal norms demonstrates that leadership can manifest in diverse and non-traditional ways, offering deeper insights into the complexities of gender roles within ancient Israel.

### 4.3 Leadership dynamics in the book of Ruth

#### 4.3.1 Ruth's leadership journey

Ruth's journey in the Book of Ruth is marked by significant moments that highlight her resilience, adaptability, and strategic decision-making. Her leadership is not exhibited through traditional authority or power but through her ability to navigate societal limitations and assert agency within a patriarchal framework. Recent scholarship has emphasised that Ruth's actions, such as her decision to remain with Naomi despite the uncertain future, demonstrate a profound level of resilience and loyalty (Panganiban 2020:182-197). This choice, driven by personal conviction, sets the foundation for Ruth's leadership as it challenges societal norms that expected her to return to her homeland.

One of the key aspects of Ruth's leadership is her adaptability. According to Gatti (2022:1-16), Ruth exemplifies flexibility in her approach by understanding and embracing the cultural norms of Bethlehem, thus ensuring her acceptance within the community. This adaptability is evident when she takes the initiative to glean in the fields to provide for herself and Naomi, a task that required her to integrate into a new social system. Ruth's ability to adapt and thrive in a foreign environment speaks to her strategic mindset and capacity to lead by example, even when her actions defy traditional expectations of a woman in her position (Hull, 2023:31-74). Furthermore, Rivers (2012:193) explores how the narrative of Ruth's inclusion among the women in Jesus' genealogy highlights her as an example of resilience and strategic leadership, despite her foreign status and humble beginnings.

Strategic decision-making represents a critical aspect of Ruth's leadership. Ruth's strategy in connecting with Boaz at the threshing floor underlines her independence and insightful planning in a context ruled by men. Instead of just going along with her assigned place in society, her dynamic actions reflected a thoughtfully designed scheme that matched with prevailing cultural customs yet quietly pushed back against lasting gender inequalities. By instigating the interaction and utilizing conventional methods such as gleaning, Ruth ensured the future well-being of both herself and Naomi. Her decisions showcase a daring and imaginative stance towards societal conventions, undertaking a deliberate risk to gain recognition and stability with Boaz's backing. As a result, she not only changed her own assignments but also showcased a leadership blueprint characterized by resolute determination, cultural perceptiveness, and a skill for crafting strategies in limited spaces (Adelman, 2012:87).

(Yudith et al, 2024:822-832) provide further insights by analysing Ruth's interactions within the text, suggesting that her actions are deliberate and reflect a deep understanding of the socio-economic structures of her time, which she navigates to secure stability and continuity for herself and Naomi.

Ruth's leadership journey is characterised by her resilience, adaptability, and strategic acumen. By navigating and occasionally subverting societal norms, she challenges the traditional expectations of women in ancient Israel. Her actions exemplify how leadership can manifest in non-traditional forms, particularly in environments where direct authority is not accessible to women. Consequently, the narrative of Ruth provides significant perspectives on the intricacies of leadership within patriarchal frameworks and emphasises the critical role of resilience and strategic decision-making as fundamental elements of proficient leadership. As Michael, (2015:145-162) discusses, Ruth's story continues to provide lessons on the importance of agency and assertiveness in the face of adversity, making her an enduring example of leadership across different contexts.

Ruth's leadership also stands out when compared to the actions of Naomi and Boaz. Naomi demonstrates leadership through her experience and guidance, often directing Ruth's decisions with a deep understanding of cultural customs. Ruth's decision to stay with Naomi after the death of their husbands was a pivotal point where she chose loyalty over personal convenience, showcasing her leadership through loyalty and service. Naomi, in turn, exhibited leadership by using her knowledge to guide Ruth, particularly when advising her on how to approach Boaz. This interplay illustrates that Ruth's leadership was not isolated but emerged in response to Naomi's mentoring and support (Palmer, 2023:277).

In comparison to Boaz, Ruth's leadership is distinctively grassroots and action oriented. Boaz's leadership, supported by his social and economic power, complements Ruth's proactive and courageous actions. Ruth led from a position of vulnerability, which required her to act boldly without the safety net of established power. This contrasts with Boaz, whose leadership was manifested in his capacity to provide protection and fulfil his role as a kinsman-redeemer. Chapman (2023:431) highlights that Boaz's recognition of Ruth's strength and loyalty indicates that her actions inspired his own leadership, thereby initiating a reciprocal dynamic where both individuals influenced each other to bring about collective well-being.

This comparison underscores that Ruth's leadership was defined not by authority but by transformative actions that changed the lives of those around her. Naomi provided the foundational support, while Boaz facilitated structural support, yet it was Ruth's courage and initiative that moved the story forward. This three-fold leadership dynamic emphasises the power of different forms of influence—initiative without formal power (Ruth), wisdom and mentorship (Naomi), and social influence and benevolent authority (Boaz)—working together to create meaningful change.

#### 4.3.2 The role of other characters in Ruth's leadership journey

The leadership journey of Ruth is intricately connected with the roles played by other characters, particularly Naomi and Boaz. Naomi's influence is pivotal as she not only provides guidance but also actively shapes the strategies that Ruth employs. According to Aloe (2023), Naomi can be seen as a mentor who guides Ruth through complex socio-cultural norms, advising her on how to approach Boaz on the threshing floor, which signifies a moment of strategic agency (Aloe et al, 2023:160). This mentorship dynamic between Naomi and Ruth underscores a collaborative form of leadership, where knowledge-sharing and trust play crucial roles in navigating patriarchal structures.

Boaz's position is of comparable importance, yet it is distinct in that he embodies a figure of authority within the patriarchal paradigm. Boaz's engagements with Ruth underscore a collaborative albeit hierarchical relationship; although he possesses societal power, Ruth's proactive approach challenges and directs his responses. For example, it is Ruth who undertakes the audacious action of approaching Boaz under the cover of night, thus subverting conventional gender norms, and instigating the series of events that culminate in their union. This interaction has been interpreted by Lederman-Daniely (2022) as a nuanced critique of the

constraints inherent in male-dominated systems, where female agency is manifested not through overt confrontation, but rather through strategic navigation within the prevailing frameworks (Lederman-Daniely, 2022:35).

The collaborative and relational dynamics present in the narrative offer deeper insights into the concept of leadership. Naomi and Ruth's partnership exemplifies resilience and adaptability. According to Fischer & Friedman (2021), their relationship is a testament to how women can work within and around patriarchal constraints, creating opportunities through mutual support and strategic action (Fischer & Friedman, 2021:37). This form of leadership is particularly relevant in contexts where traditional structures limit direct authority for women, emphasizing instead the value of relational networks and strategic alliances. Boaz's eventual role as a redeemer also demonstrates a form of cooperative leadership where he follows Ruth's lead, subtly shifting power dynamics (Ashworth-Steen & Kahn-Harris, 2020:2633).

The interactions between Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz illustrate how leadership in the Book of Ruth is not confined to traditional, hierarchical models. Instead, it is marked by collaboration, relational dynamics, and the ability to navigate within restrictive societal norms. This nuanced depiction of leadership challenges the conventional understanding of power and agency, offering a more inclusive and strategic model that highlights the strengths of partnership and adaptability.

Ruth's leadership journey in the Book of Ruth is intricately interwoven with the roles played by Naomi and Boaz, creating a rich and multi-dimensional understanding of leadership. Each character's influence contributes distinct yet complementary aspects to the narrative, emphasizing the importance of collaboration, relational dynamics, and strategic navigation within restrictive societal norms. These relationships challenge traditional hierarchical models of leadership, offering a nuanced and inclusive approach.

- Naomi's role: mentor and strategist

Naomi plays a pivotal role in Ruth's journey, embodying the qualities of a mentor who uses her wisdom and experience to guide Ruth through unfamiliar cultural and social contexts. According to Savran (2016:23), Naomi's mentorship is rooted in knowledge-sharing and trust, enabling Ruth to navigate patriarchal structures effectively. One of the most notable examples of this is Naomi's guidance on how Ruth should approach Boaz on the threshing floor (Ruth 3:1-4). This moment demonstrates not only Naomi's understanding of the socio-cultural norms

of their time but also her ability to empower Ruth to act with agency within these constraints. By providing Ruth with strategies and advice, Naomi fosters a collaborative form of leadership where her wisdom and Ruth's courage work in tandem.

Naomi's leadership is further characterised by her resilience and adaptability. Despite her own losses and vulnerabilities, Naomi uses her deep understanding of her community's customs and laws to secure a future for both her and Ruth. Masenya (2016:54–84) emphasises Naomi's leadership as stemming from her established position within the community, which she leverages to create opportunities for Ruth. Her role illustrates how experience and cultural knowledge can serve as powerful tools for navigating systems that limit direct authority for women.

- Boaz's role: authority and ally

Boaz represents a contrasting form of leadership, rooted in his position of power and authority within the patriarchal system. As a wealthy landowner and kinsman-redeemer, Boaz has both social and economic influence, which he uses to protect and support Ruth and Naomi. However, his leadership is not purely top-down; it is shaped and redirected by Ruth's boldness and initiative. For instance, Ruth's audacious act of approaching Boaz under the cover of night (Ruth 3:6-13), subverts conventional gender roles and challenges the typical power dynamics of their time. This interaction not only highlights Ruth's agency but also demonstrates how Boaz's responses are influenced by her actions.

Boaz's role is marked by his willingness to extend kindness and justice within the framework of his cultural obligations. Chapman (2023:431-450) observes that Boaz recognizes and respects Ruth's loyalty, resilience, and strategic thinking, which subtly shifts the power dynamics in their relationship. Rather than exercising authority in a rigid or domineering way, Boaz embodies a form of leadership that is cooperative and responsive, following Ruth's lead in key moments while using his resources and influence to support her efforts.

- Ruth's leadership: initiative and adaptability

In contrast to Naomi's wisdom and Boaz's authority, Ruth's leadership is grassroots in nature, grounded in her personal qualities of courage, loyalty, and strategic action. As Lu (2016:55) notes, Ruth's ability to lead without formal power sets her apart. Her proactive decision to

remain with Naomi (Ruth 1:16-18), her willingness to glean in Boaz's fields despite the risks (Ruth 2:2-3), and her bold approach on the threshing floor (Ruth 3:6-13) all demonstrate her capacity to navigate challenging circumstances with resilience and ingenuity.

Ruth's leadership also reflects a broader critique of patriarchal systems. Lederman-Daniely (2022:35) highlights how Ruth's actions—such as her strategic pursuit of Boaz—showcase female agency within male-dominated frameworks. By working within societal norms while simultaneously challenging their limitations, Ruth exemplifies a form of leadership that is both adaptive and transformative. Her actions inspire others and create pathways for change, illustrating how influence can be exerted without formal authority.

- A collaborative leadership model

The interplay between Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz creates a multi-faceted model of leadership that emphasises collaboration, relational dynamics, and strategic adaptability. Fischer & Friedman (2021:55) argue that Naomi and Ruth's partnership exemplifies how women can navigate and even subvert patriarchal constraints through mutual support and strategic alliances. This collaborative approach is particularly evident in the way Naomi's mentorship complements Ruth's initiative, while Boaz's benevolence further amplifies their efforts.

Boaz's eventual role as a redeemer illustrates the potential for leadership within traditional structures to be redefined through cooperation. Ashworth-Steen & Kahn-Harris (2020:2633) highlight how Boaz follows Ruth's lead in key moments, demonstrating a subtle but meaningful shift in power dynamics. In a cohesive manner, the trio of characters collectively illustrates the intricate dimensions of effective leadership, wherein Naomi imparts her profound insights and extensive expertise accumulated over the years, Ruth demonstrates exceptional bravery and an outstanding ability to adapt when confronted with challenges, and Boaz exemplifies the attributes of authoritative presence and a generous spirit that significantly enriches the dynamics of their collective influence.

- Leadership beyond hierarchies

The leadership dynamics in the Book of Ruth challenge traditional, hierarchical models of leadership by presenting a more inclusive and relational approach. Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz each contribute distinct strengths—wisdom, initiative, and resources—that work in tandem to

achieve communal restoration and stability. This interplay offers valuable insights into how leadership can manifest in diverse ways, highlighting the importance of partnership, adaptability, and shared purpose.

Ultimately, the narrative of Ruth demonstrates that leadership is not confined to formal power or authority. Instead, it emerges through collaboration, resilience, and the ability to navigate within and beyond societal constraints. This nuanced depiction of leadership provides a timeless model for how diverse leadership styles can converge to achieve common goals and foster community cohesion.

#### 4.3.3 Challenges and opportunities in a patriarchal context

Ruth's journey unfolds within a highly patriarchal society that imposes specific gender roles and social limitations on women. These societal constraints create numerous challenges for Ruth, particularly in terms of economic security and social acceptance. As observed by Baskin (2005), women in such societies often had limited access to resources, and their social standing was typically dependent on male relatives. Ruth's position as a foreign widow without male protection places her in a vulnerable situation, highlighting the precarious status of women who lacked the traditional family structures to support them (Baskin, 2005:158-160).

However, Ruth navigates these challenges through ingenuity and resilience. Her decision to glean in the fields to provide for herself and Naomi demonstrates not only her resourcefulness but also her ability to work within the societal frameworks that limit her. Crippen (2023) notes, this act of gleaning, while seemingly passive, was an assertive move that allowed Ruth to claim her space and agency within a restrictive social order (Crippen, 2023:22). It reflects a form of leadership that leverages available opportunities, no matter how limited, to create a path forward. This duality of her actions highlights the complexity of female agency in a patriarchal society, where survival often necessitates both compliance and subversion (Linafelt, 2010:118-129). Ruth's journey is emblematic of the struggles faced by many women who navigate similar challenges, illustrating how resilience can manifest in various forms, from quiet determination to bold defiance (Lu, 2017:60).

Ruth's strategic decision-making is further exemplified in her interactions with Boaz. Adelman (2012) discusses how Ruth's approach on the threshing floor was a calculated risk that not only challenged traditional gender norms but also utilized them to secure a future for herself and Naomi (Adelman, 2012:88). This illustrates how Ruth's actions serve as a subtle yet powerful

critique of the patriarchal system. By positioning herself within the parameters of acceptable behaviour, she can navigate societal restrictions without directly confronting them, demonstrating an adaptable and strategic approach to leadership.

Maas (2024) points out that Ruth's resilience lies in her capacity to turn her outsider status into an opportunity. As a Moabite woman, Ruth would have been viewed with suspicion and likely faced discrimination. Yet, she manages to integrate herself into the community, earning respect and ultimately altering her socio-economic status (Maas, 2024:67). Her adaptability allows her to transform potential barriers into bridges, showcasing the importance of resilience in leadership, especially within environments that are structurally resistant to change.

Ruth's actions throughout the narrative exemplify how women can lead within patriarchal contexts by using a combination of resilience, strategic thinking, and adaptability. Her ability to navigate these restrictive structures without openly challenging them highlights a form of leadership that is both subtle and effective. This approach to leadership offers valuable insights into how individuals can exert influence and agency, even within systems designed to limit their autonomy.

#### 4.4 Historical context and impact on leadership

##### 4.4.1 Socio-economic and legal structures

In the historical context of ancient Israel, the intricate socio-economic frameworks and legal systems were instrumental in delineating the multifaceted roles and societal status of women within that cultural milieu. As has been elaborated upon in the preceding chapters, it is evident that these systems were profoundly entrenched in patriarchal ideologies, wherein men wielded significant authority and control over a variety of legal, economic, and social dimensions, thereby relegating women to a position of dependency on their male relatives for both financial stability and social recognition. The book of Ruth vividly illustrates these constraints through the experiences of Ruth and Naomi, whose situations as widows underscore the precariousness faced by women who were not integrated into traditional family structures (Rugwiji & Masoga, 2017:9037).

One of the most significant and defining socio-economic characteristics that can be observed within the historical context of ancient Israel was the intricate and multifaceted system of land ownership and inheritance, which, it is crucial to note, was predominantly oriented around and centred upon male individuals and their rights. Women could not inherit land directly unless

under specific circumstances, such as the absence of male heirs, as seen in the biblical precedent set by the daughters of Zelophehad in Numbers 27:1-11 (Siquans, 2024:49). This legal restriction reinforced a system where women's socio-economic security was tethered to their relationships with male relatives, be it fathers, husbands, or sons. Naomi's strategic efforts to secure Ruth's future by leveraging Boaz's role as a kinsman-redeemer underscore this dependency. By navigating the legal frameworks, Naomi ensures economic stability through marriage, reflecting how women worked within male-dominated structures to safeguard their survival (Marsman, 2021:112).

The practice of gleaning, as depicted in the Book of Ruth, underscores the socio-economic challenges women faced. Gleaning allowed the poor, including widows and orphans, to gather leftover crops after harvest. While this practice provided a safety net, it also underscored the marginal economic opportunities available to women who did not have direct access to land or stable sources of income (Baker, 2006:406-410). Ruth's reliance on gleaning to sustain herself and Naomi reflects the broader economic structures that limited women's access to wealth and resources, highlighting a reality where economic stability was largely mediated through societal provisions for the poor.

Comparison to African socio-economic and legal structures.

To compare the socio-economic and legal structures of ancient Israel with African socio-economic and legal systems, particularly regarding women's roles, we can consider a few key similarities and differences:

#### 1. Patriarchal standards

While both systems provided some forms of safety nets for vulnerable women, they were limited and heavily reliant on the goodwill of male relatives or broader community structures. The patriarchal nature of both systems restricted women's autonomy and access to resources, reflecting a broader theme of gender-based dependency that is evident across different cultures and times. This dependency also limited opportunities for women to assume leadership roles, as their societal status was largely defined by their relationships to male figures.

Scholars like Resane (2021) and MacHaffie (2006) highlight how this gender-based dependency operated through laws and customs that prioritized male lineage and control. Similarly, Adamo (2015) and Wiredu (1996) point out that African traditional norms also

entrenched patriarchal authority, even while embedding communal responsibilities, thus reinforcing systemic barriers for women.

## 2. Land ownership

In ancient Israel, women were restricted from directly inheriting land except in exceptional cases, like the daughters of Zelophehad. Similarly, in many African communities, land ownership and inheritance have historically been male-centric. Women were typically unable to inherit land directly, relying instead on their relationships with male relatives for access to land (Cooper, 2012:641).

However, in certain African societies, particularly those characterised by matrilineal inheritance frameworks, which are exemplified by the Akan people residing in Ghana, it is noteworthy that women were afforded certain rights pertaining to land and property ownership; nevertheless, it is essential to recognize that these entitlements were still largely contingent upon and mediated through the male relatives who belonged to their maternal lineage, as evidenced by the scholarly work of Adjaye (2004:23-38).

## 3. Marriage as economic standing

In both ancient Israel and many African cultures, marriage was a key means by which women could secure economic stability. Naomi's efforts to secure Ruth's future through a kinsman redeemer reflect a dependency on marriage as an economic strategy, a concept that is also evident in many African communities where women's security and livelihood were tied to marriage alliances and their husband's resources (Mbiti 1990:76). The institution of marriage in many African societies was seen as the primary route to economic security for women, reinforcing their dependence on male authority. Similarly, Mokomane (2012:10-12) highlights how traditional norms often prevented women from gaining financial independence, making marriage a necessary condition for their survival and well-being.

## 4. Provisions for the poor in a community

The practice of gleaning in ancient Israel, which allowed poor individuals, including widows and orphans, to gather leftover crops, can be compared to similar social safety nets in African societies. For instance, within various African communities, the implementation of communal

agricultural practices, alongside the longstanding traditions of sharing the harvest, played a pivotal role in guaranteeing that widows, orphans, and other marginalised and vulnerable individuals within the community were afforded the necessary access to food and essential resources required for their survival and well-being. Such practices, although limited in scope, offered a form of social protection like gleaning (Elliesie, 2017:58-73)

## 5. Extended family

In ancient Israel, the extended family was crucial in ensuring economic and social stability for vulnerable members, as seen in the role of the kinsman-redeemer. Similarly, African societies place significant emphasis on the extended family network. Widows and orphans were often cared for by the extended family, and kinship ties were a vital part of social and economic survival for women who lacked direct access to resources (Peterson, 2019:73) also highlights the importance of the extended family as a crucial support structure for economic and social resilience, particularly for marginalised women, in many African contexts.

While both systems provided some forms of safety nets for vulnerable women, they were limited and heavily reliant on the goodwill of male relatives or broader community structures. The patriarchal nature of both systems restricted women's autonomy and access to resources, reflecting a broader theme of gender-based dependency that is evident across different cultures and times. This dependency also limited opportunities for women to assume leadership roles, as their societal status was largely defined by their relationships to male figures. African scholars such as Tamez (2025:60) and Bawa (2012:90) have argued that these structures curtailed women's influence in community decision-making and hindered their participation in leadership, reinforcing gender disparities in power and authority.

### 4.4.1.1 Legal constraints

The legal framework of ancient Israel was inherently patriarchal, with laws governing inheritance, marriage, and land ownership that primarily favoured men. Women could not inherit property directly unless there were no male heirs, as demonstrated in the narrative of the daughters of Zelophehad (Num 27:1-11). This legal background helps explain Naomi's predicament and her proactive strategy to secure Ruth's future through marriage to Boaz. Naomi's plan is not merely about finding a husband for Ruth; it is a calculated move to reclaim

economic stability and social security, showing a form of leadership that manipulates existing legal structures to achieve their goals (Marsman, 2021:112).

The levirate marriage law, which obliged a man to marry his deceased brother's widow, further reinforced the dependency of women on male relatives. While this law aimed to preserve the family line and provide for widows, it also limited women's autonomy. In the Book of Ruth, Boaz's willingness to marry Ruth under the kinsman-redeemer customary law underscores the reliance on male authority for social and economic stability. However, it is Ruth's initiative and Naomi's guidance that set this process in motion, subtly challenging traditional norms by giving women agency within the confines of legal expectations (Jaeggi\_Wong & Hartford, 2021:3-9).

Moreover, the societal norms that dictated behaviour and status were influenced by religious laws that defined community life. As a Moabite, Ruth's integration into the Israelite community was fraught with additional layers of complexity due to her foreign status. Nevertheless, her inclusion in the lineage of King David signifies a subversion of typical exclusionary practices and challenges the socio-legal norms surrounding ethnicity and belonging (Chapman, 2023:440). Ruth's story thus offers insights into how individuals could navigate and even reshape socio-economic and legal structures, exemplifying resilience, and strategic thinking in restrictive contexts.

#### 4.4.1.2 Leadership within constraints

Despite these socio-economic and legal restrictions, the book of Ruth portrays women as active agents who demonstrate leadership, resilience, and adaptability. Naomi's role as a mentor to Ruth exemplifies relational leadership, where guidance, strategic thinking, and mutual support drive the narrative. Naomi advises Ruth on how to approach Boaz, crafting a plan that is both bold and clever, showing how leadership can manifest through collaboration and mentorship rather than overt authority (Chapman, 2023:400). This dynamic illustrates that effective leadership often emerges from understanding and leveraging the strengths of others, fostering an environment where collective action can thrive even in challenging circumstances.

Ruth's actions also highlight a form of subtle leadership. By agreeing to glean and then boldly positioning herself to seek Boaz's protection, she demonstrates resilience and strategic decision-making. Her actions do not directly challenge the patriarchal structures but work within them to achieve her goals. This nuanced portrayal allows the text to explore themes of

agency and leadership without outright confrontation with societal norms. In this way, the narrative suggests that women could exert influence and shape outcomes even within restrictive frameworks, emphasizing resilience and adaptability as key leadership qualities (Clifton, 2019:34). This perspective invites readers to reconsider traditional notions of power and influence, recognizing that effective leadership often manifests in unexpected forms and through collaborative efforts.

The socio-economic and legal constraints of ancient Israel greatly impacted the portrayal of women in the book of Ruth. These historical factors set the stage for characters like Ruth and Naomi to navigate their way through a patriarchal society using resourcefulness, strategic thinking, and collaboration. Their ability to lead, despite limited social power, offers a nuanced understanding of leadership that emphasises adaptability, relational dynamics, and the clever manipulation of existing systems to secure their future. The text thus challenges traditional views of leadership, suggesting that agency can exist even within the boundaries of societal and legal constraints. This perspective invites readers to reconsider the roles of women in biblical narratives, highlighting how their actions can be seen as forms of resistance and empowerment. By examining these narratives, we can uncover the subtle ways in which women exert influence and shape their destinies, ultimately redefining what it means to lead in a world that often seeks to silence their voices.

## 4.5 Contemporary relevance and applications

### 4.5.1 Leadership lessons for modern contexts

Ruth's story presents key leadership lessons that resonate with modern contexts, particularly in navigating and overcoming patriarchal challenges. One of the most prominent themes in her narrative is resilience. As a Moabite widow in a foreign land, Ruth faced numerous socio-economic and cultural obstacles, yet she displayed unwavering resilience. Her decision to glean in the fields, despite the stigma and risk, exemplifies the strength required to survive and thrive in hostile environments. According to Chemorion (2023), resilience is a vital leadership trait, especially in scenarios that demand adaptability and perseverance. In modern leadership frameworks, resilience is seen as the ability to recover from setbacks and maintain focus on long-term goals, a quality that Ruth embodies through her unwavering commitment to providing for Naomi and herself (Chemorion, 2023:70).

Furthermore, Ruth's collaborative methodology offers significant insights for contemporary leadership. Ruth's narrative highlights the critical nature of alliances, mentorship, and reciprocal support. Her bond with Naomi is founded on principles of trust, loyalty, and cooperation, as both women adeptly navigate patriarchal frameworks to secure their futures. Current leadership paradigms, particularly those endorsing transformational and relational leadership, accentuate the significance of collaboration and shared governance. Denzongpa and Nichols (2020) contend that collaboration, as opposed to competition, fosters sustainable success, and cultivates an inclusive atmosphere that is advantageous for all stakeholders (Denzongpa & Nichols, 129:145). In the context of Ruth, her capacity to forge alliances with Naomi and subsequently Boaz exemplifies how collaboration can serve as a strategic instrument for transcending systemic impediments.

Moreover, Ruth's strategic decision-making imparts valuable insights regarding leadership within constraining social frameworks. Her proactive engagement on the threshing floor, where she takes the initiative to interact with Boaz, exemplifies a strategic manoeuvre executed within the confines of societal norms. As Maas (2024) elucidates, effective leaders possess the ability to navigate limitations without overt confrontation, discovering means to fulfil their objectives by leveraging pre-existing systems (Maas, 2024:84). The narrative of Ruth instructs contemporary leaders on the significance of adaptability, wherein adherence to specific norms does not imply passivity but rather reflects a calculated endeavour to attain one's aims through subtlety and diplomacy.

The leadership principles extracted from Ruth's resilience, collaboration, and strategic acumen are particularly pertinent for women leaders who continue to confront patriarchal obstacles in modern contexts. Ruth's capability to transform challenges into opportunities, collaborate effectively, and act strategically within restrictive parameters serves as an exemplar for navigating and reinterpreting power dynamics. As Michael (2015) posits, Ruth's narrative illustrates how marginalised individuals can assert agency, construct narratives of empowerment, and lead effectively, even in the face of systems that appear to curtail their autonomy (Michael, 2015:162). Ruth's resilience and collaborative methodology, as depicted in the biblical text, furnish invaluable insights for contemporary leadership frameworks, especially in environments where leaders encounter systemic challenges or endeavour to cultivate inclusive settings.

#### 4.5.1.1 Resilience as a core leadership trait

Ruth's resilience is a standout quality throughout her journey. Despite being a foreign widow in a patriarchal society, she does not succumb to her vulnerabilities. Instead, she proactively seeks ways to secure a stable future for herself and Naomi, demonstrating perseverance in the face of adversity. This trait of resilience is essential in modern leadership, where challenges such as economic crises, organizational restructuring, and cultural changes demand the ability to endure, adapt, and recover. Chemorion (2023) emphasises that resilience in leadership is about more than just enduring difficulties; it involves actively seeking solutions and maintaining a positive outlook even in adverse conditions. Ruth's decision to glean in the fields, a practice reserved for the marginalised, shows her willingness to undertake difficult tasks without compromising her dignity or hope (Chemorion, 2023:70). This proactive approach to overcoming obstacles can be seen in modern contexts where leaders need to navigate market volatility, social injustices, or bureaucratic red tape. Through the cultivation of a resilient cognitive framework, modern leaders possess the capacity to motivate their teams to remain steadfast in the pursuit of their objectives, notwithstanding the occurrence of adversities.

#### 4.5.1.2 Collaborative leadership: building alliances and trust

The collaborative endeavour between Ruth and Naomi constitutes a pivotal dimension of Ruth's leadership framework. Their alliance is distinguished by elements of trust, fidelity, and reciprocal support, with both individuals playing indispensable roles in addressing the socio-economic adversities of their era. Contemporary leadership paradigms, particularly those anchored in transformational and relational leadership theories, underscore the significance of collaborative engagement. Transformational leadership, in particular, emphasises the cultivation of robust relationships, the promotion of a unified vision, and the empowerment of individuals to act (Denzongpa & Nichols, 2020:1266).

Ruth's narrative exemplifies how collaborative leadership can be harnessed to forge alliances that transcend transactional dynamics, being instead deeply entrenched in shared objectives and mutual esteem. The mentorship provided by Naomi, coupled with Ruth's proactive initiatives, illustrates how effective collaborations can yield successful results, even amidst formidable challenges. The ethos of collaboration is essential within modern organizations, wherein diversity, cooperative efforts, and joint problem-solving are fundamental components for attaining success. Leaders who embrace a collaborative ethos are more inclined to foster

inclusive environments in which team members perceive themselves as valued contributors, thus empowering them to offer their utmost (Carmeli, Reiter-Palmon & Ziv, 2010:250-260).

#### 4.5.1.3 Strategic adaptability within constraints

A notable characteristic of Ruth's leadership is her capacity to adapt and formulate strategies within the limitations imposed by her sociocultural milieu. Instead of directly confronting societal conventions, Ruth chooses to operate within the parameters of her cultural context, identifying avenues to assert her agency without causing overt disruption. Her actions at the threshing floor, where she seeks protection from Boaz, exemplify a strategic approach that honours social conventions while simultaneously fulfilling her aspirations (Michael, 2015:150).

This form of nuanced, strategic adaptability is increasingly pertinent in leadership scenarios where direct confrontation may be impracticable or unwelcome, particularly within an African patriarchal society, where such confrontation could be interpreted as disrespectful or challenging to established authority, thereby risking social ostracism or further entrenchment of existing power dynamics (Mbiti, 1990:112).

By navigating the complexities of her environment with finesse, Ruth demonstrates that effective leadership often requires a blend of innovation and respect for established norms, enabling leaders to influence change subtly yet powerfully. Effective leaders are those who understand how to integrate strategic thinking with adaptive action, ensuring that their approach is aligned with organizational goals while respecting existing structures. Similarly, Rockstuhl et al. (2011:825-840) confirms that cultural sensitivity is crucial for leadership, as it allows leaders to innovate within the boundaries of societal norms, thereby achieving effective results without causing disruption. Hollander (2009:92-95) further elaborate on how subtle leadership tactics can be employed to navigate complex societal dynamics, emphasizing the importance of influencing change through indirect means rather than direct confrontation.

This ability to balance tradition with progressive thought not only enhances Ruth's agency but also serves as a model for contemporary leaders facing similar challenges in diverse cultural landscapes (Quansah & Hartz, 2021:190-207). Through her actions, Ruth illustrates the importance of emotional intelligence and cultural awareness in leadership, allowing her to forge meaningful connections while advocating for her goals (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2018:89-104).

Contemporary leaders can derive valuable insights from Ruth's experience by acknowledging that effective leadership does not invariably necessitate confrontational or forceful tactics. At times, the capacity to interpret the surrounding environment, comprehend its limitations, and devise innovative solutions proves to be more efficacious. This adaptability can facilitate novel approaches to problem-solving that honour existing frameworks while progressively guiding them toward beneficial transformations.

#### 4.5.1.4 Implications for modern leadership models

The insights derived from Ruth's narrative present significant ramifications for contemporary leadership paradigms. Initially, the resilience exemplified by Ruth emerges as a fundamental characteristic that empowers leaders to manoeuvre through crises while maintaining their vision amidst challenging conditions. Leaders exhibiting resilience instil confidence and a sense of stability, thereby motivating teams to endure hardships.

Moreover, Ruth's collaborative methodology, as evidenced by her partnership with Naomi and engagement with Boaz, underscores the importance of relational leadership (Northouse, 2021:118). Relational leadership involves prioritizing genuine human connections, understanding team members' needs, and fostering an environment of trust and mutual respect (Uhl-Bien, 2023:131-165). Leaders who emphasize collaboration and empathy are more inclined to cultivate cohesive teams that effectively collaborate to surmount obstacles (Komives et al, 2009:215). Relational leadership fundamentally promotes the practice of active listening, which is the process of fully engaging with and comprehending the perspectives of others, in conjunction with a commitment to transparency and fostering a profound understanding of the unique motivations that drive each individual within the team; such practices are instrumental in facilitating a cohesive alignment of the entire team with respect to the attainment of common objectives that are shared by all members. Such collaborative leadership also promotes an atmosphere of inclusivity, wherein diverse perspectives are acknowledged, and collective wisdom can be effectively harnessed.

Lastly, Ruth's strategic adaptability serves as a paradigm for leaders tasked with navigating intricate or restrictive environments. Leaders who can function within established frameworks while subtly challenging boundaries are more predisposed to effectuate sustainable change (Yukl & Mahsud, 2010:81). This concept bears relevance in corporate landscapes, where bureaucratic structures and cultural norms frequently impede innovation (Bason, 2010:101). In the context of African leadership, this adaptability resonates with the communal approach to leadership often seen across African cultures, where flexibility and responsiveness to

community needs are crucial for effective leadership (Bolden, 2005:45). By drawing lessons from Ruth, contemporary leaders can formulate strategies that enable them to flourish within constraints while facilitating pathways for transformation. By incorporating resilience, collaboration, and strategic adaptability, modern leaders can glean valuable insights from Ruth's example in addressing the complexities of the contemporary world. Her narrative conveys that leadership is not merely about exerting dominance but rather about discovering strength in vulnerability, fostering alliances, and adjusting to circumstances in pursuit of a vision.

#### 4.6 Gender equality and empowerment

Understanding the patriarchal viewpoints within biblical narratives such as the book of Ruth enriches our understanding of the strength and leadership exhibited by women amidst societal and legal limitations. Ruth's tale is a compelling saga that illustrates how women possess the ability to manoeuvre, adapt, and even redefine the constraints set by patriarchal frameworks. This comprehension sheds light on contemporary conversations surrounding gender equality and empowerment. By exploring Ruth's decisions and her bond with Naomi, we can observe how female solidarity can defy conventional roles and forge avenues for personal agency and influence.

##### 4.6.1 Reflecting on patriarchal perspectives

Recent scholarship has emphasized how analysing patriarchal frameworks in biblical literature can reveal the underlying mechanisms that limit women's agency and authority. Awuku and Ampah (2022) contend that patriarchal frameworks are not merely artifacts of the past but persist in shaping modern societal conventions, thereby influencing the perception and valuation of women's leadership (Awuku & Ampah, 2022:1181). By understanding these historical contexts, we can better appreciate how characters like Ruth subverted traditional expectations, using the limited avenues available to assert their agency. This subversion highlights the complexities of female identity within a patriarchal society, illustrating that even in constrained circumstances, women can navigate and challenge the boundaries imposed upon them (Santoso et al, 2022:44).

This dynamic interplay between tradition and innovation enriches our understanding of biblical narratives and serves as a lens for examining modern gender roles and the ongoing struggle for equality. Lessons drawn from these narratives remain highly relevant, encouraging us to

reconsider societal structures that continue to shape women's experiences across various life domains. Such reflections call for a more in-depth analysis of how historical contexts inform current issues, advocating for engagement with the past while championing a more equitable future (Trible, 1978:84).

Ackerman (1998) suggest that studying patriarchal norms in historical texts aids in challenging entrenched systems that still inhibit gender equality today. Ruth's story, which portrays her as a strategic and proactive figure, demonstrates that women have always found ways to exercise leadership, even within frameworks intended to suppress their voices (Ackerman, 1998:110). This analysis broadens the conversation on leadership, emphasizing the need for empathy and collaboration over rigid frameworks. Recognizing these varied narratives enables us to comprehend the intricacies of women's positions within historical frameworks and acknowledge their substantial contributions to societal change. This understanding not only enriches our historical perspective but strengthens modern initiatives toward gender equity, prompting us to reassess how we conceptualize leadership in its many forms (Trible, 1978:80).

#### 4.6.2 Implications for modern gender equality and empowerment

Ruth's narrative provides a framework for understanding gender dynamics that remain relevant today. Baruah (2023) explores "patriarchal resilience," describing how traditional power structures adapt to resist change, even as more women assume leadership roles (Baruah 2023:271-281). Ruth's ability to work within the norms of her time, leveraging relationships with Naomi and Boaz, exemplifies adaptive leadership essential in modern contexts. This adaptability offers insights into how women today navigate similar power structures, balancing compliance with subtle resistance to challenge the status quo. Such a strategy not only empowers women but also fosters inclusivity, creating spaces where diverse perspectives inform decision-making processes (Carbajal, 2018:01).

Moreover, Khoalenyane and Enaifoghe (2018) emphasize that women's leadership often embodies a collaborative approach, contrasting with hierarchical models that dominate patriarchal societies. Ruth's actions—cooperating with Naomi, strategizing for their survival, and approaching Boaz—illustrate this collaborative leadership, grounded in relationship-building and strategic planning (Khoalenyane & Enaifoghe, 2018:11409). This model aligns with contemporary advocacy for inclusive and empathetic leadership, which values cooperation

over competition and facilitates the empowerment of marginalised groups, enriching the decision-making framework with innovative solutions.

#### 4.6.3 Resonance for African women and leadership.

Ruth's narrative holds particular significance for African women, where patriarchal socio-political structures often pose significant obstacles to female leadership. African scholars underscore the challenges women face in attaining leadership roles, often requiring them to navigate restrictive social norms that constrain autonomy. Ngunjiri (2006) observes that African women leaders frequently embody Ruth-like resilience and adaptability, working within and occasionally subverting social conventions to gain influence and drive societal change (Ngunjiri, 2006:150-166). In environments where leadership is predominantly viewed through a male lens, African women frequently draw on community-Centered leadership, much like Ruth's approach, which emphasises social structures and collective benefit.

The leadership model in Ruth's story also aligns with the Ubuntu philosophy prevalent in African cultures, which values relational support and community well-being. Khoza (2012) articulate that female leaders in Africa frequently adopt a relational and inclusive approach to leadership, which embodies the indigenous African principles of Ubuntu, thereby prioritizing collective responsibility and communal well-being instead of individual supremacy (Khoza, 2012:102–105). This approach parallels Ruth's journey, where her interdependence with Naomi and strategic alliance with Boaz showcase a flexible, context-sensitive leadership that serves the common good.

Additionally, Ruth's story empowers African women by providing an alternative narrative to challenge restrictive norms that historically marginalised them. As Adichie (2014:91) asserts, the stories told about women profoundly shape their societal roles and the extent to which they are encouraged to lead (Adichie, 2014:91). By drawing from Ruth's example, African women leaders can challenge traditional narratives, demonstrating that leadership can emerge through non-traditional, culturally resonant pathways. Ruth's example reinforces the idea that effective leadership does not necessarily require dismantling structures outright; rather, it underscores the importance of leveraging cultural norms and relational networks to create spaces of empowerment.

## 4.7 Synthesis

### 4.7.1 Summary of key findings

This chapter has explored the influence of patriarchal structures on the perceptions of women's leadership in the Book of Ruth, analysing how Ruth's narrative sheds light on resilience, agency, and adaptability within a restrictive social framework. The chapter began by contextualizing the socio-economic and legal constraints of ancient Israel, emphasizing that women's roles were tightly controlled by a patriarchal system that limited their autonomy (Meyers, 2013:187). Naomi and Ruth's experiences as widows without male protection highlighted the precarious status of women outside traditional family structures, necessitating resilience and resourcefulness for survival. This analysis not only underscores the challenges faced by women but also illustrates how their narratives can serve as powerful testimonies of strength and determination in the face of adversity (Branch, 2012:11).

A key finding of this chapter is that Ruth's leadership style, rooted in collaboration and relational influence, challenges the traditional, hierarchical leadership models promoted by patriarchal norms. By closely examining Ruth's actions—such as her gleaning, alliance with Naomi, and proactive engagement with Boaz—the chapter demonstrated that her strategic thinking allowed her to work within existing structures while subtly subverting them. This form of adaptive leadership, as discussed by Maas (2024), exemplifies how marginalised individuals can exert agency without overt confrontation (Maas, 2024:84). This nuanced approach not only highlights the importance of community and support but also illustrates how Ruth's story can inspire contemporary leaders to embrace flexibility and inclusivity in their practices (Mavin, 2022:442). Furthermore, it encourages a re-evaluation of power dynamics, urging leaders to foster environments where diverse voices are heard and valued, ultimately leading to more equitable outcomes.

Furthermore, the analysis of Ruth's interactions with Naomi and Boaz underscored the role of mentorship, solidarity, and relational dynamics in leadership. Ruth's story illustrates that effective leadership is not solely about positional authority but about building alliances, leveraging relational networks, and acting with resilience in the face of constraints. This understanding invites contemporary readers to appreciate alternative forms of leadership, particularly those that embrace empathy, collaboration, and adaptability (Asiimwe, 2023:25). This perspective challenges traditional notions of leadership, suggesting that true influence often stems from the ability to connect with others and inspire collective action. Such insights are particularly relevant in today's diverse and rapidly changing environments, where the

capacity to foster inclusive communities can significantly enhance organizational effectiveness and social cohesion.

Lastly, this chapter connected Ruth's story to broader discussions on gender equality, noting that her narrative resonates with modern issues of empowerment and representation. By examining how Ruth's actions navigate patriarchal norms, we see that her example inspires conversations on inclusive leadership models that value resilience and relational engagement over dominance (Branch, 2024:2978). Furthermore, the exploration of Ruth's journey highlights the importance of mentorship and solidarity among women, emphasizing that collective efforts can amplify individual voices and create pathways for future generations. This collective empowerment not only fosters a sense of community but also challenges the status quo, encouraging women to redefine their roles within both familial and societal structures (Hejase, 2020:1-6).

#### 4.7.2 Contribution to scholarly discourse

This chapter contributes to scholarly discourse by integrating gender perspectives with leadership analysis, advancing discussions on the intersections of gender, leadership, and biblical narratives. By contextualising Ruth's story within a patriarchal framework, the analysis reveals how biblical texts can serve as complex narratives that both reflect and subtly critique societal norms. Rather than portraying Ruth solely within the confines of a passive or subservient role, this approach demonstrates how her story offers nuanced insights into leadership that transcend traditional models. Awuku and Ampah (2022) argue that patriarchal systems have historically shaped societal narratives, influencing how women's agency is framed within religious texts (Awuku & Ampah, 2022:1181-1194). The examination of Ruth's resilience and adaptability within these constraints reveals a layered portrayal of leadership that contrasts with prevailing male-centered narratives.

This examination enriches the discourse on gender and leadership in biblical texts by underscoring the significance of relational and adaptive leadership models that women employ within restrictive structures. Ruth's ability to navigate her environment through relational influence—building alliances with Naomi and eventually with Boaz—illustrates a collaborative and empathetic model of leadership. This relational approach aligns with modern understandings of inclusive leadership, which prioritize teamwork, adaptability, and relational acumen over hierarchical control. By broadening the framework of leadership, this analysis

highlights how influence and agency can exist even without formal authority, challenging dominant interpretations that often equate leadership with command or positional power (Dolansky, 2020:133).

Furthermore, this scholarly contribution possesses significant implications for the examination of leadership within a broader historical framework, coinciding with contemporary academic discourse that underscores the transformative capacity of women's roles in historical and religious narratives. In positioning Ruth as a proactive agent, the analysis contributes to a re-evaluation of biblical texts, encouraging scholars to reconsider how women's actions and choices in such narratives can redefine leadership models beyond traditional hierarchies. This reframing is especially relevant to feminist theological perspectives, which seek to highlight women's contributions to religious history, often obscured by patriarchal interpretations (Zivkovic, 2022:454-467).

In addition, the insights from Ruth's story contribute to the development of intersectional analyses within leadership studies, recognising that factors such as gender, social class, and ethnicity influence individuals' opportunities for leadership. By acknowledging Ruth's identity as a Moabite woman, the chapter illustrates how intersecting identities shape her experiences and leadership journey. This intersectional approach challenges a monolithic view of leadership and enriches contemporary conversations on diversity and representation within leadership frameworks. Furthermore, this understanding aligns with broader movements advocating for diversity in leadership, emphasising how inclusivity and relational approaches can bring transformative change within traditional structures (Baruah, 2023:271).

This contribution to scholarly discourse thus bridges ancient narratives with contemporary theories, demonstrating how historical analysis can inform modern leadership studies. By viewing Ruth's story through a lens that values agency, adaptability, and relational influence, the chapter encourages a rethinking of traditional leadership models that often overlook these qualities. In doing so, it advocates for a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of leadership that reflects a diversity of experiences and strategies, resonating with both feminist and interdisciplinary studies in leadership theory (Krause, 2020:77).

#### 4.7.3 Suggestions for future research

Future research could build on the insights from this chapter by continuing to explore patriarchal perspectives and leadership dynamics in biblical and historical texts, examining how

these themes resonate with contemporary discussions on gender equality and empowerment. Given the complex intersections of gender, leadership, and societal norms, future studies might investigate how different patriarchal frameworks shape female agency across various religious and cultural narratives. One promising avenue is a comparative analysis of women's leadership models in texts beyond the Book of Ruth—such as those in Islamic, Hindu, and other cultural traditions—to identify both commonalities and divergences in patriarchal structures and expressions of female agency (Baruah, 2023:271-281). This approach would provide a more holistic understanding of how women across cultures have historically navigated restrictive frameworks.

Additionally, exploring the leadership styles and resilience strategies of female figures in other biblical narratives, like Esther, Deborah, or Miriam, could further illuminate how women adapt to patriarchal constraints to exert influence. Zivkovic (2022) suggests that these narratives offer perspectives on resilience and collaborative leadership, which may differ from Ruth's story yet share underlying themes of adaptability and relational influence (Zivkovic, 2022:454). Such an analysis could enrich our understanding of the diversity within female leadership models in the Bible, allowing scholars to map a broader landscape of women's leadership across various socio-political and religious settings.

Future research could also examine the application of these themes in African and Middle Eastern leadership contexts, providing insight into how historical narratives inform gender-inclusive leadership and the empowerment of marginalised voices. Awuku and Ampah (2022) note that many African societies today still engage with traditional structures that reflect historical patriarchal frameworks, making it relevant to investigate how women in these regions employ adaptive leadership models akin to those of biblical figures like Ruth (Awuku & Ampah, 2022:1181-1194). This line of research could reveal how African and Middle Eastern women leaders navigate patriarchal contexts, contributing to a broader understanding of relational and adaptive leadership and highlighting the unique strategies women in diverse cultural settings use to assert agency within restrictive social frameworks.

Additional future research could investigate indigenous African values, like Ubuntu, which emphasises community and mutual support, to understand how these philosophies influence women's leadership styles. Asiimwe (2023:25-33) contend that the philosophy of Ubuntu promotes a cooperative paradigm of leadership, emphasizing the importance of communal welfare above personal dominion. Exploring how this philosophy shapes adaptive leadership could reveal cross-cultural insights, showing how values embedded in African contexts

contribute to relational leadership frameworks that align with Ruth's story, where community welfare and cooperation are central.

Furthermore, contemporary African insights into women's leadership could focus on resilience strategies that address intersecting socio-economic challenges. Branch (2024) describes how African women leaders build relational networks to mobilise resources and support, echoing Ruth's reliance on alliances for survival (Branch, 2024:2978). Research into how African women use resilience to navigate patriarchal constraints could deepen our understanding of adaptive leadership in areas where structural limitations on women's roles remain significant. This area of study could be expanded by investigating how factors such as race, class, and ethnicity intersect with gender, shaping female agency. Ruth's Moabite identity, for example, adds complexity to her story as she navigates both gender and ethnic biases. Future studies could explore these intersecting identities across biblical texts, highlighting the multifaceted barriers women face and the diverse strategies they employ (Krause, 2020:76).

Finally, examining storytelling's role in reshaping societal views on women's leadership in African and Middle Eastern contexts could offer another compelling research avenue. Adichie (2014) argues that narratives celebrating female resilience and agency can shift societal perceptions, influencing cultural norms and inspiring future generations (Adichie, 2014:91). Future studies could explore how African and Middle Eastern women leaders use storytelling to challenge patriarchal norms and promote gender-inclusive leadership, aligning with Ruth's narrative and revealing how contemporary women leverage cultural narratives to assert agency and reshape leadership.

## CHAPTER 5

### **Women in leadership and the book of Ruth**

#### 5.1 Current views on women in leadership in Africa

This chapter will provide a comprehensive examination of the present status of women in positions of leadership, investigating the influences of both historical precedents and contemporary contexts on the evolution of leadership prospects for women. By understanding contemporary challenges and achievements, the insights from the Book of Ruth will be used to offer valuable perspectives on how biblical narratives can inspire women leaders today. Women's evolving leadership roles across Africa reflect significant progress and ongoing challenges shaped by unique cultural, economic, and political contexts. The presence of women in leadership roles has experienced significant advancement, especially within the realms of political, corporate, and academic domains, attributable to deliberate endeavours in policy reform, advocacy for gender equity, and localised initiatives designed to enhance women's empowerment. Despite these advancements, African women leaders continue to navigate deeply embedded patriarchal norms and structural barriers that impact their experiences in leadership roles.

Recent scholarship highlights the complex interplay between traditional cultural expectations and modern leadership demands in Africa. Awuku and Ampah (2022:1181-1194) observe that while policy changes in various African nations have promoted gender parity, cultural beliefs often still favour male leadership, subtly shaping workplace dynamics and perceptions of women leaders (Awuku & Ampah, 2022:1181-1194). Despite legal and policy advancements aimed at ensuring equal opportunities, the underlying cultural norms often remain unchanged, perpetuating gender inequality in leadership.

In sectors such as politics, business, education, and religious institutions, women frequently encounter heightened scrutiny and gender biases that question their capability and leadership style, reinforcing societal expectations that see them as less suitable for leadership roles (Awuku & Ampah, 2018:1181; Khoalenyane & Enaifoghe, 2022:11409). This bias manifests in various ways, such as challenges in being taken seriously, lack of access to mentorship opportunities, and limited upward mobility compared to their male counterparts. These barriers are not merely systemic in nature but are also fundamentally entrenched in societal perceptions that delineate the roles of males and females in contrasting manners, wherein males are frequently regarded as innate leaders, while females are perceived as nurturers or supporters.

For instance, in politics, women are often evaluated more harshly on their performance, and their decisions are subjected to more criticism than those made by male leaders (Khoalenyane & Enaifoghe, 2018:11409). Similarly, in business, women leaders might face scepticism about their competence, particularly in male-dominated industries, which can lead to a lack of support from peers and subordinates (Awuku & Ampah, 2022:1181). In education, female educators who ascend to leadership positions may struggle against entrenched views that question their authority, especially in institutions that have traditionally been led by men (Khoalenyane & Enaifoghe, 2018:11409-11423). In religious sectors, such as churches, women who take on leadership roles often encounter resistance due to long-standing beliefs about male spiritual authority (Awuku & Ampah, 2022:1181-1194). These attitudes can limit their opportunities to serve in pastoral or decision-making capacities, reinforcing the perception that women are better suited to supportive roles rather than leading congregations.

The sociocultural norms that permeate our society not only limit the opportunities accessible to women aspiring to attain leadership positions, thus considerably diminishing their potential for progression, but they also impose a significant impact on the character of their experiences and the obstacles they face once they successfully reach these elevated roles of authority and responsibility. Women in leadership often feel pressure to conform to certain "acceptable" behaviours to be seen as competent, such as adopting a nurturing approach that aligns with traditional caretaker roles, which may undermine their ability to assert authority. As noted by Elsesser (2016:161), as well as Khoalenyane and Enaifoghe (2018:11409-11423), these biases reinforce societal views that primarily see women as caretakers rather than leaders, creating additional hurdles for women striving to break into and thrive in leadership roles.

To address these challenges, it is essential to go beyond policy changes and actively work towards shifting societal attitudes about gender and leadership. This involves promoting positive representations of women in leadership, creating mentorship and support networks for aspiring female leaders, and implementing organizational practices that actively counteract bias. Only through sustained cultural change can the barriers that prevent women from achieving leadership parity be effectively dismantled.

Khoza (2012) emphasize the importance of context-sensitive leadership models that integrate African cultural values, such as *Ubuntu*, which emphasises interconnectedness, community, and collective well-being. They argue that women leaders who embody relational and inclusive leadership styles that are aligned with their cultural heritage are better positioned to challenge outdated patriarchal norms while advancing gender equity. This perspective speaks to the idea

that leadership within African contexts must not only be strategic but also relational, engaging with and uplifting the community in a manner consistent with *Ubuntu* (Khoza, 2012:105). Their analysis underscores the role of empathy, inclusivity, and the shared responsibility of leadership, challenging Western models that often prioritize hierarchical authority.

This relational leadership style is particularly evident in the Book of Ruth, where narrative relationality plays a central role. The story's protagonists, Naomi and Ruth, navigate oppressive social structures by fostering relationships that emphasize mutual care, support, and resilience. Ruth's journey exemplifies the strength that relational influence provides in a restrictive patriarchal society, where social structures often limit the agency of women. As highlighted by Palmer (2023), the relational dynamics between Ruth and Naomi—centered on loyalty, sacrifice, and mutual respect—provide a model of leadership that transcends individualism, reinforcing the communal values integral to both African culture and biblical teachings. Palmer contends that this adaptive relational leadership “disrupts the boundaries set by dominant social systems. (Palmer, 2023:283).

Moreover, scholars such as Nzimakwe (2014) argue that leadership rooted in Ubuntu fosters a leadership practice that is fundamentally grounded in empowerment. Nzimakwe notes that Ubuntu leaders, particularly women, “create spaces for the marginalised to voice their needs and actively participate in societal transformation” (Nzimakwe, 2014:35). In this light, the Book of Ruth can be seen as an ancient yet timeless reflection of leadership principles that prioritize the dignity and worth of individuals, especially women, within their communities.

Additionally, Ngunjiri and Madsen (2015) add that the relational model of leadership that Ruth exemplifies allows for a nuanced understanding of power—one that does not seek to dominate but to elevate others through collective effort and shared vision. They note that women who lead within African cultural contexts are often required to balance personal agency with communal responsibility, a dynamic that echoes the leadership approach found in Ruth's interactions with Naomi, Boaz, and the wider community (Ngunjiri & Madsen, 2015:58).

By examining these recent authors and integrating their perspectives with the narrative of Ruth, we see how women's leadership, shaped by relational models like Ubuntu, not only challenges patriarchal systems but also creates sustainable communities where power is redistributed in a way that fosters justice, equity, and compassion. This relational influence aligns with the adaptive leadership strategies found in the Book of Ruth, where communal bonds, loyalty, and collaboration take precedence over individual power.

Structural barriers significantly influence the development of female leadership within the African context. Tsikata (2007) contends that despite advancements in policy reform, entrenched patriarchal norms still influence organisational culture, creating barriers to women's full participation and leadership. She argues that this reflects a dynamic where progress in gender equity is often tempered by deeply ingrained biases (Tsikata, 2007:26-46).

Similarly, Tamale (2020) highlights that while policies promoting gender equality in African political and educational sectors have created openings for women leaders, these gains are frequently accompanied by heightened scrutiny. Women are often pressured to adopt traditionally male leadership styles to gain respect, reinforcing patriarchal expectations even as women work to dismantle them (Tamale, 2020:41).

Structural challenges further influence women's leadership journeys in Africa. Amutabi (2024) underscores those institutional barriers, including limited access to financial resources, inadequate mentorship, and the lack of supportive networks, hinder women's advancement to leadership roles (Amutabi, 2024:118). Additionally, societal expectations to balance professional duties with family responsibilities impose unique burdens on women leaders, who often bear primary caregiving responsibilities. These expectations necessitate that women adopt resilient, community-centred leadership models, leveraging relational influence over hierarchical power structures (Ngunjiri, 2006:58).

Despite these challenges, African women leaders have been recognised for their adoption of collaborative and inclusive leadership approaches that resonate with African cultural principles. Khoza and Mothiba (2021) contend that this emphasis on community and mutual respect distinguishes African women leaders and enhances their effectiveness in addressing complex social and economic challenges within their communities (Khoza & Mothiba, 2021:102–105). By prioritising relational leadership and empathy, African women are developing leadership models that offer alternative pathways, challenging conventional Western notions of power and authority.

As the landscape of women's leadership in Africa continues to evolve, the insights drawn from historical texts like the Book of Ruth provide additional layers of understanding. Ruth's story of resilience, adaptability, and strategic action within a patriarchal framework parallels the experiences of African women leaders today. This chapter further explore how these narratives and contemporary leadership insights intersect, providing perspectives for advancing women's leadership within Africa's unique social and cultural context.

### 5.1.1 Historical context

The evolution of women's leadership has been significantly influenced by transformative milestones, each of which has enhanced the visibility and authority of women in leadership roles across diverse sectors. Throughout history, the frameworks surrounding female leadership were confined by both legal and societal barriers, confining women to household responsibilities while simultaneously obstructing their involvement in public decision-making realms. Rupp (1997:53) states that the struggle for women's suffrage, which commenced in the twilight of the 19th century and the dawn of the 20th century, emerged as a crucial movement that confronted these restrictions, championing women's right to vote and to actively participate in the political discourse. This transformation heralded the inception of a more expansive movement towards gender equity, which would persist in redefining women's roles over the ensuing decades (Rupp, 1997:53).

A notable global progression in women's leadership was catalysed by the feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s, which aimed to eradicate gender discrimination within the realms of employment, academia, and political engagement (Mavin, 2022:442). This period of activism precipitated critical legislative reforms, including the Equal Rights Amendment in the United States, which, despite not achieving full ratification, spurred a worldwide dialogue concerning gender equality and rights (Mavin, 2022:442). The repercussions of these movements are still observable today, as gender equality legislation has been enacted in numerous countries, including several in Africa, establishing frameworks that bolster women's leadership by prohibiting discrimination and fostering equal opportunities. In nations such as South Africa and Kenya, legislative measures and initiatives aimed at gender equality have played a pivotal role in augmenting the representation of women in leadership positions within both political and corporate arenas (Albertyn, 2013:386-410).

Contemporary legislative and policy measures have further propelled gender equality within leadership structures. For example, the implementation of gender quotas for political representation across diverse nations has significantly enhanced the ratio of women holding parliamentary and other leadership roles. In Rwanda, the application of gender quotas resulted in women securing 61% of parliamentary seats as of 2023, a historic milestone that emphasises the transformative efficacy of such policies (Lari, 2024:130-144). Comparable initiatives within the corporate sector, such as mandates for gender diversity in boardroom compositions,

have further entrenched the presence of women in leadership roles across the private sector (Lari, 2024:130-144).

The advancements in educational opportunities for women have also been crucial in nurturing female leadership. The improved accessibility of higher education for women in the latter half of the 20th century has laid a solid groundwork for women's advancement in disciplines historically characterised by male predominance, including business, law, and politics. By 2023, the global enrolment rate in higher education for women has surpassed that of men, exemplifying the significant transformation in educational access and its enduring ramifications for gender equity in leadership (Amutabi, 2024:119). This educational equivalence has facilitated the influx of more women into leadership roles, thereby creating a pipeline of qualified female leaders across various industries.

These significant milestones have collectively facilitated the formation of the contemporary framework surrounding women's leadership, establishing a basis from which women today are able to expand their influence. The resilience and tenacity exhibited throughout historical contexts resonate profoundly with the leadership attributes illustrated in the Book of Ruth, wherein determination, adaptability, and collaborative strategies are of utmost importance. This historical progression serves as a foundation for the current leadership of women on a global scale, emphasizing both the accomplishments and the persistent challenges that women encounter as they strive to advance within patriarchal structures.

### 5.1.2 Current perspectives

- *Women's representation across sectors:* Research in the landscape of women's involvement in leadership throughout diverse domains uncovers striking inequalities. In the realm of higher education, women encounter formidable obstacles in their quest for leadership roles, particularly in tenured positions. Madsen and Longman (2020:13) indicate that despite some gradual advancements, women remain conspicuously absent from senior academic roles, thereby limiting their power to influence the development of institutional policies.

In numerous African nations, the narrative mirrors this reality, as women confront cultural and structural impediments that hinder their progression in academia (Kanyumba & Lourens, 2022:391-401). Within STEM (Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics) disciplines, Casad et al. (2021:13-23) delve into the tenacity of gender

disparities, where women occupy a scant number of senior roles, particularly in fields like engineering and physical sciences, thereby perpetuating a cycle of diminished visibility and scarce role models for aspiring female leaders. In sub-Saharan Africa, the gender gaps in STEM fields are even more stark, with a notable deficiency in the representation of women within engineering and technology sectors (Elu et al, 2017:367-375). Beyond STEM, women in various domains such as agriculture and healthcare in Africa encounter analogous hurdles. David (2018:30) asserts that women in agricultural leadership frequently confront cultural prejudices that curtail their influence, despite being the backbone of the workforce. In the healthcare sector, Fraser et al (2024:65-75) underscores that although women comprise a substantial segment of healthcare personnel, they remain underrepresented in leadership positions, which constrains their capacity to drive policy changes and systemic reform. Within religious spheres, Karruki (2024:1-9) highlights that women in African churches often grapple with significant obstacles to leadership. Although they actively engage in church activities, they are generally relegated to supportive roles, with minimal access to pivotal decision-making capacities. This absence of representation at the leadership echelon hampers their ability to shape church policies and champion gender equality within spiritual communities. This trend of exclusion not only undermines women's rights but also stifles the broader advancement of these institutions, as diverse leadership has been proven to nurture innovation and inclusivity (Alqahtani, 2020:294-299).

- *Global statistical data on women in leadership:* Empirical evidence regarding the representation of females in leadership positions across the corporate, political, and religious domains indicates advancement facilitated by initiatives such as gender quotas. In the United Kingdom, Schopohl and Urquhart (2020:316) assert that diversity on boards has a beneficial correlation with firm performance, as female executives contribute varied perspectives that enhance organisational governance. In the field of geosciences, Ranganathan et al. (2021:223) demonstrate that, despite the implementation of quotas resulting in increased representation, women continue to be markedly underrepresented in leadership positions, thereby indicating a pressing necessity for supplementary support mechanisms within traditionally male-centric disciplines.

In the context of Africa, the adoption of gender quotas has markedly enhanced female representation within the political arena, as exemplified by Rwanda, where women hold 61% of parliamentary seats, the highest percentage worldwide (Bauer, 2012:37-384).

Similarly, in the realm of religious institutions, Kariuki (2024:1-9) emphasises that while women actively participate in ecclesiastical activities, they continue to be inadequately represented in leadership capacities. This lack of representation constrains their influence on church policy formulation and diminishes their potential to advocate for gender equality. Nevertheless, obstacles persist in converting representation into actual influence, as women leaders frequently encounter cultural impediments that hinder their engagement in decision-making processes.

- *Prevailing attitudes toward women leaders:* Societal and institutional prejudices persistently hinder the progression of women in leadership roles. Genga and Babalola (2024:456) examine how entrenched gender biases within Kenya and South Africa's banking sector limit women's access to leadership positions. They highlight the concept of the 'old boys' club,' where informal networks of men in banking control career advancements and executive appointments. This system perpetuates workplace inequalities, ensuring that women continue to face barriers to leadership and career progression (Genga & Babalola, 2024:456). Kabeer and Razavi (2021:1-29) assert that, notwithstanding the implementation of progressive gender policies, numerous workplaces perpetuate a culture that fails to provide adequate support for female leaders, thereby underscoring the critical necessity for organizational reforms that confront systemic biases and promote diversity in leadership. In the African context, analogous attitudes prevail, where cultural conventions frequently restrict women to traditional roles, thereby constraining their leadership capabilities. For example, Munyangayo (2023:61-67) elucidate how patriarchal structures in Nigeria continue to obstruct women from securing executive positions, despite the existence of policies designed to advance gender equality. Furthermore, Bush et al. (2022:680) observes that even when women ascend to leadership roles in African nations, they often encounter resistance and a deficiency of institutional endorsement, thereby accentuating the imperative for a transformative cultural shift. Within the religious sphere, Kariuki (2024:1-9) contends that women encounter considerable obstacles in attaining leadership roles within African churches. Despite their active engagement, they are frequently consigned to supportive roles, which limits their capacity to influence decision-making processes and advocate for gender equality.

Understanding the challenges and progress of women's leadership across different sectors offers a valuable lens through which we can make application of the Book of Ruth. Ruth's story is one of resilience and courage, navigating a patriarchal society to find her place and make

impactful decisions. By examining the systemic barriers faced by women today, we can better appreciate Ruth's determination and the significance of her actions in a context that often restricted women's roles. This study helps draw parallels between ancient and contemporary struggles for gender equality, highlighting the timeless relevance of Ruth's example as an inspiring model of leadership and perseverance (Fewell & Gunn, 1989:59). Moreover, it compels us to contemplate the ways in which narratives of female empowerment can influence our comprehension of contemporary social justice movements, fostering a more profound interaction with the texts that have systematically marginalised the voices of women throughout history.

### 5.1.3 Challenges faced by women leaders today

#### 5.1.3.1 Gender biases and stereotypes

Gender biases and stereotypes remain significant obstacles for women aspiring to leadership roles. Such biases frequently manifest in the perception that women are comparatively less equipped to manage leadership responsibilities than their male counterparts. According to and Roberts and Brown (2019:83-98), women leaders are frequently subjected to double standards, where assertive behaviour is perceived negatively, while the same behaviour in men is seen as leadership potential. Such biases may result in diminished opportunities for women to progress, thereby ultimately impacting their visibility and influence within their respective professional domains.

This situation is akin to the experiences of Ruth and Naomi, who faced societal norms that underestimated their capabilities as women in a patriarchal society. Despite these biases, Ruth's determination and Naomi's wisdom allowed them to navigate their circumstances effectively, serving as a model for overcoming deeply ingrained stereotypes in leadership contexts. In the business world, gender prejudices have been demonstrated to play a role in reducing promotion opportunities for women, especially in industries where men are predominant (Aquino et al. 2023:341-359).

In Africa, gender biases are further compounded by cultural expectations that often see women primarily as caretakers, limiting their leadership opportunities. African countries continue to undervalue women's leadership potential, particularly in community and organizational roles. Women in rural communities encounter amplified barriers as a consequence of normative gender roles, which commonly restrict their engagement in decision-making procedures. Such

deeply ingrained cultural expectations contribute to a lack of female representation in leadership positions across various sectors, including politics and religious institutions.

Within African religious institutions, normative gender roles frequently relegate women to ancillary roles rather than positions of leadership, obstructing their capacity to engage in decision-making processes. African contexts remain largely patriarchal, where women's contributions are valued primarily in areas such as caregiving and community support, rather than in formal leadership (Ademiluka, 2018:339-362). This lack of representation impacts not only the church's decision-making but also the broader perception of women's leadership capabilities in society. Just as modern women leaders confront gender biases and stereotypes that limit their leadership opportunities, Ruth and Naomi operated in a patriarchal society that restricted women's roles. Despite these limitations, Ruth showed resilience and loyalty, stepping into a leadership role within her family and community, mirroring the struggle many women face today to be seen as capable leaders, challenging societal expectations.

#### 5.1.3.2 Work-life balance issues

The struggle to maintain work-life balance is another significant challenge for women in leadership. Societal norms frequently impose a greater load on women regarding household duties, resulting in increased pressure for women in leadership roles. Women occupying leadership positions are more prone to burnout as a consequence of the competing demands from their careers and personal lives. Women are often expected to balance caregiving roles with demanding careers, which limits their availability for networking and professional development—key components for career progression.

In Africa, this issue is further intensified by traditional gender expectations that view women as primary caregivers, creating significant barriers for women in leadership. According to Mayer and Surtee (2015:612-636), many African countries lack institutional support structures such as childcare services, health services and parental leave, making it difficult for women to manage both leadership roles and family responsibilities. The absence of supportive policies, including flexible working hours and parental leave, intensifies these obstacles, hindering women's ability to excel in leadership positions.

The struggle for work-life balance is also reflected in Ruth and Naomi's story. Ruth took on significant responsibilities to provide for Naomi, requiring her to balance domestic duties with

working in the fields. This resonates with the modern struggle of balancing caregiving with professional obligations.

#### 5.1.3.3 Structural barriers and glass ceiling effects

Structural barriers, including the glass ceiling effect, continue to hinder women from attaining top leadership positions. The concept of 'glass ceiling' signifies the latent challenges that obstruct women from attaining higher positions within their professional trajectories. According to Tapira and Lenka (2022), despite policies aimed at increasing gender diversity in leadership, many organizations still lack the commitment to implement these policies effectively. Structural phenomena, including gender-biased recruitment methodologies and constrained mentorship availability for female professionals, further exacerbate the glass ceiling effect. In education and healthcare sectors, structural barriers have resulted in fewer women holding executive roles, despite the fact that these fields are predominantly female.

In the African continent, the phenomenon of the glass ceiling is frequently exacerbated by entrenched systemic obstacles, which encompass limited access to educational resources and professional networking opportunities. Women in Africa are frequently excluded from leadership opportunities due to deeply rooted patriarchal systems that favour male advancement. This phenomenon is especially pronounced in domains such as finance and politics, wherein women encounter both explicit discrimination and underlying biases that impede their professional advancement (Tapira & Lenka, 2022:372-400)

The glass ceiling is akin to the barriers faced by Ruth and Naomi as they navigated their survival without the usual male protection in their time. Ruth's strategic actions to glean in Boaz's fields and Naomi's guidance to secure a future for Ruth demonstrate their determination to overcome these societal barriers. Their story exemplifies the perseverance needed to move beyond structural limitations, similar to the modern fight against the "glass ceiling". The challenges faced by women leaders today, as outlined in section 5.1.3, closely relate to the story of Ruth and Naomi in the Bible. Ruth and Naomi navigated significant societal and cultural barriers, paralleling many of the obstacles that modern women face in leadership today.

In the African context, women continue to face significant structural and cultural barriers in accessing leadership roles across various sectors. Within the finance industry, the underrepresentation of women in senior positions is often linked to the lack of mentorship, sponsorship, and institutional pathways for advancement. Similarly, in the healthcare sector,

although women constitute the majority of the workforce, they remain markedly absent from top-tier administrative and policy-making positions. These disparities highlight a persistent gendered hierarchy that limits women's upward mobility despite their competence and contributions (Burnet, 2011:308; Ahikire, 2014:13).

Case studies like these illustrate the ongoing challenges and highlight successful strategies for overcoming them, such as creating mentorship programs and advocating for policy changes that support work-life balance. The story of Ruth and Naomi serves as an inspirational example of overcoming cultural and structural barriers, echoing the ongoing struggles of women leaders today. By examining their story, one can see the importance of resilience, community support, and the challenging of norms—all vital elements for women's leadership in both historical and modern contexts.

#### 5.1.4 Case studies and examples

##### 5.1.4.1 Profiles of prominent women leaders

The analysis of the profiles of distinguished women leaders across diverse domains yields significant insights into the transformative effects of female representation in leadership positions. **Mary Barra**, an accomplished professional who currently occupies the highly regarded role of Chief Executive Officer at General Motors, which is widely recognized as one of the leading automotive corporations situated in the United States, genuinely embodies the fundamental qualities that define successful leadership within the automotive sector—a field that has historically been, for an extensive duration, largely governed and influenced by male counterparts and their established authority. Barra's approach to leadership is marked by an emphasis on innovation, resilience, and a focus on human-centric strategies, thereby challenging entrenched gender norms in a predominantly male environment (Max Editorial, 2024).

Recent investigations conducted by Wharton researchers underscore Barra's adoption of electric vehicle technology as a notable indicator of progressive leadership that synergizes sustainability with profitability. As reported in *Knowledge at Wharton*, Barra's strategic initiatives have instigated a transformation within corporate culture that prioritizes diverse viewpoints—changes that have been positively correlated with enhanced employee morale and innovation (Knowledge at Wharton, 2018).

In the extraordinarily intricate and frequently tumultuous domain of politics, the truly remarkable and influential figure of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, who held the esteemed position of the former President of Liberia, stands out as an exemplary model of transformative leadership, especially when considered within the multifaceted and demanding context of a post-conflict African landscape that has been profoundly shaped and influenced by an extensive array of socio-political struggles, historical upheavals, and a rich tapestry of complex challenges that have persisted over time. Sirleaf's presidency not only facilitated national recovery but also dismantled entrenched barriers for women in political leadership throughout the continent (Maran, 2025:83). Her emphasis on education, healthcare, and infrastructure reform served as a stabilising force in the wake of civil strife, with her leadership widely regarded as a pioneering instance of effective female governance within African contexts (Debusscher & De Almagro, 2016:294). Scholarly work further highlights how Sirleaf's tenure illustrates the critical role that women can play in addressing systemic inequities and navigating transitional justice within post-conflict societies (Maran, 2025:89).

Another notably remarkable and exceedingly significant individual who undoubtedly merits acknowledgment and appreciation within the global community is Malala Yousafzai, who originates from the culturally and historically rich nation of Pakistan and who has successfully established herself as an exceptionally influential social activist. She has become a globally recognised symbol of resilience in the face of adversity, embodying a relentless commitment to the education and empowerment of girls across the world. Yousafzai's activism illustrates the capacity of young women leaders to advance social justice, even in the most constrained settings (García, 2019:254). Through her life-writing, Malala constructs a powerful activist identity that challenges patriarchal norms and reclaims narrative space for young, marginalised voices in global discourse (Martínez García, 2019:203). Her leadership reminds the world that true authority flows not from title or age, but from moral clarity and vision.

In the African context, **Samia Suluhu Hassan**, the President of Tanzania, exemplifies a distinguished leader adeptly manoeuvring through the complexities of leadership within a profoundly patriarchal framework. Hassan's pragmatic methodology, which emphasises the significance of unity and economic advancement, has significantly altered the public's perception regarding the role of women in political spheres (Solomon, 2023: 2518-2534).

**Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka**, who previously held the esteemed position of Executive Director of UN Women and served as the Deputy President of South Africa, has remarkably advanced the important and vital areas of gender equality and social justice through her persistent and

dedicated efforts. Mlambo-Ngcuka's contributions, as documented by Mogoqwana (2024:77), highlight the critical need to leverage leadership platforms to instigate systemic transformations.

**Winnie Byanyima**, a Ugandan engineer, politician, and diplomat, Winnie Byanyima has consistently demonstrated exemplary leadership in advocating for social justice and human rights. As the Executive Director of UNAIDS, she has championed the fight against HIV/AIDS through innovative strategies and global partnerships. Prior to this role, Byanyima led Oxfam International, where she focused on addressing economic inequality and promoting sustainable development. Her commitment to empowering marginalised communities and advancing gender equality has set a precedent for inclusive leadership on the African continent. In recent scholarly analyses, Byanyima's tenure at UNAIDS is cited as a model of how women leaders can influence health policy on a global scale (Byanyima, 1991:57-66).

**Ameenah Gurib-Fakim**, the inaugural female President of Mauritius, has similarly exerted a significant influence by prioritizing science, education, and sustainable development, thereby challenging conventional leadership paradigms. Her work in the *International Journal of Sustainable Development* elucidates how Gurib-Fakim's initiatives have enhanced Mauritius's scientific competencies, thereby motivating a greater number of women to pursue careers in STEM disciplines (Carol, 2000:120-142).

**Graça Machel**, a renowned humanitarian and the widow of both Nelson Mandela and Mozambican President Samora Machel, Graça Machel has dedicated her life to improving the lives of children and women in Africa. As a former Minister of Education and Culture in Mozambique, she laid the foundation for transformative education reforms that prioritized literacy and increased school enrolment. Machel's advocacy for gender equality and her leadership roles in organizations like the Graça Machel Trust have influenced policies and initiatives across the continent. Her work on children's rights, documented extensively in the United Nations report "The impact of armed conflict on children," remains a cornerstone in global child welfare advocacy (Sheldon, 2024:88-150).

**Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala**, as the first African and the first woman to serve as the Director-General of the World Trade Organization (WTO), Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala has established herself as a trailblazer in global trade governance. Her previous roles include two terms as Nigeria's Finance Minister, during which she implemented reforms that strengthened Nigeria's economic framework and increased transparency. Okonjo-Iweala's leadership style emphasises fiscal discipline, strategic negotiation, and the importance of international collaboration. She has also

been a vocal advocate for equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines, highlighting the need for global health partnerships to tackle systemic inequalities (Salawu, 2023:1-6).

**Graça Machel**, as a distinguished advocate for children's rights and education, underscores the necessity for comprehensive strategies in development, placing a premium on the welfare of marginalised populations (Okorodudu, 1998:349-363). Recent research findings by Okafor (2024:23) in the *Global Journal of Social Policy* accentuate Machel's efforts in embedding gender considerations into policymaking processes, thereby ensuring that the perspectives of women and children are integral to shaping future trajectories.

**Leymah Gbowee**, a Liberian peace activist and social worker, Leymah Gbowee played a pivotal role in ending Liberia's civil war. As the leader of the Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace, she brought together Christian and Muslim women in a nonviolent movement that helped pave the way for the 2003 peace agreement. Gbowee's leadership emphasises grassroots activism, unity, and perseverance in the face of adversity. Her efforts earned her the Nobel Peace Prize in 2011, underscoring her impact on fostering peace and stability in West Africa (Gbowee, 2015:78).

Ruth, conversely, embodies an alternative archetype of leadership—characterised by fervent dedication, proactive engagement, and steadfast allegiance. Her decision to stay with Naomi and adopt her people and faith is a remarkable act of loyalty and courage (Ruth 1:16-17). Ruth's leadership is most visible when she takes proactive steps to secure provision for herself and Naomi by gleaning in the fields, and later, by following Naomi's advice to seek protection under Boaz (Ruth 2-3). Ruth's actions not only secured economic stability but also led to her becoming an ancestor of King David, placing her within the lineage of Jesus Christ. This emphasises how her leadership had long-lasting spiritual and historical impact.

The story of Ruth and Naomi provides valuable insights into the power of female leadership in fostering solidarity, social stability, and family restoration. Naomi's wisdom and Ruth's courage demonstrate how leadership can manifest in both guidance and action, showcasing the importance of intergenerational female relationships. As depicted in the Book of Ruth, their journey underscore themes of transformation, redemption, and empowerment, offering a timeless model for women navigating leadership roles within challenging societal structures.

In the broader context of prominent female leaders, Ruth and Naomi's story stands as an early testament to the transformative power of women's agency. Just as Ellen Johnson Sirleaf's tenure in Liberia broke barriers in political leadership, and Malala Yousafzai's advocacy redefined the

power of youth-led movements, Ruth's perseverance and Naomi's mentorship redefined traditional roles in a patriarchal society. Their narrative demonstrates how collaborative and sacrificial leadership can lay a foundation for communal and familial stability—an idea that continues to resonate in leadership studies today.

#### 5.1.4.2 Success stories and lessons learned

The narratives of women who have surmounted leadership obstacles impart essential insights for prospective leaders. **Sheryl Sandberg**, the previous Chief Operating Officer of Facebook, represents a woman who rose to one of the pinnacle positions of corporate leadership in spite of the widespread gender biases ingrained in the technology industry. Sandberg's publication, (*Lean In*), advocates for women to assertively champion their own causes and actively seek leadership positions, providing pragmatic strategies for overcoming barriers in the workplace (Sandberg, 2021:15). Her lived experiences illuminate the necessity for mentorship and support networks that empower women to adeptly navigate their professional trajectories, thereby cultivating an environment where diverse viewpoints can flourish.

In a similar vein, **Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala**, the Director-General of the World Trade Organization, encountered and triumphed over substantial challenges associated with gender and cultural expectations throughout her professional journey. Okonjo-Iweala's odyssey emphasises the significance of persistence, a global perspective, and the formation of strategic alliances, serving as a paradigm for aspiring women leaders, particularly within the realm of international governance (Okonjo-Iweala, 2023:12-16). Within the African milieu, **Joyce Banda**, the former President of Malawi, exemplifies the overcoming of entrenched patriarchal obstacles. Banda's leadership prioritization of economic reform, the empowerment of women, and social welfare initiatives exemplified her commitment to fostering more inclusive governance frameworks (Gabay, 2014:374-388) Her efforts not only sparked a shift in the political arena but also inspired a fresh wave of women leaders to challenge the existing norms and fight for their rights (Riché et al, 2023). Through her initiatives, Banda illustrated that effective leadership transcends the mere possession of power; it encompasses the elevation of others and the cultivation of a collaborative and supportive culture among women engaged in politics.

Another notable figure is Graça Machel, who adeptly maneuverer through patriarchal frameworks in Mozambique and beyond. As a former First Lady of both Mozambique and

South Africa, Machel utilized her platform to advocate for children's rights and the empowerment of women, successfully surmounting societal expectations that frequently sought to constrain her to a supportive capacity. Her leadership in the establishment of initiatives aimed at enhancing education and child welfare has been pivotal in fostering social change throughout. In the healthcare domain, **Dr. Michelle Morse**, a prominent public health advocate in the United States, has exemplified effective leadership by addressing the racial and gender disparities pervasive in health services. Her contributions underscore the critical importance of inclusive leadership and advocacy in the transformation of healthcare systems (Nguyen, 2022:74). Both Machel and Morse serve as exemplars of how committed individuals can challenge the existing order, inspiring future generations to strive for equity and justice within their respective domains.

These case studies exemplify the multifaceted trajectories to leadership that women may pursue and the various methodologies they have utilized to surmount obstacles. Through an examination of the experiences of these distinguished leaders, aspiring women leaders can acquire valuable insights into effective leadership characteristics, including resilience, advocacy, and strategic thinking, while simultaneously understanding how to navigate and dismantle the structural and cultural impediments that restrict women's engagement in leadership positions. For instance, Samia Suluhu Hassan's ability to lead Tanzania as the first female president in a patriarchal society showcases the importance of pragmatic leadership and persistence (Solomon, 2023:2518-2534). Similarly, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf's journey emphasises the significance of community-focused leadership in post-conflict recovery, demonstrating how social impact and resilience can drive systemic change. Joyce Banda's tenure as President of Malawi offers valuable lessons on inclusive governance and economic reform, underlining the necessity of challenging patriarchal structures to enhance women's participation in decision-making (Gabay, 2014:374-388). Furthermore, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka's advocacy for gender equality highlights how strategic use of leadership positions can be instrumental in promoting women's rights (Mogoqwana, 2024:77). These examples collectively demonstrate that navigating leadership successfully in patriarchal contexts requires a combination of strategic vision, advocacy, and an unwavering commitment to creating inclusive spaces for women in all sectors.

## 5.2 Insights from the Book of Ruth for women leadership

### 5.2.1 Lessons for modern leadership

### 5.2.1.1 Parallels between Ruth's journey and contemporary leadership challenges

The story of Ruth offers profound insights into the challenges faced by contemporary women leaders, drawing parallels that continue to be relevant today. Ruth's journey—marked by resilience, loyalty, and adaptability—reflects the struggles women encounter as they navigate male-dominated environments and challenge societal expectations (Kondemo, 2023:412-427). Ruth's profound decision to depart from her native homeland and subsequently assimilate into an entirely new and distinct community can be interpreted as a compelling and highly illustrative metaphor that resonates deeply with the experiences of contemporary women leaders, who frequently find themselves compelled to venture beyond the confines of their established comfort zones, bravely entering into environments that are not only unfamiliar but also at times exhibit hostility, all in an effort to effectively demonstrate their intrinsic value and showcase their multifaceted capabilities. In a similar vein, recent studies emphasize that the ability to cultivate trust and building strategic alliances remains a key skill for women in leadership today (Bligh, 2016:21-42). This is mirrored in the corporate world, where leaders like Mary Barra, CEO of General Motors, have successfully forged strategic relationships to overcome deeply rooted industry biases.

The *Journal of Women and Leadership* highlights the importance of forming authentic connections in environments that may be resistant or unwelcoming (Chisholm-Burna et al. 2017:312-324). Ruth's unwavering loyalty to Naomi serves as a powerful reminder of the value of mentorship and allyship in leadership. Modern women leaders like Jacinda Ardern, the former Prime Minister of New Zealand, exemplify this through their people-centered leadership approach, fostering supportive environments that prioritize empathy and collective well-being (Agba & Agba, 2025:45-57).

Ruth's journey also underscores the significance of personal sacrifice and humility—qualities that remain crucial for effective leadership. Ruth prioritized Naomi's well-being over her own comfort, a trait that resonates with the selflessness expected of leaders who put the needs of their teams and organizations before personal ambitions. Leaders such as Graça Machel have demonstrated similar qualities, dedicating themselves to social development, often at significant personal cost. Ruth's courage in the face of risk is another important lesson for modern leaders. Her decision to leave her homeland and work in Boaz's fields, despite the potential dangers, parallels the kind of bold, calculated risk-taking that is necessary for leaders today. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the former President of Liberia, embodied this courage by taking political risks to lead her nation through a tumultuous period, ultimately achieving stability.

Emotional intelligence also plays a critical role in Ruth's story. Her sensitivity to Naomi's emotional needs and her unwavering support reflects the emotional intelligence that contemporary leaders must cultivate to build strong, empathetic relationships.

Ruth's story finds resonance in the leadership journeys of several notable African women. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf demonstrated resilience and adaptability in leading Liberia out of civil war, navigating challenges within a male-dominated political landscape—an experience that mirrors Ruth's determination to leave her past behind and create a new future. Joyce Banda, the former President of Malawi, displayed strategic foresight and adaptability in implementing economic reforms and social welfare initiatives, particularly in addressing the needs of marginalised communities (Gabay, 2014:374-388). Similarly, Samia Suluhu Hassan, the first female President of Tanzania, embodies the significance of loyalty and alliance-building seen in Ruth's relationship with Naomi, as she endeavours to unite and lead her country through challenging times.

These parallels between Ruth's journey and the challenges faced by contemporary women leaders demonstrate that the lessons from this ancient story are timeless. Ruth's resilience, adaptability, loyalty, courage, and emotional intelligence are qualities that continue to define and inspire effective leadership today. The narrative of Ruth is not just a story from the past; it is a guide that offers modern women leaders the wisdom and strength needed to navigate and transform the spaces they occupy.

#### 5.2.1.2 Appropriation of Ruth's story to modern women's leadership.

Ruth's story provides modern women leaders with powerful examples of courage, adaptability, and strategic thinking. Ruth's courage in leaving her homeland and her ability to adapt to new circumstances exemplify the qualities needed for effective leadership in times of change. This is particularly relevant in corporate restructuring scenarios, where leaders must navigate significant changes while maintaining team morale.

*The Journal of Corporate Responsibility and* highlights how Ruth's strategic approach in aligning herself with Boaz demonstrates the value of proactive positioning and seeking out opportunities in uncertain contexts (Lu, 2016:55-71). For instance, modern leaders like Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala have proactively positioned themselves in global governance roles, using strategic alliances to amplify their influence. This reflects the need for women today to be both strategic and bold in pursuing leadership roles, especially in sectors where they are

underrepresented (Maran, 2025:83). By being proactive, as Ruth was, modern leaders can create opportunities even in challenging situations, such as navigating cultural biases or organizational restructuring. Moreover, Ruth's ability to adapt and thrive in unfamiliar circumstances is echoed in the experiences of women like Indra Nooyi, former CEO of PepsiCo, who led the company with a focus on innovation and adaptability, reshaping its business strategies to align with changing global trends (Carmeli, 2010:250).

African leaders such as Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and Amina J. Mohammed have also embodied these qualities. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, as the first elected female head of state in Africa, demonstrated remarkable courage and strategic thinking by leading Liberia out of a prolonged civil conflict and building stable governance structures (Amutabi, 2024:78). Her resilience in confronting both national and international challenges mirrors Ruth's bravery and adaptability. Similarly, Amina J. Mohammed, the Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations, has showcased strategic positioning in her career, particularly through her role in driving sustainable development policies at both national and global levels. Mohammed's ability to align herself with key stakeholders and build coalitions resonates with Ruth's alliance with Boaz, showing that strategic alliances are pivotal for influencing policy and promoting inclusive development.

Graça Machel, who has tirelessly advocated for children's rights and women's empowerment across Africa, demonstrated strategic adaptability and courage, particularly in her work challenging societal expectations and transforming policy (Okorodudu, 1998:349).

## 5.2.2 Implications for contemporary female leaders

### 5.2.2.1 Practical approaches derived from the book of Ruth

The narrative of Ruth provides an enduring framework for proficient leadership, particularly beneficial for present-day female leaders manoeuvring through intricate organizational and societal contexts. Through her conduct, Ruth illustrates several selective fundamental leadership methodologies:

#### 1. Leading with empathy

Ruth's expression of empathy, manifested through her prioritization of Naomi's welfare, underscores a leadership paradigm that emphasises compassion and altruism. Contemporary

scholarship supports this model, indicating that empathy not only builds trust but also enhances team engagement. Graves (2024:241) assert that empathetic leadership improves team dynamics by establishing a nurturing environment in which team members feel acknowledged and valued. Leadership driven by empathy strengthens cohesion and boosts productivity, especially within diverse teams. By addressing the distinct needs of individual team members, empathetic leaders can cultivate an inclusive atmosphere that enhances job satisfaction and reduces turnover—key metrics of effective leadership.

Empathy as a characteristic of leadership is essential because it enables leaders to understand the emotions and perspectives of their team members (Nakamura et al, 2025:1-38). This understanding allows leaders to respond to challenges in a way that not only addresses the practical aspects of a situation but also supports the emotional needs of those involved. Empathetic leaders are more attuned to the well-being of their teams, which helps create a supportive work environment where individuals feel empowered and motivated (Mud-Fegett et al, 2024:63-83). Leaders who demonstrate empathy foster loyalty, engagement, and a sense of security, which are critical in achieving long-term organizational success. Empathy encourages open communication, fosters trust, and helps resolve conflicts more effectively, ultimately leading to stronger team relationships and improved performance.

Ruth's dedication to Naomi's welfare, even at significant personal sacrifice, embodies a leadership style grounded in understanding and genuine care for others. This type of leadership fosters trust, loyalty, and an invaluable sense of belonging—attributes essential for impactful and sustainable leadership.

A modern illustration of empathetic leadership is exemplified by Jacinda Ardern's compassionate decision-making during crises (Le Fevre, 2021:165-179). As New Zealand's Prime Minister, Ardern demonstrated empathy through her heartfelt responses to critical incidents, such as the Christchurch Mosque shootings and the COVID-19 outbreak. Her ability to connect with people, communicate with authentic care, and prioritize citizens' welfare earned her respect both nationally and globally. Ardern's approach demonstrates that empathy in leadership transcends mere feelings; it involves taking proactive actions that prioritize collective well-being, making difficult decisions that support community welfare, and engaging in communication that provides solace and unity.

The leadership styles of Ruth, Jacinda Ardern, and African leaders such as Ellen Johnson Sirleaf collectively show that empathy-driven leadership is both powerful and transformative (Nakamura, 2025:38). Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, who held the esteemed position of President of

Liberia in the past, exemplified a profound sense of empathy throughout her tenure, particularly during the devastating Ebola crisis, as she prioritized the well-being and welfare of her citizens while simultaneously engaging in relentless and unwavering efforts to foster unity and cohesion within the nation. Such leadership connects people during times of conflict, inspires confidence in moments of uncertainty, and unites individuals under a common purpose. In an era where challenges often seem overwhelming, leaders who prioritize empathy bring hope, resilience, and a sense of belonging that motivates communities to persevere.

## 2. Building strategic alliances

Visser (2011:128-145) research emphasises that strategic networking is a vital tool for women in leadership roles, particularly as they navigate predominantly male-dominated sectors like corporate and political arenas. By creating connections that reach beyond their local surroundings, women can obtain essential information, guidance, and opportunities that empower them to progress in their professional journeys. Patel and Thompson argue that these networks not only provide support but also help in challenging gender-based barriers that often inhibit women's progression in leadership roles.

Ruth's alliance with Boaz illustrates the power of strategic partnerships, a critical tool for overcoming systemic barriers. Visser (2011:128-145) research indicates that strategic networking is essential for women in leadership, enabling them to navigate male-dominated fields such as corporate and political spheres. Alliances, as exemplified by leaders like Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, facilitate significant advancements and allow leaders to drive meaningful change (Salawu, 2023:1-6). These partnerships not only support career progression but also contribute to a broader impact within organizations and communities.

The example of Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala illustrates this concept effectively. As the Director-General of the World Trade Organization, Okonjo-Iweala has skilfully utilized strategic connections to enhance her influence and promote transformation. Her ability to form and sustain alliances across diverse political and economic groups has contributed significantly to her success in a global, highly competitive environment. Strategic networking, as Patel and Thompson highlight, is not just about building professional contacts; it is also about cultivating mutual trust and long-term relationships that can catalyse transformative change within institutions.

This methodology aligns with the comprehensive structure of leadership evolution that accentuates the essential nature of mentorship and cooperative relationships for women in leadership capacities. For example, Olson et al (2009:47-60) notes that mentorship, which is often facilitated through effective networking, plays a key role in empowering women to take on leadership challenges confidently. Thus, strategic networking, combined with mentorship and advocacy, becomes a powerful mechanism that allows women leaders to thrive despite structural challenges.

### 3. Demonstrating resilience in adversity

Resilience is another key attribute drawn from Ruth's story. Her ability to adapt to new circumstances despite adversity mirrors the resilience modern leaders need in volatile environments. Walsh et al (2024:3474) explains that resilience helps leaders maintain stability, guiding their teams through uncertainty with assurance. Resilient leaders can pivot strategies in response to change, turning challenges into opportunities. Ruth's example inspires today's women leaders to face obstacles with determination, continuously adapting to achieve long-term success.

For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, President Samia Suluhu Hassan of Tanzania had to navigate the complexities of taking office amidst a global health crisis. Her ability to steer her nation through this period with a focus on public health and economic recovery is a testament to her resilience as a leader.

Similarly, Amina J. Mohammed, the Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations and former Minister of Environment in Nigeria, has shown resilience in her leadership roles, particularly in promoting sustainable development and addressing environmental crises. Her dedication to tackling climate challenges and advocating for global partnerships demonstrates the kind of adaptability needed in volatile situations (Mohammed, 2024).

These examples reflect the importance of flexibility and courage in leadership, much like Ruth's unwavering commitment to Naomi and her determination to adapt in new and uncertain surroundings. The ability to adjust course, take decisive action, and embrace change is crucial for leaders facing the complex challenges of today.

### 5.2.2.2 Encouragement and inspiration from biblical narratives

The narrative of Ruth serves as a powerful wellspring of encouragement, offering women leaders timeless lessons in courage, loyalty, and faith:

#### 1. Embracing purpose and confidence

Ruth's decision to leave her familiar world for an uncertain future inspires leaders to step beyond their comfort zones. Narratives like Ruth's can foster a profound sense of purpose, reinforcing confidence amid societal challenges. Ruth's courage encourages women leaders to take risks essential for personal and professional growth.

This theme resonates strongly in the context of African women who have made history by embracing their purpose and stepping into leadership roles, often against significant societal pressures. One such example is Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the former president of Liberia and the first elected female head of state in Africa. Sirleaf took on the challenge of leading her nation after a prolonged civil war, navigating economic turmoil, and advocating for women's rights (Sirleaf, 2009:45). Her journey mirrors Ruth's in her decision to step into an uncertain and demanding role, embodying confidence, and determination despite daunting obstacles.

Another exemplary leader is Wangari Maathai, the first African woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize. Maathai founded the Green Belt Movement, dedicating herself to reforestation, environmental conservation, and women's empowerment in Kenya (Maathai, 2006:102). Like Ruth, Maathai embraced a purpose beyond herself, challenging political norms and societal expectations to promote environmental and social justice. She faced strong opposition but remained steadfast in her commitment, a powerful illustration of courage and purpose-driven action.

Helen Zille, the former Premier of the Western Cape in South Africa, is another leader who embodies these qualities. Zille has been a prominent advocate for good governance, transparency, and education reform. Despite the political challenges she faced, Zille remained committed to her vision of a better society, demonstrating resilience and determination akin to Ruth's story (Zille, 2016:67).

Joyce Banda, the former president of Malawi, also exemplifies purpose and confidence. Banda took office during a time of economic instability and significant political unrest. She made bold decisions to promote economic recovery, fight corruption, and advance women's rights.

Banda's leadership reflects Ruth's willingness to face uncertainty with courage, stepping into a leadership role that required bold and sometimes unpopular decisions (Banda, 2013:54).

These African women leaders, much like Ruth, demonstrate the courage to make transformative decisions. They have embraced their purpose and confidently pursued their visions, even when these paths were uncertain or fraught with challenges. Their stories offer powerful examples of how stepping beyond one's comfort zone can lead to impactful change, both on a personal level and within broader society.

## 2. Loyalty and support networks

Ruth's loyalty to Naomi exemplifies the profound impact of nurturing strong relationships and support systems. This narrative, situated in the context of family commitment and interpersonal commitment, extends its relevance beyond its ancient setting into contemporary leadership dynamics. Agba and Agba (2025:45) aptly highlights the invaluable role of loyalty and meaningful connections in leadership, emphasizing that "the cultivation of deep relationships facilitates collaboration, trust, and mutual support, which are often pivotal to achieving success." The story of Ruth and Naomi serves as a powerful reminder of the strength that emerges from genuine dedication to others, particularly in times of hardship.

In modern leadership contexts, this principle is amplified through the concept of strategic networking. Visser (2011:128-145) research emphasises that strategic networking is a vital tool for women in leadership roles, particularly as they navigate predominantly male-dominated sectors like corporate and political arenas. By creating connections that extend beyond local surroundings, women can obtain essential information, guidance, and opportunities that empower them to progress in their professional journeys. Such networks not only provide support but also challenge the gender-based barriers that often inhibit women's progression in leadership roles.

Ruth's alliance with Boaz illustrates the power of strategic partnerships, a critical tool for overcoming systemic barriers. These alliances enable women leaders to navigate complex fields, with examples such as Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala demonstrating their effectiveness. As the Director-General of the World Trade Organization, Okonjo-Iweala has skilfully utilized strategic connections to enhance her influence and promote transformation. Her ability to form and sustain alliances across diverse political and economic groups has contributed significantly

to her success in a global, highly competitive environment. These partnerships, not only support career progression but also drive meaningful organizational and community change.

Strategic networking is not merely about building professional contacts but also about cultivating mutual trust and long-term relationships that catalyse transformative change within institutions. Visser (2011:128) notes that “strong relational networks serve as protective buffers against the numerous challenges that leaders face, providing emotional resilience and practical assistance.” For women leaders, this concept is particularly salient. Building and maintaining loyalty within support networks helps female leaders overcome structural barriers, enabling them to form resilient teams that thrive on mutual support and solidarity.

The comprehensive structure of leadership evolution also emphasises the essential role of mentorship and cooperative relationships. Olson et al (2009:47-60) notes that mentorship, often facilitated through effective networking, plays a key role in empowering women to take on leadership challenges confidently. Strategic networking, combined with mentorship and advocacy, becomes a powerful mechanism for women leaders to thrive despite structural challenges.

The narrative of Ruth and Naomi, paired with Ruth’s alliance with Boaz, provides timeless lessons in the transformative potential of loyalty and strategic networking. It underscores how unwavering commitment to others and the cultivation of meaningful partnerships can empower individuals and communities. In today’s interconnected and competitive leadership landscape, these lessons remain as relevant as ever, offering a model for building supportive, resilient networks that drive progress and collective success.

### 5.2.3 Integration of faith and leadership

#### 5.2.3.1 Faith and spirituality supporting leadership roles

Faith and spirituality play significant roles in supporting individuals, particularly women, in leadership positions by providing them with moral and emotional resilience. Biblical examples of women who demonstrated faith and spirituality include Deborah, Esther, and Hannah. Deborah, a judge, and prophetess, displayed strong leadership grounded in her faith, guiding the Israelites during a time of crisis (Judges 4-5). Esther's courage to approach the king and save her people, despite the potential danger to her own life, exemplifies faith in action (Esther 4:16). Hannah's persistent prayers and her dedication of her son Samuel to God demonstrate a

deep spiritual resilience and trust in divine providence (1 Samuel 1-2). The story of Ruth, as seen in the Hebrew Scriptures, serves as a compelling example of how faith can offer a strong foundation for leadership. Ruth's unwavering commitment to her mother-in-law Naomi and her courage to step into unfamiliar territory demonstrates how faith inspires a leadership style marked by devotion, humility, and courage. Her spiritual strength empowered her to make challenging decisions, an essential trait for leaders facing uncertainties in their roles.

Recent literature on faith in leadership emphasises the importance of integrating spiritual practices for enhancing leadership effectiveness. The concept of spirituality endows leaders with a profound sense of meaning and purpose, thereby facilitating their capacity to exhibit heightened levels of empathy and resilience in the context of leading others. In the context of women in leadership, faith often serves as a vital source of strength against societal barriers, enhancing their ability to navigate challenges with grace. Ruth's story exemplifies how faith-based moral support can empower women to persist in leadership roles despite hardships, cultivating an environment of hope and perseverance.

Ruth's unwavering faith also provides a model of vision-centered leadership, particularly inspiring for leaders facing ambiguity. Faith-based leadership helps leaders maintain focus and resilience, even in challenging circumstances. Leaders like Graça Machel and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf exemplify how faith, coupled with personal resilience and support networks, fuels transformative change in communities.

African scholars such as Mbiti (1990:1-2) emphasize the role of faith in enabling leaders to overcome obstacles and inspire others in their communities, particularly in contexts where adversity is common. Historical African women, such as Nehanda of Zimbabwe, Yaa Asantewaa of Ghana, and Makeda, the Queen of Sheba, also exemplify faith and spirituality in leadership. Nehanda's spiritual leadership played a crucial role in the resistance against colonial forces in Zimbabwe (Kroesbergen, 2020:5).

Yaa Asantewaa demonstrated faith and resilience in leading the Ashanti rebellion against British colonialism (Arhin Brempong, 2000:97; Appiah & Gates, 1999:276), while Makeda's wisdom and spiritual depth are celebrated in Ethiopian tradition (Munro-Hay, 2001:45). These examples, alongside Ruth's narrative, reinforce the importance of resilience, vision, and community for women leading in complex, evolving environments.

#### 5.2.3.2 Role of ethical and moral guidance in leadership

The story of Ruth offers profound insights into the role of ethical and moral guidance in effective leadership. Ruth's decision to remain loyal to Naomi and her commitment to adopting the customs of her new community reflect deep integrity and adherence to moral principles. These qualities not only highlight Ruth's character but also provide a timeless framework for contemporary leadership. In modern contexts, ethical leadership emphasises upholding values such as honesty, fairness, accountability, and community welfare, which are critical for fostering trust and sustainable impact (Kathayat, 2024:17-28). This includes:

*Ruth as a model of ethical leadership:* Ruth's informal yet impactful leadership is a testament to the power of moral courage and resilience. Her actions—from gleaning in the fields to ensure provision for herself and Naomi, to aligning with the ethical practices of her adopted society—demonstrate a servant-leadership model rooted in service to others. Robert Greenleaf's theory of servant leadership underscores the importance of putting others' needs above personal interests, which aligns closely with Ruth's story (Greenleaf, 1977:13). This selfless approach inspires trust and loyalty, making it a foundational principle for effective leadership across various domains.

*Ethical leadership in African contexts:* Women in African leadership have historically been celebrated for their ability to integrate ethical principles with effective governance. Figures like Nehanda of Zimbabwe (spirit medium and anti-colonial leader, see [scielo.org.za](http://scielo.org.za)) exemplify ethical leadership through their commitment to community welfare and justice during times of adversity. Yaa Asantewaa of Ghana demonstrated ethical leadership through her faith and resilience in leading the Ashanti rebellion against British colonialism (Arhin Brempong, 2000:97; Appiah & Gates, 1999:276), while Makeda's wisdom and spiritual depth are celebrated in Ethiopian tradition (Munro-Hay, 2001:45). Contemporary leaders such as Graça Machel continue this legacy by prioritizing collective well-being and moral accountability, calling for “moral courage” rooted in justice and empathy (Okorodudu, 1998:349). Their leadership styles resonate with spiritual and ethical values, emphasizing the importance of faith, moral courage, and communal solidarity in decision-making.

*Cultural Values and Leadership:* African cultural values often prioritize collective welfare, moral courage, and the pursuit of justice. These values reinforce the servant leadership model, which places the needs of the community above personal gain. Such cultural paradigms align with Ruth's actions, as she demonstrated an unwavering commitment to Naomi's well-being and the ethical standards of her community. This alignment highlights the universality of ethical leadership principles, making them relevant across different cultural and historical contexts.

*Ethical Leadership in Modern Frameworks:* Modern leadership frameworks increasingly recognize the importance of ethical practices as key pillars of sustainable leadership. As noted by Northouse (2021:215), morality and ethics are essential for building trust, fostering loyalty, and achieving long-term success. Leaders who embody these values are better equipped to navigate complex challenges and inspire their teams toward collective goals. Ruth's example serves as a powerful reminder of the transformative impact of ethical decision-making, particularly in environments where integrity and trust are paramount.

Practical Applications: Ruth's story offers valuable lessons for contemporary leaders:

1. **Integrity in Decision-Making:** Ruth's unwavering loyalty to Naomi underscores the importance of aligning actions with moral values. Leaders today can draw inspiration from this example to make principled decisions, even in the face of adversity.
2. **Service to Others:** By prioritizing Naomi's needs over her own, Ruth exemplifies the servant leadership model. Modern leaders can adopt this approach to foster stronger relationships and build cohesive teams.
3. **Building Community Trust:** Ruth's integration into her adopted community highlights the significance of respecting and adhering to communal values. Leaders who engage with their communities ethically and authentically are more likely to inspire trust and cooperation.
4. **Resilience and Adaptability:** Ruth's ability to navigate a new cultural and social landscape demonstrates resilience—a critical trait for leaders facing change and uncertainty.

**Bridging Biblical and Contemporary Perspectives:** The ethical and moral principles demonstrated by Ruth are not confined to biblical narratives; they have profound implications for modern leadership. Whether in corporate settings, political arenas, or community initiatives, leaders who prioritize ethical standards can create lasting impact. By embodying integrity, accountability, and compassion, they can build authentic and impactful leadership models that resonate across generations.

Ruth's story stands as a dual emblem of historical and contemporary guidance in ethical leadership. Her unwavering dedication to moral principles and servant leadership reveals the profound impact of values-driven actions. Ruth's life not only exemplifies the strength derived from moral courage and integrity but also underscores the importance of putting others' welfare above personal gain. In today's complex leadership landscape, her principles resonate as timeless wisdom, offering leaders a framework for building trust, resilience, and fostering a

culture of communal welfare. Modern leaders can draw from Ruth's example to navigate ethical dilemmas, inspire loyalty, and create sustainable impact that transcends immediate challenges, leaving a legacy rooted in authenticity and compassion.

### 5.3 Implications

The implications of contemporary views on women in leadership, in dialogue with the biblical narrative of Ruth, extend far beyond theoretical discussions, encompassing actionable strategies for creating equitable leadership landscapes. Leadership studies over the last decade have increasingly focused on bridging the gap between gender representation and effective leadership, highlighting the systemic challenges that women face and the transformative potential of inclusive practices (Eagly A.H. & Heilman M.E, 2016:355).

Recent scholarship underscores the necessity of policy reforms, tailored leadership development programs, and interdisciplinary research to dismantle structural barriers and foster environments where women leaders can thrive. For instance, Ely, Ibarra, and Kolb argue for a reimagined approach to leadership training that integrates both gender-specific challenges and broader societal influences (Ely, Ibarra & Kolb, 2011:480). Reave emphasizes the importance of contextualising leadership strategies within cultural and ethical frameworks, a perspective that resonates with the moral and relational principles exemplified in the Book of Ruth (Reave, 2005:655).

In this segment, the goal is to improve and enrich the grasp of women's leadership by systematically investigating and assessing various aspects such as the organizational guidelines that influence the structure within which leadership exists, thorough leadership training frameworks that are intended to cultivate and develop the capabilities required for impactful leadership, along with examining potential research avenues that might arise, all of which synergistically strive to encourage a more inclusive and broadened perspective of women's leadership in the intricate and diverse contexts that characterise contemporary multifaceted environments.

#### 5.3.1 Policy recommendations

The success of women in leadership requires deliberate and targeted policy interventions to dismantle systemic barriers and foster inclusive environments where women can thrive.

Businesses that support and cultivate a greater extent of gender diversity in their leadership teams not only show improved financial results when contrasted with their less diverse counterparts, but they are also inclined to present significantly heightened innovation levels alongside a more adept approach to decision-making. However, deeply ingrained gender biases and institutional barriers persist, requiring holistic policy reforms at both organizational and societal levels to achieve meaningful progress.

#### 5.3.1.1 Organizational policies supporting women in leadership.

*Mentorship and Sponsorship Programs:* Mentorship and sponsorship have emerged as critical tools for fostering women's leadership development. Mentorship programs provide guidance and career planning, while sponsorship ensures that women leaders gain visibility and access to strategic opportunities. Research by Ibarra, and Silva (2010:84) shows that women with sponsors are 22% more likely to achieve leadership roles compared to those without. Organizations should institutionalize these programs to create formal networks of support and advocacy.

*Gender Diversity Initiatives:* Organizations that implement gender diversity initiatives, such as quotas and representation goals, see substantial improvements in leadership inclusivity. A study by Adams and Ferreira (2009:250) highlights that companies with gender-balanced boards demonstrate enhanced decision-making and stronger governance mechanisms. Policies must focus on equitable hiring practices, representation in leadership pipelines, and accountability mechanisms to ensure sustained progress.

*Flexible Work Policies:* The necessity for creating work environments that allow for greater flexibility has become increasingly evident and emphasized, particularly in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has significantly altered our approach to work. Implementing flexible policies, which include providing options for remote work, offering generous parental leave, and ensuring adequate childcare support, empowers women to effectively manage and harmonize their professional obligations with their personal responsibilities in a way that promotes overall well-being and productivity. Such initiatives reduce attrition rates among women leaders and create a more sustainable leadership pipeline. Additionally, organizations should actively monitor the effectiveness of these policies through employee feedback and adapt them to support diverse needs, including those of single parents and caregivers.

### 5.3.1.2 Strategies for creating inclusive and supportive environments.

*Training and Sensitization Programs:* Organizations should invest in training programs that address unconscious bias and promote inclusive leadership. These programs encourage teams to challenge stereotypes and recognize diverse leadership styles (Visser, 2011:128). Organizations which implement and maintain regular, systematic bias training programs tend to experience a notable increase of approximately 15% in the perceptions held by their employees regarding the fairness and equity within the workplace environment. Training initiatives should also include scenario-based learning to help employees practice inclusive behaviours in real-world settings.

*Equitable Resource Allocation:* Ensuring that women leaders have equal access to resources such as training budgets, leadership coaching, and high-visibility assignments is essential. Lack of access to these resources perpetuates inequality and hinders career progression (Salawu, 2023:4). Organizations must audit their practices to identify and rectify disparities in resource distribution. Furthermore, developing transparent criteria for resource allocation can help build trust and accountability within teams.

*Recognition and Celebration:* Celebrating the achievements of women leaders reinforces their contributions and inspires others. Recognition programs can include awards, public acknowledgments, and promotions tied to performance metrics. Highlighting success stories fosters a culture of encouragement and motivation for aspiring leaders (Walsh et al. 2024:3474). Additionally, showcasing these stories through internal and external communication channels can enhance the organization's reputation as a champion of gender equality.

By implementing these policy recommendations, organizations can create ecosystems that not only support women leaders but also enhance overall organizational success and societal equity.

### 5.3.2 Educational and training programs

Developing targeted educational and training programs is vital for empowering women leaders and addressing the specific challenges they face. Recent research highlights the importance of designing curricula that account for gender dynamics, cultural contexts, and the evolving demands of leadership (Madsen & Ngunjiri, 2023:67). Effective training programs can equip women with the skills, confidence, and networks needed to succeed in leadership roles.

### 5.3.2.1 Leadership programs tailored for women

*Customized Leadership Development:* Tailored programs focusing on women's leadership can bridge critical gaps in traditional leadership training. These programs should emphasize confidence-building, negotiation skills, and strategies for overcoming workplace bias. Participants in gender-specific leadership programs increase in ability to navigate male-dominated spaces (Mudd-Fegett et al. 2024:63-83). Integrating practical workshops with mentorship opportunities ensures participants receive both theoretical knowledge and actionable insights.

*Peer Networking and Community Building:* Programs that foster peer networks among women leaders create a support system that is crucial for long-term success. These networks provide spaces for sharing experiences, strategies, and encouragement. Women involved in professional networks are 35% more likely to advance in their careers (Visser, 2011:128-145). Training initiatives should include dedicated time for peer interaction and collaborative projects.

### 5.3.2.2 Incorporation of insights from Ruth into training curricula.

*Courage and Resilience from Ruth's Narrative:* Lessons from the Book of Ruth offer timeless insights into leadership qualities such as courage, resilience, and adaptability. Ruth's determination to overcome societal expectations can inspire modern women leaders to navigate adversity with grace. Training modules can use Ruth's story as a case study to teach perseverance and strategic thinking.

*Ethical and Relational Leadership:* Ruth's commitment to Naomi exemplifies relational leadership—an approach that values empathy, collaboration, and mutual support. Integrating these principles into leadership training helps create leaders who are not only effective but also compassionate. Programs can include reflective exercises that encourage participants to align their leadership style with ethical and relational values.

*Practical Applications:* Educational and training programs should include practical exercises such as role-playing, scenario analysis, and project-based learning to enhance skills in real-world contexts. By focusing on education and training, organizations and institutions can build a robust pipeline of women leaders equipped to navigate the complexities of modern leadership. These programs not only benefit individual participants but also contribute to creating more inclusive and dynamic leadership landscapes (Maran, 2025:90).

### 5.3.3 Future research directions

#### 5.3.3.1 Need for future research

The field of women's leadership offers numerous avenues for future research, particularly at the intersection of gender, culture, and leadership frameworks. Recent studies emphasize the need to deepen understanding of systemic challenges and innovative strategies that can support women in achieving leadership success. This section outlines key areas for further exploration and interdisciplinary approaches that can enrich the dialogue on women in leadership.

#### 5.3.3.2 Areas for further study on women in leadership

##### 5.3.3.2.1 Cross-cultural leadership dynamics

Examining how cultural contexts influence women's leadership experiences is essential for developing global leadership models. Research highlights that societal norms and cultural perceptions significantly affect the opportunities and challenges women face in leadership roles (Eagly & Chin, 2010:217). In the African context, for example, women leaders often navigate a complex interplay of traditional expectations and modern aspirations. Studies show that while African women leaders are making strides in sectors such as education and public health, they continue to face barriers rooted in patriarchal cultural norms and limited access to leadership training (Nkomo & Ngambi, 2009:50). Further, Ampofo and Boateng (2017:102) emphasize that rural women are often excluded from leadership opportunities due to systemic socio-economic barriers and insufficient policy support.

Future research should explore how indigenous leadership practices and community-based strategies can inform global models and support African women in leadership roles. Indigenous leadership practices in Africa, such as Ubuntu, which emphasises community and collective well-being, offer a rich source of insight into relational and ethical leadership styles. These practices can provide alternative frameworks that challenge individualistic and hierarchical models prevalent in Western contexts. Community-based strategies, including grassroots leadership development programs and women's cooperatives, have already demonstrated success in fostering leadership among women in rural and underserved areas. Additionally, exploring the intersection of traditional practices with modern leadership challenges, such as navigating digital transformation and global markets, will provide a comprehensive understanding of their applicability in contemporary settings.

### 5.3.3.2.2 Sector-specific challenges and opportunities

Different industries present unique barriers and enablers for women leaders. For example, the tech industry often grapples with significant gender disparities, while healthcare tends to have higher female representation but limited progression into top executive roles. Exploring sector-specific dynamics can provide actionable insights for addressing disparities and leveraging opportunities in various fields.

### 5.3.3.2.3 Impact of digital transformation on women's leadership

The rise of digital technologies has reshaped organizational structures and leadership roles. Future research should investigate how digital transformation influences women's access to leadership opportunities, particularly in remote and hybrid work environments. According to Angelici and Profeta (2020: 4), remote work enables the narrowing of gender gaps by improving women's work-life balance—but only when mediated by equitable digital communication practices. Similarly, Pal and De (2021: 7) caution that digital platforms can both bridge and widen gender gaps depending on how ICTs are designed and governed.

For example, in Africa, where internet penetration varies widely between urban and rural areas, digital transformation has the potential to either empower or exclude women leaders. Digital tools like e-learning platforms and virtual mentoring programs have enabled women to access leadership training without geographical constraints, as seen in initiatives like the "African Women Leadership Network" (AWLN). Similarly, the "She Leads Africa" platform, a digital and entrepreneurial initiative aimed at empowering African women through mentorship, business resources, and leadership training (Osei & Belo-Osagie, 2014).

It seeks to close the gender gap in leadership by providing access to tools, networks, and opportunities that enable women to thrive in competitive environments and become change-makers in their communities. has demonstrated the potential of digital platforms to provide mentorship and entrepreneurial resources to women. However, limited access to reliable internet and digital devices in many regions perpetuates existing inequalities.

Additionally, cultural biases in technology adoption and digital literacy gaps present significant barriers. For instance, in regions where technology use is predominantly associated with men, women often face stigmatization when engaging with digital tools. Future studies should focus on how to bridge these divides by promoting affordable access to digital tools, incorporating

localized content, and addressing gender biases in technology design and implementation. Policies such as subsidized internet access and digital literacy campaigns targeted at women could play a crucial role in mitigating these barriers and fostering equitable access.

### 5.3.3.3 Interdisciplinary approaches combining theology and leadership studies.

#### 5.3.3.3.1 Integrating biblical narratives with modern leadership models.

The Book of Ruth and other biblical texts offer rich insights into ethical and relational leadership. Future research should explore how these narratives can be integrated with contemporary leadership theories to create faith-informed leadership models. Studies suggest that ethical frameworks rooted in theology can enhance decision-making and organizational integrity (Joseph & Gaba, 2020:7). For instance, Ruth's loyalty and strategic decision-making under adverse circumstances serve as examples of relational and adaptive leadership that resonate with contemporary challenges in organizational contexts.

The narrative of Ruth highlights principles of inclusivity and perseverance, which can inform leadership training programs aimed at fostering diversity and resilience. Integrating these principles with current leadership theories, such as servant leadership and transformational leadership, can bridge the gap between ancient wisdom and modern organizational demands. Future studies should also explore the cross-cultural applicability of these biblical insights, particularly in multicultural leadership settings where values of empathy and ethical decision-making are crucial.

#### 5.3.3.3.2 Gender studies and theological perspectives

Combining gender studies with theological insights can provide a nuanced understanding of women's leadership. This interdisciplinary approach can highlight the interplay between faith, culture, and gender roles, offering fresh perspectives on leadership development. In the African context, theological perspectives often intersect with cultural norms, creating a unique set of challenges and opportunities for women leaders.

Research by Kanyoro (2002:10) and Phiri (2004:23) emphasises the importance of addressing patriarchal interpretations of Scripture that have historically limited women's leadership roles. For instance, reinterpretations of Proverbs 31 as a model of active and resourceful leadership rather than domesticity are gaining traction in African faith communities.

Initiatives such as the “Women of Faith Leadership Program”, a transformative initiative aimed at equipping women with the skills and theological grounding needed for leadership in both faith-based and secular contexts, have demonstrated how theological education can empower women by equipping them with leadership skills grounded in faith and ethics (Phiri, 2004:25).

By integrating gender studies, future research can explore how faith communities in Africa are reinterpreting theological narratives to empower women leaders while respecting cultural values. This intersectional analysis is critical for advancing both theoretical frameworks and practical applications in leadership development. Additionally, a comparative study of gender-inclusive theological practices across African nations could shed light on regional variations and the role of interfaith dialogue in fostering leadership equity.

#### 5.3.3.4 Methodological innovations

##### 5.3.3.4.1 Innovative research methods

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## 5.4 Synthesis

Women's leadership in Africa has made significant strides, yet systemic challenges persist due to deeply ingrained patriarchal norms and structural barriers. While policies and advocacy efforts have increased gender representation in politics, business, education, and religious institutions, women still face heightened scrutiny, exclusion from key networks, and cultural resistance. The *Ubuntu* leadership model, which emphasises relational and collective leadership, provides a viable alternative to traditional hierarchical leadership structures. The biblical story of Ruth mirrors this concept, demonstrating how loyalty, adaptability, and strategic alliances can help women navigate leadership spaces. Ruth's resilience in overcoming societal constraints serves as a guiding framework for modern female leaders striving to break barriers.

The chapter highlights the experiences of prominent women leaders such as *Ellen Johnson Sirleaf*, *Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala*, *Samia Suluhu Hassan*, and *Malala Yousafzai*, who have defied gender norms through strategic networking, advocacy, and ethical leadership. These leaders embody the core principles of Ruth's story—resilience, relational influence, and faith-driven leadership. Women occupying leadership roles frequently encounter supplementary obstacles, including the necessity to reconcile professional obligations with caregiving responsibilities, restrictive mentorship availability, and the phenomenon commonly referred to as the glass ceiling. To effectively mitigate these impediments, it is imperative to implement focused interventions, which may encompass mentorship initiatives, reforms within workplace structures, and transformative cultural shifts that reconceptualize leadership beyond frameworks traditionally dominated by males.

The integration of faith and ethical leadership plays a crucial role in empowering women to lead with integrity and purpose. Ruth's unwavering commitment to Naomi and her moral-driven leadership demonstrate how faith can serve as a foundation for resilience and community-building. In contemporary contexts, servant leadership models that prioritize inclusivity, ethical governance, and collective well-being are essential for sustainable change. In order to promote women's leadership, it is imperative to adopt systemic reforms, engage in cultural advocacy, and implement faith-based leadership frameworks, thereby guaranteeing that women not only attain access to leadership positions but also flourish within these roles.

## CHAPTER 6

### Synthesis

#### 6.1 Introduction

##### 6.1.1 Research problem and scope

This study has addressed a significant gap in Ruth scholarship by exploring leadership as a central theme in the Book of Ruth, reframing the narrative to highlight how leadership transcends formal titles and manifests through actions, decisions, and the ability to navigate societal and cultural complexities. By analysing Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz, the research uncovered a model of dispositional leadership rooted in ethical decision-making, relational intelligence, resilience, and strategic adaptability. These qualities enabled the characters to shape their community's future within a patriarchal society that did not formally recognize female leadership.

##### 6.1.2 Aim(s) and objectives

The aim of the research is to explore Ruth's leadership within biblical narratives using an Afro-centric hermeneutical approach, examining how her story challenges patriarchal structures and provides valuable insights for contemporary female leadership in male-dominated environments. The research was guided by three primary objectives:

1. To examine Ruth's leadership attributes and actions through an Afro-centric hermeneutical lens: This approach provided a fresh perspective by contextualizing Ruth's story within African traditions and perspectives. It illuminated how leadership in the narrative parallels the resilience, relational strength, and communal emphasis found in many African cultural contexts. By adopting this lens, the study revealed the relevance of Ruth's story to modern readers, particularly within societies that value communal collaboration and social resilience.
2. To evaluate how patriarchal structures influence female leadership within biblical narratives: By critically examining the interplay of societal constraints and leadership emergence, this objective highlighted the systemic barriers Ruth and other characters faced. The research demonstrated how Ruth's leadership was not only a personal triumph but also a profound subversion of the societal norms that often-side-lined women. It underscores the importance of

understanding patriarchal structures in shaping leadership narratives and their implications for women navigating similar contexts today.

3. To synthesize lessons from Ruth's narrative that can inform contemporary leadership, especially for women in male-dominated contexts: Ruth's resilience, relational intelligence, and strategic adaptability offer timeless insights for leadership in restrictive environments. By distilling these lessons, the study provides a practical framework for empowering women leaders in contemporary male-dominated contexts, bridging ancient cultural realities with modern leadership challenges.

Central to achieving these objectives were the following questions:

- How does Ruth exemplify leadership within her cultural and societal constraints?
- In what ways does an Afro-centric framework enrich the understanding of female leadership in biblical texts?
- What practical applications can Ruth's narrative provide for modern leadership challenges?

Through these guiding questions, the research synthesized theological, cultural, and leadership studies, creating a nuanced understanding of leadership dynamics in the Book of Ruth. By examining the intersection of leadership and societal structures, it challenged traditional views, advocating for an inclusive model that prioritises marginalised voices.

The study's integration of theological insights with cultural and leadership analysis bridges the gap between ancient and contemporary leadership discussions. Ruth's story serves as a profound model for leadership that thrives under constraints, emphasising resilience, ethical action, and strategic foresight. By adopting an Afro-centric hermeneutical lens, the research contextualized Ruth's leadership in ways that resonate with modern readers, particularly in African and other communal societies. This perspective enriches the narrative, showing how it continues to speak to issues of gender equity, social justice, and leadership dynamics.

The findings affirm that Ruth's leadership is deeply relevant in empowering women leaders who face systemic barriers in male-dominated spaces. Her story offers a timeless reminder that leadership is not defined by positions or offices but by the courage to act ethically, build relationships, and adapt strategically to challenges. Naomi and Boaz's contributions further

reinforce the importance of collaborative leadership, rooted in covenantal faithfulness and justice.

By revisiting the primary objectives and questions, this research concludes with a synthesis of Ruth's enduring significance as a model for leadership. It highlights the relevance of her story for addressing contemporary challenges, particularly in empowering women to navigate restrictive environments with resilience, agency, and relational intelligence. In doing so, this study not only enriches biblical scholarship but also provides actionable insights for modern leadership studies, advocating for more inclusive and dynamic leadership frameworks in diverse cultural contexts.

### 6.1.3 Afro-centric female leadership paradigm.

An Afro-centric perspective underscores communal values, resilience, and adaptability—qualities that are deeply embedded in Ruth's narrative. This research situates Ruth within a broader cultural and theological paradigm, presenting her as a leader whose story resonates strongly with African contexts of community-Centered leadership, relational influence, and the importance of strategic alliances. Ruth exemplifies leadership that thrives in adversity, relying on ethical decision-making and faith-based actions to navigate and transform her circumstances.

Recent scholarship reinforces these perspectives, enriching the study's analysis. Mburu (2019:45-47) emphasises the significance of African hermeneutics in reading biblical texts, highlighting how communal values and relational agency are central to leadership in African contexts. Mburu argues that characters like Ruth embody resilience and adaptability, key traits in African leadership traditions.

Oduyoye (2001:88-90) discusses the vital role of women in theology and leadership within patriarchal structures, identifying parallels between Ruth's narrative and the lived experiences of African women who lead through relational influence and strategic foresight. Oduyoye's work affirms Ruth as a model of female agency that challenges systemic inequalities while maintaining communal harmony.

Haddox (2020:23-126) contributes further by examining the integration of ethics and leadership in biblical narratives. His analysis aligns with Ruth's actions, demonstrating how ethical decision-making and covenantal faithfulness not only serve personal interests but also

contribute to communal flourishing. Haddox's insights frame Ruth's story as a paradigm for ethical leadership, one that transcends cultural and historical boundaries while offering timeless lessons.

Afro-centric interpretations of Ruth's leadership resonate deeply within African contexts. Mburu (2021: 85–87) emphasizes that biblical narratives, when read through local cultural frameworks, reveal how relational intelligence and community alliances are vital for overcoming systemic constraints. Diko (2024: 5–6) reinforces this by highlighting Ruth's collaboration with Naomi and Boaz as emblematic of African leadership models that prioritize collective progress over individual gain.

By interpreting Ruth's story through this Afro-centric lens, the research bridges cultural and biblical narratives, showcasing how Ruth's leadership transcends the confines of patriarchal norms. Her actions demonstrate that leadership is not about positional authority but about relational influence, ethical decisions, and a commitment to communal well-being. This perspective enriches the study's contribution to understanding female leadership dynamics, particularly in contexts where women navigate systemic barriers.

#### 6.1.4 Chapter outline

This chapter synthesises the findings from a comprehensive study of leadership in the Book of Ruth. It addresses a gap in biblical scholarship by highlighting how effective leadership transcends formal authority, emerging instead from personal qualities such as resilience, adaptability, relational intelligence, ethical decision-making, and faith.

The research employed an Afro-centric hermeneutical lens, revealing how Ruth's leadership resonates powerfully within communal contexts, especially in African cultural settings emphasizing values such as community, interconnectedness, and strategic alliances. Ruth's story was used to demonstrate how female leadership can effectively navigate and challenge patriarchal structures, providing insights applicable to modern leadership contexts.

Key findings include Ruth's resilience in adversity, her strategic adaptability to cultural changes, and her influential relational intelligence. These qualities are critical in contemporary leadership, particularly for women facing systemic barriers in male-dominated environments. Ruth's ethical integrity further illustrates how ethical choices contribute to enduring communal benefits and personal transformation.

Practically, the chapter advocates for integrating these insights into leadership training curricula and policymaking, emphasizing mentorship, relational collaboration, and ethical grounding. It recommends the creation of targeted mentorship programs, strategic alliances, and culturally sensitive policies inspired by Ruth's approach.

Finally, the research highlights the value of interpreting biblical narratives through an Afro-centric lens, bridging theology, culture, gender studies, and leadership theory. Ruth's story exemplifies dispositional leadership, underscoring the timeless relevance of leadership grounded in faith, integrity, and relational wisdom, thereby providing a robust model for leaders in diverse contemporary contexts.

## 6.2 Key findings

### 6.2.1 Insights on female leadership from Ruth

Ruth's leadership provides profound insights into female leadership within contexts of adversity, marginalization, and cultural transition. This analysis draws on Mburu's (2019:45) hermeneutical framework, which underscores African communal values, and Kouzes & Posner's (2017:175-210) leadership principles, which emphasize enabling others to act and inspiring a shared vision. Her leadership traits include:

- *Resilience*: Ruth demonstrates extraordinary resilience in the face of personal loss and societal marginalization. Despite being a Moabite widow in a patriarchal society, she takes decisive action to support herself and Naomi, showcasing a determination that transcends cultural and societal constraints. This aligns with Mburu's (2019:45-47) hermeneutical framework, which emphasises communal values and perseverance as critical aspects of leadership in African contexts.
- *Adaptability*: Ruth's remarkable and commendable ability to gracefully adapt to a new cultural and social environment, which is often quite challenging for many individuals, is undeniably pivotal to her overall success in navigating this complex world. She learns and adopts the practices of Naomi's community while maintaining her integrity and values. Kouzes and Posner (2017:92-96) discuss adaptability as a hallmark of effective leadership, emphasizing the ability to navigate new contexts and leverage opportunities for growth. Ruth's adaptability is most evident in her strategic approach to securing her future through Boaz, as seen in Ruth 3:1-11.

- *Influence:* Ruth's actions inspire trust, cooperation, and goodwill, impacting Naomi, Boaz, and the broader community. Her decision to remain loyal to Naomi (Ruth 1:16) exemplifies relational leadership, a concept also emphasized in Burns (2003:3-5) theory of transformational leadership, which highlights the ability of leaders to inspire and influence others through relationships rather than authority.

Ruth's leadership resonates strongly with African communal leadership models, which prioritize relational influence, collective well-being, and resilience. As Oduyoye (2001:88-90) argues, women's leadership within patriarchal contexts often emerges through relational and situational dynamics rather than formal positions of power. Ruth exemplifies this by leveraging her relationships with Naomi and Boaz to bring about systemic change, securing stability and prosperity for her family.

Northouse (2021:56-60) underscores the importance of ethical decision-making and cultural intelligence in leadership, both of which are evident in Ruth's ability to navigate the cultural and societal complexities of Bethlehem. Ruth's leadership reflects a deep understanding of social structures and ethical principles, demonstrating that effective leadership is not limited to positional authority but is rooted in relational intelligence and moral action.

Haddox (2020:123-126) complements this perspective by exploring the integration of ethics and leadership in biblical narratives, affirming that Ruth's actions align with covenantal faithfulness and justice. Her leadership, therefore, is a model of how ethical decision-making can lead to transformative outcomes, even in restrictive environments.

## 6.2.2 Contributions of patriarchal perspectives to leadership analysis

The patriarchal structures depicted in the Book of Ruth play a dual role, functioning as both barriers and enablers of leadership. While these systems marginalise women, they also create frameworks within which innovative and transformational leadership can emerge. Ruth's story exemplifies how individuals navigate societal constraints to exercise agency and influence, offering profound insights into the interplay between systemic limitations and leadership potential.

Mburu (2019:56-58) and Haddox (2020:133-135) emphasize, patriarchal constraints often paradoxically create opportunities for innovative leadership by forcing individuals to adopt strategic and adaptive approaches. Similarly, Oduyoye (2001:92-94) highlights how women

navigate these structures through relational intelligence and strategic decision-making, demonstrating the power of agency within restrictive contexts. Ruth's ability to work within societal boundaries illustrates how transformational leadership and personal agency can emerge even when systemic barriers persist. By inspiring trust and cooperation, she not only reshapes her own future but also contributes to the flourishing of her community. Her story bridges ancient cultural contexts and modern leadership challenges, particularly for women navigating male-dominated spaces.

Kouzes and Posner (2017:130-135) observe, enabling others to act and inspiring a shared vision are hallmarks of effective leadership. These principles are central to Ruth's journey, as she leverages relational intelligence and ethical decision-making to overcome barriers and achieve transformational outcomes. Her story challenges rigid, hierarchical, and exclusionary ideas of leadership, advocating instead for inclusive and relational approaches that emphasize collaboration, trust, and resilience.

Through this lens, Ruth's narrative offers timeless perspectives, demonstrating that leadership is not defined by positional authority but by the ability to navigate constraints and inspire collective action. These insights hold relevance for contemporary leadership, where systemic barriers to women's leadership remain prevalent. Ruth's example provides a powerful framework for empowering leaders who thrive through adaptability, relational influence, and ethical decision-making.

### 6.2.3 Contemporary applications of Ruth's leadership insights

Ruth's story offers practical lessons for modern leadership: Her life exemplifies how leadership can emerge through adversity, ethical integrity, and faith-driven actions. These lessons are particularly potent for addressing contemporary challenges in leadership, including navigating cultural barriers, and fostering inclusive environments.

#### 6.2.3.1 Relational intelligence

Relational intelligence is the ability to understand and manage relationships effectively. This is a cornerstone of transformative leadership. Building trust, fostering alliances, and creating pathways for collective success are critical for overcoming challenges and achieving sustainable outcomes. In the narrative of the Book of Ruth, relational intelligence emerges as a

pivotal quality, exemplified by both Ruth and Naomi in their interactions and decision-making. Their ability to navigate societal structures and maintain strong interpersonal bonds underscores the importance of this leadership trait.

Ruth's unwavering commitment to Naomi, captured in her famous declaration, "*Where you go, I will go; where you stay, I will stay*" (Ruth 1:16-17), highlights her profound relational intelligence. By choosing to remain with Naomi, despite the personal risks of leaving her homeland and entering a foreign society, Ruth demonstrates an ability to prioritize relationships over immediate security. This decision not only cements their bond but also sets the foundation for their collective resilience. Relational intelligence here is not merely about emotional connection but about forging a partnership rooted in trust, loyalty, and shared goals.

Ruth's actions also reflect her keen awareness of the cultural dynamics in her new environment. For instance, her decision to glean in Boaz's field (Ruth 2:2-3) demonstrates a calculated effort to build alliances within a society where her status as a foreigner might have marginalised her. Ruth's respectful approach to Boaz and her initiative to work hard and seek favour illustrate how relational intelligence involves understanding and navigating social hierarchies to foster cooperation and goodwill.

Naomi, too, demonstrates relational intelligence through her guidance of Ruth. Despite her initial despair upon returning to Bethlehem, Naomi strategically advises Ruth on how to engage with Boaz, recognizing his potential as a kinsman-redeemer (Ruth 3:1-4). Naomi's ability to understand the cultural and legal structures of her society enables her to guide Ruth in a manner that not only protects their dignity but also creates opportunities for a secure future. Naomi's relational intelligence is evident in her strategic foresight, which balances societal expectations with Ruth's well-being.

Naomi and Ruth's relationship illustrates how relational intelligence can create partnerships that transcend generational and cultural boundaries. Naomi's wisdom complements Ruth's resilience, and together, they form a dynamic leadership team that navigates systemic barriers with relational adaptability and mutual support.

*Theoretical Perspectives on Relational Intelligence:* Relational intelligence, as discussed in leadership studies, is a critical factor in creating and sustaining successful alliances. Goleman et al. (2002:210-215) explores how relational intelligence underpins effective leadership, emphasising the importance of empathy, adaptability, and communication in fostering trust and collaboration. Goleman highlights that leaders who excel in relational intelligence can navigate

complex interpersonal dynamics, build loyalty, and inspire collective action—qualities that are vividly displayed in Ruth and Naomi’s journey.

From a cultural perspective, Mburu (2019:64-66) highlights the significance of relational intelligence in communal leadership models prevalent in African contexts. Mburu argues that in many African societies, leadership is less about individual authority and more about relational influence and the ability to build consensus within the community. This perspective resonates with Ruth’s story, where her success is deeply tied to her ability to form meaningful relationships with Naomi, Boaz, and the broader community of Bethlehem.

The relational intelligence demonstrated in Ruth’s story offers timeless lessons for contemporary leadership, particularly in contexts where collaboration and adaptability are essential. One of the most significant takeaways is the power of trust in fostering resilient partnerships. Trust is crucial for employee engagement and organizational success. Leaders who, like Ruth and Naomi, prioritise trust-building can create environments where people feel valued and motivated to contribute to collective goals.

Another important perspective is the role of relational intelligence in navigating systemic barriers. Ruth and Naomi operate within a patriarchal society where their agency is limited, yet they leverage their relationships and cultural knowledge to achieve transformative outcomes. This has direct applications for women in modern leadership roles, particularly in male-dominated industries. By building alliances, fostering trust, and exercising strategic foresight, women can overcome systemic challenges and create pathways for success.

The concept of relational intelligence also emphasises the importance of cultural sensitivity and adaptability. Ruth’s ability to integrate into a new cultural context without losing her identity demonstrates how leaders can navigate diverse environments effectively. This is especially relevant in today’s globalized world, where leaders must often manage multicultural teams and operate across different cultural frameworks.

*Scholarly Foundations and Broader Implications:* Relational intelligence in Ruth’s story is not an isolated theme but part of a broader narrative that integrates leadership with cultural and theological insights. Burns (2003:3-5), in his seminal work on transformational leadership, discusses how relational influence is central to inspiring and empowering others. Kouzes and Posner (2017:130-135) argue that enabling others to act and fostering collaboration are

hallmarks of exemplary leadership. These frameworks align with the relational dynamics in Ruth's story, where her leadership is exercised through trust, loyalty, and strategic partnerships.

The broader implications of relational intelligence also extend to communal and organizational contexts. Northouse (2021:125-127) notes, relational leadership approaches that emphasise empathy, collaboration, and adaptability are increasingly recognized as critical in today's complex and fast-changing environments. Ruth and Naomi's journey exemplifies the application of these principles for individual achievement and communal change.

Relational intelligence emerges as a defining characteristic of leadership in the Book of Ruth, shaping the narrative's outcomes and offering valuable lessons for modern leadership studies. Ruth's unwavering commitment to Naomi, her ability to navigate societal structures, and Naomi's strategic guidance underscore the transformative power of trust and collaboration. The story demonstrates that relational intelligence is not merely a soft skill but a critical leadership competency that enables individuals to overcome challenges and inspire collective resilience.

By drawing on the insights Goleman et al. (2002), Mburu (2019), Burns (2003), and Kouzes and Posner (2017), this analysis bridges biblical narratives and contemporary leadership frameworks. It highlights how relational intelligence, rooted in empathy, adaptability, and cultural sensitivity, continues to shape leadership dynamics across diverse contexts. The enduring relevance of these principles underscores the value of Ruth's story as a model for inclusive and relational leadership in both ancient and modern settings.

#### 6.2.3.2 Ethical decision-making.

Ethical decision-making is a central theme in the leadership exemplified in the Book of Ruth. The narrative highlights how Ruth and Naomi consistently act with integrity and purpose, demonstrating that ethical leadership is not only about following rules but also about navigating complex moral landscapes with courage, strategic thinking, and a commitment to the well-being of others. Their choices reveal that effective leadership requires balancing cultural expectations, personal values, and the needs of the broader community.

Ruth's decision to glean in Boaz's field (Ruth 2:2-3) exemplifies her commitment to lawful and ethical practices, even in the face of personal vulnerability. As a foreigner and widow, Ruth's societal status placed her among the most marginalised. Yet, instead of resorting to potentially dishonest or desperate actions, she chooses to glean—a practice protected by

Mosaic law that allowed the poor to gather leftover grain (Leviticus 19:9-10). By doing so, Ruth respects the cultural and legal norms of her adopted community while exercising her agency to provide for herself and Naomi. Her actions demonstrate an alignment of ethical behaviour with purpose-driven leadership, where her personal values guide her choices in a way that inspires trust and respect.

Ruth's integrity also extends to her interactions with Boaz. When Ruth follows Naomi's advice to approach Boaz at the threshing floor (Ruth 3:1-4), she does so with respect and propriety, maintaining her dignity while navigating a delicate social situation. This moment reveals Ruth's ability to act decisively within the bounds of ethical and cultural norms, using strategy and humility to secure her and Naomi's future. Her behaviour models how ethical leadership involves not only moral rectitude but also the wisdom to act appropriately within the constraints of societal systems.

Naomi also exemplifies ethical decision-making through her guidance of Ruth. Her advice to Ruth regarding Boaz is strategic yet deeply rooted in cultural traditions and legal frameworks. As a kinsman-redeemer, Boaz had a potential obligation to protect and provide for Naomi's family, but Naomi's approach ensures that Ruth's actions remain respectful and honourable. By guiding Ruth within the bounds of societal norms, Naomi demonstrates how ethical decision-making can be both strategic and culturally sensitive. Her leadership underscores the significance of ethical foresight in decision-making.

*Theoretical Perspectives on Ethical Leadership:* Haddox (2020:142-144) emphasise the integration of ethics in leadership, particularly in biblical narratives where leaders often face complex moral dilemmas. Haddox observes that the actions of figures like Ruth and Naomi reflect a deep understanding of the importance of ethical decision-making in building trust, fostering cooperation, and achieving transformative outcomes. Ruth's commitment to lawful practices and her respectful approach to Boaz align with Haddox's argument that ethical integrity is a hallmark of effective leadership, particularly in situations of vulnerability or adversity.

Goleman et al. (2002:220-222) argue that ethical integrity is foundational to effective leadership. Their research highlights that leaders who consistently act with integrity inspire trust and loyalty, enabling them to build strong relationships and navigate challenges with confidence. Ruth's narrative illustrates this principle, as her ethical actions not only earn her

the respect of Boaz and the community but also serve as a catalyst for transformative change in her and Naomi's circumstances. By remaining true to her values, Ruth models a form of leadership that is both principled and impactful.

*Broader Implications for Leadership:* The ethical decision-making exemplified in Ruth's story provides timeless lessons for contemporary leadership. Ethical issues often arise from conflicting interests. Ruth's narrative demonstrates that ethical leadership requires aligning one's actions with core values, even when facing systemic barriers or personal hardship. This principle is particularly relevant in today's complex and fast-paced environments, where leaders must navigate competing priorities with integrity and purpose.

One significant lesson from Ruth's narrative is the necessity of decisions that emphasize the welfare of others. Ruth's actions, guided by her commitment to Naomi, reflect a selfless approach to leadership that balances personal goals with collective needs. In organizational settings, this relates to leaders prioritizing the welfare of their teams, clients, and communities, thus fostering trust and cooperation.

Cultural sensitivity is crucial in ethical decision-making. Naomi's advice to Ruth demonstrates how effective leadership requires understanding and respecting cultural norms while pursuing strategic goals. In today's globalized world, leaders must often operate across diverse cultural frameworks, making cultural intelligence a vital component of ethical leadership.

Finally, the narrative underscores the long-term benefits of ethical decision-making. Ruth's integrity and adherence to ethical practices ultimately lead to her inclusion in the lineage of King David and, by extension, Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:5-6). This outcome highlights the enduring impact of ethical leadership, reminding us that principled actions can create lasting legacies.

Ethical decision-making is a defining feature of the leadership demonstrated by Ruth and Naomi. Their ability to navigate complex moral landscapes with integrity and strategic foresight offers a powerful model for modern leadership. By examining their story through the lens of scholars such as Haddox (2020) and Goleman et al. (2002), this analysis bridges the gap between biblical narratives and contemporary leadership theory, highlighting the timeless relevance of ethical integrity as a cornerstone of effective leadership.

In both ancient and modern contexts, ethical leadership inspires trust, fosters collaboration, and creates pathways for sustainable success. Ruth's narrative illustrates that true leadership transcends titles, it is rooted instead in integrity and purpose. Her example serves as a guide for

leaders who seek to navigate complex challenges with wisdom, empathy, and a commitment to ethical principles.

### 6.2.3.3 Faith-based leadership (Christian)

#### 6.2.3.3.1 Introduction

Faith-based leadership, as illuminated in the Book of Ruth, underscores the pivotal role of spiritual grounding in fostering resilience, guiding ethical decision-making, and enhancing effective leadership, particularly in complex and challenging contexts. Ruth's steadfast reliance on her faith serves as a foundation for her bold decision-making, her ability to inspire trust, and her capacity to navigate and overcome societal constraints. This demonstrates that leadership rooted in religious principles possesses the transformative power to transcend cultural and systemic barriers, offering a model for leaders in diverse contexts to lead with purpose and integrity.

Ruth's declaration to Naomi, "*Your people will be my people and your God my God*" (Ruth 1:16-17), is a profound expression of faith that defines her leadership journey. This act of spiritual commitment is not only a personal decision but also a leadership act rooted in trust and purpose. Ruth's faith inspires her to leave behind the familiarity of Moab and step into an uncertain future, guided by her belief in divine providence. Her faith-driven decisions set a tone of courage and determination that continues throughout the narrative.

Her choice to glean in Boaz's field (Ruth 2:2-3) reflects not just her resilience but also her reliance on religious to guide her actions. As a foreigner in a patriarchal society, Ruth is vulnerable to rejection or mistreatment, yet her faith motivates her to act with dignity and integrity. By trusting in God's provision, she seizes opportunities that lead to transformative outcomes, not only for herself but also for Naomi and their family line.

Ruth's faith is further evident in her approach to Boaz on the threshing floor (Ruth 3:9-11). Her actions are both bold and culturally respectful, demonstrating a deep trust in God's plan for her and Naomi. This moment underscores the integration of faith, strategy, and relational intelligence in her leadership, as she seeks redemption for Naomi's family while maintaining her own moral and spiritual integrity.

Naomi's role in Ruth's journey also reflects faith-based leadership, characterised by wisdom and a deep trust in divine providence. Despite her initial despair, Naomi's faith enables her to

envision a pathway for redemption through Boaz, guiding Ruth to act strategically within cultural norms (Ruth 3:1-4). Naomi's leadership emphasises the importance of mentoring and empowering others, illustrating how faith-based leadership involves fostering resilience and hope in those around us. Naomi's ability to balance her trust in God with practical actions demonstrates the dynamic nature of faith-based leadership. She does not passively wait for divine intervention but actively seeks solutions, showing how faith and action work in tandem to achieve transformative results.

#### 6.2.3.3.2 Scholarly perspectives on faith-based leadership

Scholars have long recognized the centrality of faith in leadership, particularly in contexts where systemic barriers or cultural constraints require resilience and ethical grounding. Gill (2022) examines the significance of faith as a foundational principle in leadership, a theme that is exemplified throughout the Book of Ruth. Ruth's actions marked by boldness in the face of exile, integrity in gleaning, and unwavering hope amid uncertainty reveal a profound internal compass shaped by trust in divine providence. This aligns with Gill's assertion that "spirituality is fundamental to ethical and effective leadership," providing leaders with "moral clarity, courage to face complex challenges, and a hopeful vision that inspires action" (Gill, 2022: 219). Ruth does not merely survive her circumstances; her faith empowers her to transform them. Her leadership, therefore, is not accidental it is rooted in a deep spiritual foundation that echoes Gill's broader model of spiritually conscious leadership.,

Fry (2003) presents a theory of spiritual leadership in which faith defined as "enduring belief and conviction in a transcendent vision, accompanied by a willingness to act in its direction" is a critical source of resilience, moral clarity, and hope (Fry, 2003:705). This spiritual grounding equips leaders to navigate complex challenges with purpose and integrity. In the Book of Ruth, this dynamic is vividly illustrated: Ruth's faith, expressed in her bold decision to remain with Naomi and embrace an uncertain future, becomes the bedrock of her transformative leadership. Despite her marginalized status, Ruth's unwavering trust in divine providence enables her to act with courage, uphold moral integrity in her interactions with Boaz, and pursue a vision of restoration for Naomi's household. Her journey exemplifies what Fry identifies as "hope/faith that sustains the calling and meaning necessary for intrinsic motivation and perseverance" (Fry, 2003:706). Thus, Ruth does not merely endure adversity—she leads through it, grounded in the spiritual qualities Fry deems essential for effective leadership.

Oduyoye (2001:102-104) provides a unique perspective on the role of faith in empowering women leaders within patriarchal contexts. She argues that faith serves as a source of strength and agency for women navigating systemic inequalities, allowing them to lead with confidence and purpose. Ruth's story aligns with this framework, as her faith enables her to challenge societal norms while maintaining her integrity and relational influence.

Burns (2003:45-47) highlights the role of faith in transformational leadership, particularly in inspiring followers to act with courage and vision. Ruth's leadership reflects these principles, as her faith-driven actions inspire trust and cooperation from Naomi, Boaz, and the broader community.

The principles of faith-based leadership in Ruth's narrative offer valuable perspectives for modern leaders, particularly women navigating male-dominated fields. A pivotal insight pertains to the significant function of faith in cultivating resilience. For leaders facing systemic barriers, faith provides a foundation for enduring challenges and maintaining a sense of purpose. Ruth's example shows that faith-driven decisions, rooted in ethical integrity, can inspire trust, and create pathways for success.

Another important insight is the integration of faith and strategy. Ruth and Naomi demonstrate how spiritual principles can guide practical actions, illustrating the dynamic relationship between faith and leadership. For modern-day leaders, this underscores the significance of synchronizing strategic decision-making with foundational values, thereby promoting ethical and effective leadership.

Faith-based leadership also emphasises the importance of relational intelligence, as seen in Ruth's interactions with Naomi, Boaz, and the broader community. This principle holds particular significance for leaders operating within contemporary diverse and interconnected contexts, where the capacity to foster trust and galvanize collaboration is of paramount importance.

Ultimately, Ruth's narrative emphasises the profound impact of faith in confronting societal conventions and championing justice and equity. Her leadership offers a model for women leaders who seek to navigate systemic barriers while maintaining their spiritual and moral integrity. Through the harnessing of fortitude derived from their spiritual beliefs, women possess the ability to lead with valour, tenacity, and an unwavering dedication to promoting constructive transformation.

Faith-based leadership, as illustrated in the Book of Ruth, provides a timeless framework for ethical, resilient, and transformative leadership. Ruth's reliance on faith enables her to navigate societal constraints, inspire trust, and achieve lasting change, while Naomi's faith-based guidance emphasises the importance of mentoring and empowerment. Together, their story highlights the dynamic relationship between faith, strategy, and relational intelligence in leadership.

Gill (2022), Fry (2003), Oduyoye (2001), and Burns (2003) reinforce the critical role of faith in leadership, emphasizing its relevance for both ancient narratives and contemporary contexts. These principles are particularly significant for women leaders navigating male-dominated fields, offering strategies for resilience, ethical grounding, and empowerment.

In both ancient and modern contexts, faith-based leadership serves as a powerful model for inspiring trust, fostering collaboration, and achieving sustainable success. Ruth's story reminds us that leadership grounded in faith is not only transformative but also enduring, offering timeless lessons for leaders seeking to make a lasting impact.

## 6.3 Contributions to scholarship

### 6.3.1 Advancing African hermeneutics.

This research contributes to African hermeneutics by contextualizing the Book of Ruth within African cultural and social frameworks. It demonstrates the richness of Afro-centric perspectives in reinterpreting biblical texts, emphasizing the shared values of community, resilience, and leadership. The study contributes to African hermeneutics by:

- (a) Demonstrating the relevance of Afro-centric perspectives in biblical interpretation. This research underscores the cultural resonance and community-cantered values that align with African hermeneutics. Scholars such as Mburu (2019:78-80) and Oduyoye (2001:102-105) highlight how this approach enables a nuanced understanding of leadership within patriarchal societies, making biblical texts more relatable to contemporary African contexts. Mburu's hermeneutical technique integrates African oral traditions, proverbs, and community-focused paradigms, providing a deeper contextual analysis that bridges ancient and modern leadership models. This method emphasises the interconnectedness of cultural and theological values, showing how figures like Ruth exemplify resilience, mutual support, and ethical leadership in adversarial settings. Haddox (2020:140-143) connects

Afro-centric interpretations with ethical frameworks, providing insights into how cultural identity and biblical leadership intersect. For example, Haddox’s analysis highlights the cultural navigation seen in Ruth’s adaptation to the Israelite community, which reflects universal leadership principles such as adaptability and relational intelligence.

Masenya (2013:1) and Boesak (2005:118) expand on these themes by exploring how Afro-centric hermeneutics emphasize collaboration and community resilience. Masenya illustrates that Ruth and Naomi’s partnership reflects African values of mutual care and survival, aligning with the philosophy of Ubuntu, which centres on shared humanity and interconnectedness essential for leadership dynamics. Boesak similarly describes Ubuntu as a source of resilience, noting that it “allows us to move away from the power of ethnicity” (2005:118), enabling people to endure and remain human despite systemic adversity. This perspective enriches the understanding of biblical leadership, offering insights particularly relevant for navigating challenges in marginalised and patriarchal contexts.

- (b) Highlighting the shared cultural values of community, resilience, and relational leadership. Ruth and Naomi provide practical examples of these principles. Ruth’s decision to remain with Naomi (Ruth 1:16-17) and her proactive actions in seeking sustenance for their household (Ruth 2:2-3) illustrate community-centred leadership and resilience in action. Naomi’s strategic guidance for Ruth’s approach to Boaz (Ruth 3:1-4) showcases relational intelligence and adaptability within patriarchal constraints. Recent scholarship, such as Masenya (2013:1-51) and Miller (2009):45-46), explores the intersection of relational intelligence and cultural resilience, emphasizing how biblical figures like Ruth embody adaptive leadership. Similarly, Boesak (2005:) highlights how the African cultural lens provides deeper insights into the collaborative leadership dynamics displayed in Ruth’s narrative, enriching the discourse on leadership in both ancient and contemporary contexts.
- (c) Providing a framework for reinterpreting biblical texts to resonate with African social and cultural realities. Iheanacho (2021: 3) emphasizes the importance of integrating cultural identity into biblical exegesis, noting that in sub-Saharan Africa “*religious traditions were largely codified in oral forms*”, which shapes communal memory and moral instruction. He highlights how oral traditions, proverbs, and storytelling foster communal authority and resilience parallel to the relational leadership modeled in narratives like Ruth. Similarly, Miller (2009: 45–46) underscores the transformative potential of aligning scriptural interpretation with community memory and resilience. He highlights the significance of

oral tradition in shaping communal authority and leadership, drawing on Old Testament narratives like Ruth to show how culturally grounded storytelling can inspire contemporary leadership practices. Oduyoye (2001:102-105) adds that reinterpreting these texts through the lens of African feminist theology can highlight gender-specific challenges and triumphs, offering a more nuanced understanding of leadership in patriarchal societies. This combined approach enriches the interpretive process, making biblical narratives like Ruth's more applicable to contemporary African and global leadership paradigms.

### 6.3.2 Bridging theology and leadership studies

By integrating theological insights with leadership theories, this research advances interdisciplinary scholarship. The innovative use of Mburu's hermeneutical framework and Kouzes & Posner's principles illustrates how biblical narratives can inform modern leadership paradigms. This approach encourages further exploration of biblical texts for leadership studies by employing methodologies such as narrative analysis, socio-rhetorical critique, and intercultural hermeneutics.

Mburu's framework, for instance, emphasises the integration of African oral traditions and communal values to reinterpret leadership dynamics within biblical texts like Ruth. This technique bridges historical narratives with contemporary cultural applications, showing how figures like Ruth and Naomi embody leadership principles that resonate with African communal philosophies such as Ubuntu. Ubuntu, as a relational ethic, mirrors Ruth's loyalty to Naomi (Ruth 1:16-17) and her proactive collaboration in navigating societal structures (Ruth 2:2-3). Iheanacho (2021:6819) argue that such culturally grounded approaches enhance leadership studies by fostering inclusivity and adaptability.

Kouzes and Posner's (2017:78-80) focus on relational leadership principles, including enabling others to act and modelling the way, further illuminates Ruth's leadership. Her decision to glean in Boaz's field demonstrates initiative and ethical foresight, setting a standard for others to follow. Similarly, Naomi's mentorship exemplifies the principle of "Encouraging the Heart," as she nurtures Ruth's confidence and provides strategic guidance (Ruth 3:1-4).

Additionally, socio-rhetorical analysis provides another layer for understanding Ruth's leadership. Haddox (2020:140-143) highlights how Ruth's navigation of patriarchal structures offers insights into adaptive leadership strategies. By balancing cultural expectations with innovative action, Ruth exemplifies how leaders can effectively work within constraints to

create transformative outcomes. Miller (2009:45-46) further notes that storytelling within biblical texts, such as Ruth's narrative, serves as a pedagogical tool for imparting leadership perspectives across generations.

This interdisciplinary exploration highlights how ancient texts remain relevant for addressing contemporary leadership challenges. Masenya (2013:1-9) emphasises how combining theological insights with leadership theory can empower leaders to approach adversity with resilience and relational intelligence. These methodologies not only enrich theological scholarship but also provide actionable frameworks for fostering ethical and culturally responsive leadership in diverse contexts.

### 6.3.3 Implications for gender and leadership studies

This research enriches discussions on gender and leadership by:

#### (a) Challenging traditional perceptions of leadership

Ruth challenges traditional perceptions of leadership by embodying qualities such as resilience, ethical integrity, and relational intelligence, all without holding a formal title. Her actions, such as choosing to stay with Naomi (Ruth 1:16-17) and taking initiative to glean in Boaz's field (Ruth 2:2-3), demonstrate leadership through service and relational trust. Scholars such as Mburu (2019:64-66) emphasize how her communal approach aligns with African values of Ubuntu, focusing on mutual care and interconnectedness. Kouzes and Posner (2017:56-58) also provide a framework to understand her leadership, as she "Models the Way" through her proactive behaviour and "Inspires a Shared Vision" by seeking not only her welfare but also Naomi's redemption. Recent research, including Haddox (2020:133-135), highlights Ruth's ability to navigate patriarchal constraints as a testament to adaptive and transformative leadership, offering insights for both ancient and modern leadership paradigms.

#### (b) Providing a biblical framework for understanding female agency.

Providing a biblical framework for understanding female agency involves integrating interdisciplinary methodologies such as African hermeneutics, narrative analysis, and cultural anthropology. Scholars like Mburu (2019:78-80) emphasize the significance of community-centred values, illustrating how Ruth's decisions reflect agency rooted in relational leadership

and cultural resilience. Iheanacho (2021:68918) extends this perspective by highlighting the importance of interpreting Ruth's actions through African oral traditions and communal ethics, which parallel modern leadership principles. Recent research by Masenya (2013:1-9) explores how female agency in biblical texts can inform contemporary leadership models, particularly in addressing gender inequities and fostering inclusive leadership. By synthesizing these approaches, this framework offers a robust lens to reinterpret biblical narratives like Ruth's, making them relevant to modern discussions on leadership, agency, and cultural dynamics.

(c) Offering insights for empowering women leaders in patriarchal societies.

Offering insights for empowering women leaders in patriarchal societies by establishing targeted mentorship programs, creating inclusive policy frameworks, and integrating leadership development programs grounded in biblical narratives. Olson and Jackson (2009:45) advocate for mentorship models that not only provide guidance but also build strategic networks for women in leadership roles. Thelma & Ngulube (2024: 280–283) emphasize the importance of structural reform in organizations to ensure equitable opportunities for women leaders. Their recommendations include instituting transparent promotion processes, implementing targeted mentorship and sponsorship programs, and embedding gender-sensitive mechanisms within organizational policies. This approach anchored in structural justice ensures that women can access and thrive in leadership roles, even within complex institutional systems.

Miller (2022:45-46) highlights the role of storytelling and cultural narratives, such as those in Ruth's story, in fostering resilience and inspiring leadership. Collaborative workshops, as suggested by Adewale & Potokri (2023: 60–62) emphasize the importance of creating platforms for women leaders to share best practices and build supportive communities. They further advocate for interdisciplinary research initiatives bringing together theologians, sociologists, and gender studies experts to ensure that leadership development programs are both sustainable and culturally relevant across higher education and organizational contexts.

## 6.4 Practical implications

### 6.4.1 Directives for leadership training and policy

The findings inform:

- (a) *Leadership Training Curricula*: Emphasizing resilience, ethical leadership, and relational dynamics. This can be achieved through tailored programs that integrate case studies from biblical narratives like Ruth's, highlighting practical applications of her leadership traits. For instance, Ruth's adaptability and ethical integrity in gleaning responsibly (Ruth 2:2-3) can inspire modules on resilience in challenging contexts. Additionally, Naomi's relational intelligence in mentoring Ruth (Ruth 3:1-4) offers a model for mentorship dynamics. Scholars such as Iheanacho (2021:6819) and Masenya (2013:1-9) suggest incorporating cultural and spiritual dimensions into leadership training to enrich its applicability and impact.
- (b) *Policymaking*: Advocating for gender equity and inclusive leadership practices is inspired by Ruth's story. This can be achieved by incorporating policy frameworks that emphasize mentorship opportunities, equitable representation in leadership roles, and cultural sensitivity training rooted in biblical principles. For example, Ruth's commitment to ethical actions and community support (Ruth 2:2-3) provides a model for creating policies that prioritize social equity and resilience. Scholars such as Iheanacho (2021:6819) and Miller (2009:46) suggest that integrating historical and scriptural examples into modern governance structures can enhance gender equity and foster inclusive leadership cultures.

#### 6.4.2 Empowerment strategies for women leaders

These strategies include:

- (a) *Mentorship Programs*: Facilitating guidance and support for women leaders. This can be implemented by establishing structured mentorship frameworks within organizations, faith-based groups, or leadership networks. Programs can pair emerging women leaders with experienced mentors who provide career guidance, spiritual encouragement, and practical leadership advice. Boesak (2005:118-122) highlights the importance of mentorship in overcoming systemic barriers, while Masenya (2013:1-9) emphasises tailoring mentorship strategies to account for cultural and contextual needs. Additionally, virtual mentorship platforms can extend opportunities to women in remote or underserved areas, ensuring broader access to leadership development resources.
- (b) *Strategic Alliances*: Encouraging collaboration to overcome systemic challenges. This can be implemented by fostering partnerships across organizational, cultural, and faith-based platforms. For example, creating interfaith forums that promote dialogue and joint ventures

can help build trust and address shared challenges. Masenya (2013:1-9), Boesak (2005:118-143), highlight the importance of cross-sector partnerships in addressing systemic inequities. Additionally, leveraging technology to build global networks for women leaders, can amplify their impact by providing access to diverse perspectives and support systems. Collaborative leadership models rooted in shared values, as explored by Olson and Jackson (2009:50, further reinforce the effectiveness of strategic alliances in creating sustainable solutions.

- (c) *Faith and Ethics*: Promoting spiritual and moral grounding in leadership. This can be implemented by encouraging faith-based organizations to integrate leadership training into their programs, emphasizing the alignment of spiritual values with ethical decision-making. For instance, mentorship initiatives within churches can guide emerging leaders to model integrity and servant leadership, drawing on biblical narratives like Ruth's. Spiritual grounding fosters accountability and resilience, especially in high-pressure leadership roles. Kathayat (2024:29) highlights the potential for faith-driven leadership workshops to create spaces for reflection and ethical growth, making faith a cornerstone of effective leadership strategies.

## 6.5 Future research directions

### 6.5.1 Theological leadership models for women

Future studies could:

- (a) Explore other biblical narratives for female leadership models by identifying stories where women exhibit resilience, agency, and influence in complex socio-cultural contexts. For example, the narratives of Deborah (Judges 4-5), who led Israel with wisdom and courage, and Esther, whose strategic actions saved her people, provide key leadership insights. Additionally, the story of Abigail (1 Samuel 25), who used diplomacy and strategic thinking to prevent bloodshed, and Huldah (2 Kings 22:14-20), a prophetess who played a pivotal role in guiding Judah during a critical period of reform, offer diverse examples of female leadership. Masenya (2013:1-9), and Kathayat (2024:28) emphasize the importance of analysing these narratives to uncover leadership principles that resonate across cultural and historical contexts.

(b) Conduct comparative analyses across cultural and biblical contexts by identifying shared leadership principles, such as resilience and ethical integrity, in different traditions. This can involve studying leadership models from African matriarchal systems, Asian familial hierarchies, or indigenous community structures alongside biblical figures like Ruth, Deborah, and Esther. Mburu (2021: 22–24) and Gill (2022: 219) emphasize the importance of a hermeneutical approach that engages cultural narratives and their intersections with scriptural leadership themes. They advocate for contextual analysis, community involvement, and interpretive methods that honour both tradition and lived experience. Diko (2024: 5–6) complements this by encouraging the use of interdisciplinary frameworks drawing from oral traditions, literary analysis, and community-based inquiry to better understand and apply leadership lessons from biblical figures like Ruth in modern cultural contexts.

### 6.5.2 Expanding Afro-centric hermeneutics

Further research should:

(a) Deepen the application of Afro-centric frameworks to biblical texts by employing interdisciplinary methodologies, including cultural anthropology, historical analysis, and theological hermeneutics. Scholars like Iheanacho (2021:6819), Oduyoye (2001:102-105), and Mburu (2019:78-80) suggest leveraging oral traditions, African proverbs, and communal leadership models to contextualize biblical narratives. This approach can be implemented by fostering collaborative research networks that bring together theologians, cultural historians, and sociologists to reinterpret texts through Afro-centric lenses. Additionally, workshops and seminars focused on applying these frameworks to teaching and preaching can further embed Afro-centric perspectives in academic and ecclesiastical contexts.

(b) Investigate the intersection of African culture and biblical hermeneutics by incorporating methodologies such as comparative cultural analysis, oral history research, and theological interpretation rooted in African traditions. For instance, exploring how African communal values, such as Ubuntu, align with biblical themes of community and mutual care can provide rich insights. Iheanacho (2021:6819) suggests examining African proverbs and their parallels in biblical wisdom literature, while Miller (2009:45-46) highlights the

importance of oral traditions in understanding biblical storytelling. Collaborative workshops with theologians and cultural historians can further deepen this investigation, fostering a nuanced understanding of how African cultural frameworks enrich biblical hermeneutics.

### 6.5.3 Interdisciplinary approaches

Future interdisciplinary research could:

- (a) Blend theology, gender studies, and leadership theory by adopting interdisciplinary methodologies. Scholars such as Masenya (2013:1-9) advocate for integrating theological hermeneutics with contemporary leadership theories, emphasizing the intersectionality of gender and cultural studies. For example, conducting case studies that juxtapose biblical narratives with modern leadership challenges can provide actionable insights. Workshops and collaborative research efforts between theologians, sociologists, and leadership experts, can further enrich this field by fostering innovation and diverse perspectives. Additionally, Iheanacho (2021:6819) suggests utilizing faith-based community feedback to ground theoretical models in practical application.
- (b) Explore new methodologies for analysing leadership in biblical texts by integrating tools such as narrative criticism, socio-rhetorical analysis, and intercultural hermeneutics. Using narrative criticism to uncover the relational dynamics in biblical stories is essential for interpreting deeper leadership structures in texts like Ruth. Kroesbergen (2020: 3–5) employs socio-rhetorical analysis to examine how leadership functions within both cultural and spiritual settings, particularly in framing moral authority and communal influence through the spirit world. Additionally, Kanyoro (2002: 10–12) highlights the value of intercultural hermeneutics from African contexts for connecting ancient leadership paradigms to modern realities. Practical implementation can involve interdisciplinary collaboration among theologians, sociologists, and historians to develop enriched and culturally grounded leadership models.

## 6.6 Final reflections

### 6.6.1 Leadership as a transformational journey

Ruth's narrative is a testament to the transformative power of leadership. Her journey from a marginalised widow to a figure of historical and theological significance underscores the potential of resilience, vision, and ethical decision-making. From her decision to leave Moab and pledge loyalty to Naomi and her God (Ruth 1:16-17), Ruth demonstrates an ability to reimagine her circumstances and step into a future shaped by faith and determination. By gleaning in Boaz's field (Ruth 2:2-3), she takes proactive steps to provide for herself and Naomi, embodying both humility and initiative. Furthermore, Ruth's bold approach to Boaz (Ruth 3:1-11) highlights her strategic acumen and understanding of cultural norms, ensuring a redemptive outcome for her family.

This transformational journey illustrates key leadership traits: resilience in the face of adversity, the vision to seek opportunities, and the courage to act ethically and strategically. Scholars such as Haddox (2020:142-144) emphasize that transformative leadership often emerges in contexts of vulnerability and challenge, where individuals like Ruth redefine their roles and impact through adaptive strategies. Similarly, Mburu (2019:95-97) notes that Ruth's reliance on communal and relational intelligence strengthens her leadership impact, demonstrating the importance of collaboration and trust.

The transformative nature of Ruth's leadership extends beyond her immediate circumstances. As the great-grandmother of King David, her actions shape Israel's history, illustrating how seemingly small, faithful acts of leadership can have enduring consequences. This legacy underscores the importance of ethical leadership grounded in faith and community values. Moreover, Ruth's story inspires modern applications, particularly for women leaders navigating systemic barriers. Ruth's journey serves as a model for leveraging relational networks and cultural intelligence to achieve transformative outcomes.

Leadership, as portrayed in Ruth's story, is not about dominance or authority but about service, integrity, and the ability to inspire change. Her narrative invites contemporary leaders to embrace transformational leadership as a journey of faith, vision, and resilience, offering timeless lessons for navigating complex and challenging contexts.

## 6.6.2 Legacy of Ruth for contemporary leadership

Ruth remains an enduring model of leadership, offering timeless perspectives for navigating adversity and inspiring others. Her story affirms the relevance of biblical narratives in shaping modern leadership paradigms, particularly for women.

Ruth's legacy lies in her ability to lead without a formal title—a concept I call “Dispositional Leadership.” This form of leadership emerges from character, actions, and influence rather than positional authority. Through her daily decisions, Ruth demonstrates that leadership is not confined to roles but is embedded in how one lives. From her loyalty to Naomi (Ruth 1:16-17) to her initiative in gleaning (Ruth 2:2-3) and her bold approach to Boaz (Ruth 3:1-11), Ruth exemplifies the power of dispositional leadership.

Her actions are a testament to the impact of consistency, humility, and a heart committed to serving others. Ruth's life illustrates that true leaders inspire through their behaviour, even in mundane or challenging circumstances. Her example has profoundly influenced my understanding of leadership, teaching me that one's disposition—how they treat others, their resilience in adversity, and their ability to see opportunities in hardship—defines their leadership.

Ruth's dispositional leadership also provides a framework for modern contexts. Leadership rooted in everyday actions fosters trust and community, Northouse (2021:227-229) highlights that relational transparency a leader's willingness to share core feelings, motives, and inclinations openly is essential for building long-term relational influence. By fostering trust through this kind of integrity, leaders establish a foundation that sustains follower confidence and moral authority over time. Ruth's story underscores the value of relational intelligence, showing that leaders must prioritize empathy and collaboration. Her legacy reminds us that leadership can emerge in unassuming ways and that small, faithful acts often yield the greatest impact.

Ruth's example encourages a leadership model focused on servanthood and authenticity. It challenges leaders to prioritize others' well-being and to lead through actions that align with ethical and faith-driven values. Ruth's journey has inspired what I now call “Dispositional Leadership,” a leadership approach characterised by influence through daily actions rather than formal authority.

Using Mburu's hermeneutical framework, I see Ruth as a figure who embodies communal leadership. Her decision to stay with Naomi (Ruth 1:16-17) exemplifies an unwavering

commitment to relationships, a cornerstone of dispositional leadership. This act, analysed through an Afro-centric lens, highlights the value of solidarity and mutual support in leadership. Mburu (2019:45-47) notes that such leadership fosters resilience within communities, emphasizing how relational intelligence can redefine leadership in challenging contexts.

Kouzes and Posner's leadership principles further illuminate Ruth's dispositional leadership. For instance, her choice to glean in Boaz's field (Ruth 2:2-3) demonstrates her willingness to "Model the Way" by taking initiative and working diligently to support Naomi. Ruth's strategic approach to Boaz on the threshing floor (Ruth 3:1-11) reflects the principle of "Inspiring a Shared Vision," as she seeks not only personal security but a redemptive future for Naomi's family. Kouzes and Posner (2017:56-58) emphasize that transformational leaders inspire others by aligning personal goals with broader communal values.

Ruth's legacy as a dispositional leader resonates deeply with me because it illustrates that impactful leadership is rooted in character and everyday actions. Her story reminds that leadership is not about offices or positions but about creating a positive influence through consistent integrity and service. Ruth's life demonstrates the power of ethical decision-making, humility, and strategic foresight, even in ordinary circumstances.

This understanding has profoundly shaped my view of leadership. Dispositional leadership, as modelled by Ruth, challenges traditional hierarchical perspectives. Instead, it encourages leaders to lead from wherever they are, using the resources and relationships at their disposal.

By integrating Mburu's communal values and Kouzes and Posner's principles, I have developed a leadership philosophy that prioritizes authenticity, servanthood, and adaptability. Ruth's journey inspires us to see leadership as a transformational journey one rooted in faith, resilience, and purpose. Her example challenges all of us to embrace leadership as a disposition, a way of life that transcends roles and inspires others through everyday actions.

## 6.7 Hypothesis

This research posits that an Afro-centric hermeneutical analysis of the Book of Ruth, applying Mburu's African contextual hermeneutics alongside Kouzes and Posner's exemplary leadership framework, reveals that dispositional leadership—exemplified through Ruth's character—transcends formal titles or positions. Ruth's embodiment of resilience, initiative, strategic adaptability, courage, humility, integrity, and relational intelligence empowered her

within the patriarchal context of ancient Israel, enabling her not only to navigate systemic societal constraints but also to influence her community significantly. Thus, the narrative of Ruth provides practical, ethical, and culturally resonant leadership strategies that are applicable and empowering for contemporary African women navigating leadership within similar patriarchal contexts.

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# UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

## Declaration of originality and generative AI use

This form must be completed and submitted with every assignment, project, report, or thesis.

### SECTION A: STUDENT INFORMATION AND DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

Name and Surname	<b>JOHANN LUFACE</b>
Student Number	<b>U26522846</b>
Student Signature	
Module Code	<b>PhD specialising in Old Testament Studies-06265042</b>  <b>OW980</b>
Assignment Title	<b>An Afro-centric female leadership importation from the Book of Ruth within a patriarchal context</b>

I declare that:

1. I understand what plagiarism is and am aware of the University's policy in this regard.
2. This submission is my own original work. Where the work of others has been used (from any source), it has been properly acknowledged and referenced in accordance with academic standards.
3. I have not used work previously submitted by another student or any other person as my own.
4. I have not allowed and will not allow anyone to copy my work with the intention of passing it off as their own.

### SECTION B: GENERATIVE AI USE DECLARATION

Q1. AI Declaration [tick one box]

1. Yes  I used Generative Artificial Intelligence in the current assignment
2.  I did not use any Gen AI for the current assignment

Ensure you are permitted to use generative AI by reading the instructions for your assignment or assessment or by consulting your study guide. Failure to follow the instructions regarding using generative AI for your assignment constitutes academic dishonesty. Examples of generative AI include ChatGPT, Google's Gemini, Microsoft's Copilot, Claude, and Meta's Llama 3 AI integrated into WhatsApp and Facebook. If you selected option 1 in Q1, please continue to complete the rest of the form:

## Q2. Prompts Used

Paste or summarise all prompts and indicate their purpose:

Prompt	Aspect of Assignment
Find scholarly sources.	To gather Journals and Pdf, books
Generate a summary of the journal.	To gather information on journals.
Find this topic and writers.	Verify citation details.

## Q3. Type of Gen AI Usage

Brainstorming/Idea Generation	Scispace. Elicit,
Language Editing Suggestions	Grammarly
Feedback and Revision	Ebsco, Google scholar, Elicit
Explaining Complex Concepts	ChatGPT
Writing Coach	Grammarly (Free version)
Other (please specify)	

## Q4. Ethical Use

Write a brief paragraph explaining how you ensured the usage of Gen AI was aligned with the ethical and responsibility requirements of the University of Pretoria ([link](#)). Consider examples such as repurposing and reintegrating ideas generated by Gen AI with your own thoughts, integrating Gen AI ideas with other literature, critically evaluating Gen AI outputs, maintaining

transparency about Gen AI usage, enhancing your learning and ensuring comprehension despite using Gen AI, and personal development through using Gen AI as an assistant. If you directly used text or data generated by Gen AI, ensure it was cited appropriately.

To ensure alignment with the ethical and responsibility requirements of the University of Pretoria, I used Generative AI tools as assistants, not as substitutes for my academic thinking or authorship. All AI-generated content was critically evaluated and either repurposed, restructured, or reintegrated with my own analysis and voice. I cross-checked ideas generated by ChatGPT, SciSpace, and Elicit with scholarly literature and ensured that no AI tool produced unverified or uncredited claims. Where AI tools assisted with summarisation, editing, or rephrasing, I retained full academic control and comprehension. I also used Grammarly for grammar and style refinement and Google Scholar for source verification. I have been transparent about my AI usage and ensured that any ideas directly adapted from AI tools were cited or paraphrased in accordance with academic standards. This process not only enhanced my learning but also deepened my engagement with the subject matter, especially in refining theological and cultural insights relevant to my study.

Q5. Why Did You Use Gen AI?

I used AI tools to enhance the efficiency, clarity, and depth of my research process. Specifically, I leveraged AI for refining academic language, summarising complex ideas, identifying relevant literature, and generating comparative insights across theological and leadership frameworks. These tools supported my critical thinking without replacing it, helping me organise, evaluate, and articulate my arguments more effectively—especially in managing a large volume of interdisciplinary sources. AI served as an assistant to my scholarship, enabling me to focus on analysis, reflection, and personal engagement with the material.

**Student...Signature:**



**Date: 20 July 2025**