

NAOMI ON THE
CROSSROADS OF UMLAZI

2001

SALOME N. MAHLANGU

UNIVERSITY OF ZULULAND

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NAOMI ON THE CROSSROADS OF UMLAZI

SALOME N. MAHLANGU

(BA Hons)

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS IN BIBLICAL STUDIES

in the

Faculty of Theology

in the Department of

Bibliological Studies

at the

University of Zululand, Kwadlangezwa

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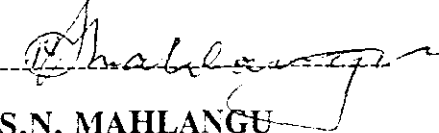
Supervisor : Prof. J.A. Loubser

Date submitted : September 2001

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to:

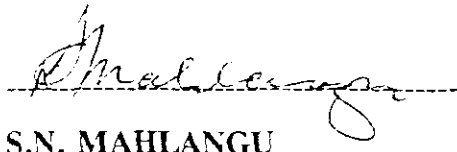
- my parents, for teaching and advising me how to cope with life;
- my husband R. Mahlangu who encouraged me and made many financial sacrifices in order to enable me to complete my studies; and
- lastly, my children, for their support and courage.



S.N. MAHLANGU

DECLARATION

I declare that *Naomi on the Crossroads of Umlazi*, an historical study of the cultural situation of the childless widow in the Ancient Israel *via-a-vis* to that of the childless widow in Umlazi, KwaZulu-Natal in the late 1990s, is my own work and that all sources quoted have been acknowledged by means of appropriate references.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'S.N. Mahlangu', is written over a horizontal dashed line.

S.N. MAHLANGU

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CHAPTER 1

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 PROPOSED TITLE

The title of this dissertation reads *Naomi on the Crossroads of Umlazi: A critical-historical study of the cultural situation of the childless widow in Ancient Israel vis-a-vis that of the childless widow in Umlazi, KwaZulu-Natal in the late 1990s.*

1.1.1 Proposed primary aim of this dissertation

According to religious, societal laws and traditions portrayed and explained especially in the Pentateuch (cf. *inter alia* Dt. 24:21) widows and especially childless widows were ostensibly relegated by society and the religious and societal laws to the lowest economic classes in the society. In fact, widows and orphans seemingly belonged to exactly the same category in the Israelite society, the financially helpless dependent upon the welfare and the care of relatives, neighbours, religious institutions and society as a whole.

However, it is the proposed aim of this dissertation to show that childless "widows" should not and cannot be equated to a powerless woman, not in Ancient Israel and not in the township of Umlazi of the late 1990s.

Also, as Naomi in the Book of Ruth had a Ruth to manipulate and to steer in the struggle for survival, it is the proposal of this study that all childless widows have a "Ruth" that they can use, manipulate and steer to satisfy their daily needs and to ensure a future for themselves. The question, however, is who is the Ruth of today's childless widow? Although the literature concerning the story of Ruth concentrates largely upon the way in which people and widows were treated

according to the traditions of Israel, this dissertation attempts to show that Naomi is one example of a widow who survived, despite the traditions prevalent at that time in Ancient Israel. Robin (1995:47) asserts in her commentary that the story of Ruth, provides an image of traditions amongst the people of this Ancient culture. For example, the harvest scene illustrates that men and women were monitored on a daily basis by the landlord.

Furthermore this study attempts to explore the "hidden" conditions under which childless widows of Israel lived and to relate this situation as depicted in the Book of Ruth to the contemporary conditions of childless widows in Black culture *per se*, but especially to that of the culture of the Umlazi Township. When Loader (1992:132) comments on childless widows, he states that these women can be expected to be destitute as they were regarded as helpless by society. This assumption must not be misconstrued to suggest that all childless widows were poor and Judith (in the Book of Judith) is an example of a woman who inherited enough money from her husband to support herself. Although it is clear that Naomi and Ruth were meant to depict an extreme pole of poverty, it also transpires from the Book of Ruth, that they did not rank among the average impoverished, childless widows. Even though they faced many challenges, they had land and they distinguished themselves, through their own endeavours, in overcoming some major obstacles that confronted them.

Therefore, I agree with Gottwald (in Loader, 1992:312), who attempts to show how Naomi realised that, in order to survive, she and Ruth had to make an appropriate decision concerning the future of Ruth. In other words, Naomi will provide for herself by means of her daughter-in-law. It would appear that the task of making decisions is difficult for someone in Naomi's position as she is treated as a "decision-receiver" rather than a "decision-maker". It is therefore, the premise of this dissertation that in order to survive, Naomi was forced to change her own role in society and to become the decision-maker of the family. Notable

in this story is Naomi and Ruth who converted themselves to the new religion, e.g. that of their in-laws; yet they never doubted that God is on their side and that He would provide solutions to their problems. Naomi's experience of her widowhood was an act of Yahweh and therefore all the answers to life lay squarely in the hands of God.

1.1.2 Methodology

To attempt to achieve the abovementioned proposed aims, a historical-critical study is made of the Book of Ruth with the focus on Naomi as the prime maker of events. Furthermore, an historical-critical study is made of the position of the childless widow in Zulu culture. The results of these two envisaged separate yet inter-dependent studies is compared primarily to discover whether a childless widow could and can only survive with the aid of the other or another woman. The reasoning behind this proposed hypothesis is that Naomi's survival depends upon her skilful manipulation of the physical assets and attributes of her childless widowed daughter-in-law, Ruth, the Moabitess.

While many scholars like Loader (1992) regard the Book of Ruth as a prime object for feminist scholarship, this dissertation notes the arguments, but will not side with any scholar or school of thought. The only use of genderism will be when *attempting to determine the plight in which childless widows find themselves today in the Umlazi society*. In order to assess this, it is essential to identify similarities and differences between Ruth and Naomi and the childless widows of Umlazi.

It is very important to note that the phenomenon of childless widows is analyzed and used to reach appropriate conclusions, because the conditions which were experienced by childless widows in Moab and Judah are, to an extent, similar to the situation currently encountered by childless women in Umlazi Township. There are common identifiable features in both groups of women. Most important

is the reversal in roles from "decision-receivers" to decision-"makers" and being provided for to providing for oneself as well as one's dependants. While a widow is universally understood to indicate a woman whose husband died, childlessness does not of necessity imply a woman who has never given birth to a child only; hence the concept is subject to many divergent interpretations. Nonetheless, for the purpose of this study, the concept "childlessness" refers to a woman who mysteriously lost her children without tracing their whereabouts. In other words, she has no way of locating the present domicile of her child or children.

1.1.3 Approaches to the Old Testament

Most students of the Old Testament are well aware of the variety of different approaches to the contents of the Book of Ruth. It is particularly a favourite with Biblical genderists (Ruether, 1974; Loader, 1992; Russel, 1974; Fiorenza, 1986).

Even though this dissertation accepts and acknowledges the contributions of genderists, it intends to approach the Book of Ruth from the viewpoint that Naomi used her knowledge of the traditions and habits of her own people coupled to her position as mother-in-law, to manipulate Ruth's youth, sex and her femininity and beauty as an effective means to secure their future as well as the continuation of the family name of the House of Elimelech.

The postulate of this dissertation is that the Book of Ruth be approached from the viewpoint that Naomi is the prime mover of the events portrayed. Notwithstanding the fact that even though the book bears her name, the role of Ruth according to the hypothesis of this dissertation is that she is a highly manipulated person. In other words, it postulates that Naomi could only ensure financial security for both of them by the wilful manipulation and exploitation of Ruth.

According to Nel (1999) leadership functions on two levels, visible and invisible.

The invisible leader is the one with the most power, but also the one with a well-defined goal and the ability to manipulate another person or party into a visible yet subordinate role. In the case of Naomi and Ruth, the latter is the visible manipulated person, while Naomi is the virtually invisible yet powerful leader.

1.1.4 Pilot study already undertaken

The relevant Biblical material i.e. (the Book of Ruth, Deuteronomy, Leviticus and Numbers) and extra-Biblical material relevant to this topic has already been studied. Questionnaires have been distributed to childless widows in Umlazi Township. Different classes of society and also different church groups were targeted. These questionnaires have been collected and data processed.

During the course of the research, it has been noticed that for most widows especially childless widows survival is exceptionally difficult. This study does not attempt to provide answers to this problem. However, it attempts to show how these women cope with realities by providing a "Ruth" for themselves. Ruth is therefore seen as a powerful instrument in the hands of women struggling for survival. However, this Ruth is not of necessity a female. The postulate is that this Ruth is that instrument that eventually provides security and survival.

All findings with reference to the childless widow in the Ancient Near East have been compared with the information gleaned from questionnaires.

1.1.5 Sources

For the purpose of this study, different translations of the Old Testament have been used. Furthermore concordances, thesauruses, dictionaries - general and theological text - will be used in addition to subject-related books and articles. A comprehensive list of all material used appears at the end of this dissertation.

1.1.6 Abbreviations

A complete list of all abbreviations used in this dissertation appears on the last page.

1.1.7 Proposed outline of the study

This dissertation consists of 6 chapters, a summary, a table of contents and a bibliography. The first chapter comprises the introduction, while the sixth and final chapter comprises a summary of the findings of the dissertation. Chapter two attempts to reconstruct the historical background, the origin and the dating of the Book of Ruth. Furthermore, the Biblical background and the position of widows in the Old Testament are examined and overviewed. Thereafter the role and meaning of personal and place names used by the author in this narrative are also examined *vis-a-vis* name giving in Zulu Culture.

Chapter three deals with traditions and cultures in Ancient Israel compared with those of African Black cultures in the society of Umlazi during the 1990s. Specific traditions identified in the Book of Ruth will be compared with similar traditions among the Zulu people.

Chapter four deals with the role and fate of a childless widow in the Old Testament or ancient Near East and that of the African Zulu culture. The purpose of this chapter is to determine how powerless widows really were during ancient times. The pertinent question is: should the Book of Ruth be positioned with Feminist or Liberation scholarship? Thereafter, the role and the position of a daughter-in-law in a typical Ancient Israelite family is compared with that of a typical African Black family of Umlazi Township.

Lastly the relationship between a mother-in-law and a daughter-in-law in a typical Israelite family is compared with that of the African Black society of Umlazi Township.

Chapter five deals with the development and the use of the questionnaire. The terms research and questionnaire are thereby defined. Furthermore, this chapter contains the results of the research conducted in Umlazi Township. The viewpoint of this dissertation is that Naomi could only survive by using and manipulating Ruth. Because there is a tendency to regard the Book of Ruth as gender-related literature, especially by Christian scholars, an effort is made in this dissertation to acknowledge the feminist viewpoint of scholars, but not to concentrate on it. The focus of the dissertation is on a specific class of women in society and not on women *per se*.

Chapter six contains the summary of findings and the conclusion.

CHAPTER 2

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE BOOK OF RUTH

2.1 GENERAL

2.1.1 Introduction

This chapter deals with and presents in detail, the historical background, the origin and the dating of the Book of Ruth. In this respect various scholarly perspectives will be used to explain the origin and dating of the narrative. In the course of this chapter, the Biblical background of the Book of Ruth and the position of widows in the Old Testament will be briefly discussed at large. Furthermore the location of the narrative will also be discussed. An essential part of this chapter will be an analysis, the survey and significance of personal and place names including the relevance of the narrative.

Loader (1992:1) points out that the Book of Ruth forms part of the Five Scrolls, i.e. Ruth, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations and Esther. It is traditionally read at the Jewish festival - the Feast of Weeks, Shavuoth or Pentecost since the eighth Century AD or CE. Gray (1967:388) like Loader (1992:78) speaks of the traditional reading of the Book of Ruth during Shavuoth since the twelfth Century A.D. and regards the Book as appropriate to the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost) celebrated at the end of the wheat harvest.

2.1.2 Origin and dating of the Book of Ruth

2.1.3 Introduction

Although the introductory verse places the narrative within a specific historical period, there are a number of indications that the Book of Ruth was not written

during the "days of the Judges". Old traditions like the "exchange of sandals" (Rt 3:8-9; Loader, 1992:78) have obviously fallen in disuse and it has become so obsolete that the author finds it necessary to explain the meaning. There is also the matter of the concluding verses of the book with its genealogies going well beyond the "days of the Judges". Therefore in order to understand clearly the historical background, the origin and the possible dating of the Book of Ruth, it is necessary to reflect on the various perspectives postulated by different scholars whose views are briefly outlined below. These scholars are Föhrer (1976), Loader (1992), Gray (1967), Efthimiades (1991), Morris (1974), and Soggin (1980).

2.1.4 Scholarship

(a) **Föhrer**

Föhrer (1976:251) avers that when attempting to date the Book of Ruth one should distinguish between the different possible stages in its formation. According to Föhrer, the intellectual content of this book, its linguistic character as well as its placing in the division "Writings" of the Hebrew canon, all suggest a post-exilic dating. He prefers a date between the close of the fifth century and the beginning of the fourth century. However, he rejects Haller's (1965) as well as Rudolph's (1962) dating of the late monarchical period and also the period of the Solomonic enlightenment suggested by Gerleman (cf. Föhrer, 1976:251).

(b) **Loader**

Loader (1992:6-7) finds it difficult to date the narrative with certainty. However, according to some scholars which are not mentioned, the book is post-exilic. They point to expressions which would, according to them, only be possible at this stage, such as the idea of the "time of the Judges" Rt. (1:1) which is supposed to have originated only after the period of the Deteoronomic movement (thus after the sixth century BCE). Other scholars think that the humane spirit that radiates

from the book bears witness to a much earlier time, when the 'Solomonic Enlightenment' (a period marked by an openness of mind during the reign of Solomon in the tenth century BCE) made such a spirit possible. Some scholars find the language usage typical of the early monarchy, while others dismiss this by claiming that it only concerns conscious archaisms. The lack of concern about David's Moabite blood can be considered as a late phenomenon *viz* as criticism of the prohibition of mixed marriages enforced by Ezra and Nehemiah (cf. Ezr. 10; Neh. 13:22-29).

Loader (1992:7) argues that since the genealogy of Ruth 4:18-22 is secondary the story itself must be earlier. The genealogy is probably pre-Deuteronomic, because it contradicts the Deuteronomic view about the fathering of the first son from a Levirate marriage (Boaz, and not Mahlon, is seen as the father of Obed, cf. Dt. 25:5). According to this information or argument Loader (1992:7) prefers a date earlier than the seventh century BCE.

(c) **Gray**

Gray (1967:398) suggests that the Book of Ruth follows on the Book of the Judges because of the setting of the story in those days i.e. according to Ruth 1:1 when the Judges ruled. Gray (1967:398) also avers that the fact that the opening words were taken at face-value, can be seen in the Babylonian Talmud (Baba Bathra 14b) where it is argued that Samuel wrote the book. Furthermore, he refers to scholars like Wright, Gerleman, Fichtner and Lamparter who all contend for a comparatively early date. Other scholars like Oetti and Driver (in Gray, 1967:398) argue for a date during the monarchy. In the LXX (Septuagint) the Book of Ruth is placed among the historical books, immediately after the Judges. Gerleman (in Morris, 1974:230) also avers that Ruth bears close relation to the historical books. For support of his point of view, Gray (1967:398-400) refers to Gunkel (1933), Gressmann (1922), Rudolph (1962), Haller and Herteberg (1965) who favour a date in the latter part of the monarchy. However, there does appear

to be an accumulation of evidence for a comparatively late date (cf. Gray, 1967:399) especially as traditions like that pertaining to the *go'el* and the Levirate law appear to be no longer in use or well-known. It would appear as if the Book of Ruth consciously adapts traditions in the J source, *inter alia* the stories concerning Rebecca and Tamar (Gray, 1967:400) (cf. also Gn. 14:67 and 38:6 respectively). It is possible that this could have been done deliberately to create an atmosphere of authenticity as far as the historical setting is concerned.

(d) **Eissfeldt**

Eissfeldt (1966:595) does not reject or contradict any presuppositions of other scholars concerning the origin of the Book of Ruth. However, he identifies a spirit of tolerance and universalism. He argues that its closest Old Testament parallel is the Book of Jonah. Furthermore, he suggests that the Book of Ruth should be considered as a protest against the rigorist policy of (Neh. 13:23-25) and (Ez. 10). Based on these arguments, he suggests that this book should be dated in the late exilic to early post-exilic period or perhaps even later. As far as this premise is concerned Gray (1967:400) avers that he does not concur with this view, because of the liberal tone that in his view is related to the practical issues of the time and that it is more relevant to the post-exilic period than to any other period during Old Testament times.

(e) **Efthimiades**

From the perspective of Efthimiades (1991:62) the Book of Ruth is located within the period of the Judges (Rt. 1:1). Efthimiades (in Lubbetzak, 1995:62) postulates that the Book of Ruth is an Ancient Hebrew document that has undergone a number of revisions that undoubtedly affected its interpretation. The final compilation possibly took place during the exilic or post-exilic period for a variety of reasons, for instance as a counter-action to Nehemiah and Ezra's mixed marriages policies.

(f) **Morris**

Quite correctly Morris (1974:229) points out that the author of the book of Ruth is unknown. Even though there is a Rabbinic tradition that Samuel composed this narrative (Talmud, Baba Bathra 14b), the tradition is late and does not appear to be something based on evidence. However, Morris (1974:229) further argues that, the fact that this narrative is found in the section "Writings" or Ketubim in the Hebrew canon, points to a date later than the prophetic books. He (Morris, 1974:230) fails to mention which prophetic books and also to provide a convincing answer. He also fails to explain what he means by "later than" the prophetic books. However, the Book of Ruth remains questionable. The question is: should it be interpreted as monarchical exilic or post-exilic? And if we accept a post-exilic date, should we not perhaps look at the Book of Ruth as a reaction to Ezra's and Nehemiah's forceful destruction of family structures in order to cleanse the Israelite people ethnically?

Morris (1974:235) further states that most scholars prefer a date between 450 and 250 BC. The earlier part of this period is favoured by those who are of the opinion that the book was written to oppose the prohibition of mixed marriages (cf. Neh. 13:23 ff). Scholars like *inter alia* Edwald and Koning (in Morris, 1974:239) favour the exilic period while others like Jouon, Oesterly, Robinson and Pfeiffer, favour the post-exilic period. He (Morris, 1974:234) correctly argues that, due to lack of firm evidence, it is impossible to be dogmatic. But the language, the knowledge (or lack) of certain early customs and the general atmosphere of the book seemingly point to a date during the early monarchy.

(g) **Soggin**

Soggin (1983:395) dates the Book of Ruth in the post-exile period, but he does not exclude the use of earlier material. He (Soggin, 1983:396) agrees with Föhrer (1976:251) concerning a possible date beyond the fifth or fourth centuries.

However, that does not mean that the memory of the earlier customs e.g. the village tribunal at the city gate, were not preserved.

2.1.5 Conclusion

Although different scholars hold divergent opinions concerning the origin of the Book of Ruth, the views of Föhrer (1976:251-252) and Soggin (1983:395) are understandably the most appropriate ones, due to their ability to shed light on the historical origin of the Book of Ruth. In concurrence with their views, it is the premise of this dissertation that the content of the Book of Ruth points to a post-exilic dating approximately the close of the fifth to the fourth century. This is supported by the linguistic character of the book and its position in the third division of the canon. Quiet correctly, Soggin (1983:395) speaks of symbolic names of all four characters e.g. Ruth means "companion" or "friend" and she became friendly to her mother-in-law Naomi when she returned with her to Bethlehem. Orpah means "disloyal" and she became disloyal to her mother-in-law Naomi when she turned her back and returned to her home-town.

Naomi means "pleasantness" as she proved herself to her two daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah. Boaz means "strength". A strong and powerful man who was able to accommodate two desperate women from Moab i.e. Naomi and Ruth.

The practice prescribed in Deut. 25:9 is quoted in 4:7 as a feature of the past.

2.2 THE BIBLICAL BACKGROUND OF THE BOOK OF RUTH

2.2.1 General

Since the origin and the historical background of the Book of Ruth have been discussed it is also necessary to compare and explore different views from various biblical scholars on the biblical background and the position of widows as well as childless widows in the Old Testament.

2.2.2 The Biblical background of the Book of Ruth

2.2.3 Introduction

The Book of Ruth is one of the most important narratives in the Old Testament. Scholars like Föhrer (1976), Lasor *et al.* (1985), La Cocque (1990), Loader (1992), and Bellis (1985) give different views about the biblical background of the Book of Ruth.

According to Föhrer (1976:249, *et al.*), the Book of Ruth is a small narrative which takes its name from one of the three figures that play the major role in it, i.e. Ruth. Biblically, the book belongs to the third part of the Hebrew canon, the "Writings", although its canonicity was once in doubt, as can be seen from Talmud Baba/Bathra 14b and Megilla 7a. It was later used as a festival scroll for the Feast of Weeks, for example, the festival of the wheat harvest. Since it purports to narrate a story from the period of the Judges, the LXX and other translations placed it after the Book of the Judges.

Lasor *et al.* (1985:611) concur with Föhrer in that the book is named after its principal character Ruth the Moabite who had married into the family of Elimelech, Judahite from Bethlehem.

According to Bellis (1985:206), in the Old Testament, the stories of Ruth, Esther, Susanna and Judith convey the most liberating messages for women of any of the stories on women. Bellis further speaks of subversive points made in these narratives.

Ruth

The story of Ruth and Naomi is characterised as a sweet story of loyalty and tragedy turned into triumph (Lasor *et al.*, 1985:611). It is the story of Naomi

whose husband and two sons die while they are living away from their Israelite homeland in Moab. It is also the story of Ruth, one of Naomi's two daughters-in-law, who decides to return to Israel with Naomi (Ruth 1).

In Judah, Ruth meets Boaz, a relative of Naomi as she gleans in his field, and he praises her for her loyalty to Naomi (Ruth 2). Ruth 3 describes Naomi's plan for Ruth to present herself to Boaz where he is sleeping and Ruth's execution of the plan. Boaz again praises her, but this time for choosing him rather than a young man. In Ruth 4, Boaz works out the final arrangements for redeeming Naomi's field and marrying Ruth. A son named Obed is born to Boaz and Ruth. He becomes the grandfather of King David (Bellis, 1985:206; Rt 4:12).

Phyllis Tribble was the first feminist Hebrew Bible scholar to offer an interpretation of Ruth. She sees the story of Ruth as that of women, loyal to each other, struggling to survive in and transform a patriarchal world. On the other end of the feminist spectrum, Esther Fuchs believes that Ruth and Naomi are biblical heroines because they voluntarily and actively support the patriarchal institution of the Levirate which ensures the patriarchal lineage of the deceased father (Bellis, 1985:207).

It is the assumption of this dissertation that a Moabite woman becomes the hero of the story. The law of the levirate is applied to her. This law allows an Israelite widow without heirs to mate with her deceased husband's brother to produce an heir. The custom was intended to preserve Israelite families and property.

Part of the subversive effect of the Book of Ruth comes from the parallels between it and the story of Tamar and Judah (Gen. 38). Ruth is the new Tamar. The unmarried man who forfeits his rights when he does not agree to redeem Naomi's field and marry Ruth (Ruth 4:1-6) corresponds to Shelah in Gen. 38 and the third son whom Judah withholds from Tamar.

This dissertation therefore concurs with Bellis (1985:208) who claims that there is a heroine in the story. Ruth's role brings Naomi back to life. Without Ruth, Naomi would be a widow without support, without property (at least for all practical purposes), with *goél* in life ("call me Marah, Bitter", she says on her way back to Bethlehem).

Rudolph in La Cocque (1990:89) supports this view, he states: "The book of Ruth does not make an objective point. It says that without the Moabitess there would have been no greatest and most celebrated king of Israel, prototype of the Messiah. That is, without the Moabitess, history would be like a wadi whose waters have dried up. Ruth furthermore, was not just a passive instrument for the preservation of the ancestral line of David, she was a beacon of *hesed* (faith, loyalty) for Israel, a woman to rank with the matriarchs of the nation (La Cocque, 1990:89)".

According to Loader (1992:3) the story can be characterised as a novelette and as such, can be compared to the stories of Joseph (Gen. 37, 39-50), and Esther. A novelette is a work of fiction that may or may not be based on real historical events, in which a basic premise is described in narrative form. Scholars differ on the interpretation of the details and the message of the story. Most scholars however agree that we have here a masterpiece of narrative art. In this respect the most important characteristics are:

1. Typical of a novelette is that there is a crisis, a turning point and a culmination in the story of the book of Ruth - e.g. the introduction or "prehistory" (1:1-5) tells of a crisis in the form of a famine in Bethlehem and the result of Elimelech's attempt to escape it by emigrating to Moab with his family.
2. The turning point is when Naomi's daughters-in-law decide to do something about their plight (Rt 2:1-3).

3. The culmination of the story follows when the influential Bethlehemite, Boaz, succeeds in obtaining both Ruth as his wife and the family property (Rt 4:9-10).

2.2.4 Overview of the Book of Ruth

Since the dissertation is primarily based on the Book of Ruth, it is necessary to give an overview of the Book.

Rt 1:1-6 Emigration of a family from Bethlehem to Moab. The man's name is Elimelech while his wife is Naomi. They had two sons Mahlon and Chilion. Unfortunately the father Elimelech dies. Marriage of the two sons to Moabite women; death of the two sons; the mother Naomi remains a childless widow with her two daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah (Rt 1:6).

Rt 1:7-22 Return of Naomi to Bethlehem with her daughter-in-law Ruth. "Wherever you go I will go, your God will be my God, wherever you die I will die and there I will be buried", Ruth refers to her mother-in-law Naomi. However Orpah, the second daughter-in-law remains behind in Moab with her family.

Rt 2 Boaz a wealthy relative of Ruth's husband is attracted to the diligent and virtuous Ruth as she is reaping grain in his fields.

Rt 3 Ruth's mother-in-law advises her to go to Boaz at night and lie at his feet, to remind him of his duty as a relative to redeem her by marriage and urge him to perform it.

Rt 4:1-17 Another relative relinquishes his claim to Ruth, Boaz marries her, and a son named Obed is born to them.

Rt 4:18-22 Genealogy of David (Föhrer, 1976:249). In concurrence with Föhrer (1976:249), Morris (1974:409) also refers to the book of Ruth as a little book or rather the 'perfect book' told in simple and direct language. It deals with the period of the Judges but it forms a contrast with the book of that name. While the book of the Judges tells of war and strife, the book of Ruth is a tale of two women. It relates of how one of them Naomi, underwent much hardship, but eventually won through to achieve security. It also tells how Ruth attached herself firmly to her mother-in-law's God and how she received the blessing of that God. This book also deals with how God is active and faithful in the affairs of humanity. He works for a purpose and blesses all that trust Him (Morris, 1974:409).

Essentially, this dissertation purports that the book of Ruth could be described as an historical narrative embroidered with love and faith. The author places it against a certain biblical background, in a specific period namely that of the Judges. While this book appears as a short, simple, unembroidered and straightforward story of the woes and mishaps of two women in Bethlehem, tied together by a marriage bond, the narrative poses many problems. It also provides us with many clues concerning an issue about which very little is known, namely the fate and destiny of the childless widow. Written in narrative form, it is also studied in feminist or liberation theology. The main perspective is that the two women, both widowed and childless, fought and struggled for their future. This happened after the episode which took place in Moab, viz. the death of their husbands. Faced with such a condition, they decided to fight their way out to secure a future for themselves.

When Naomi decided to return to Bethlehem her home-town, Ruth took the initiative to return with her (Rt 1:16-17, Loader, 1992:1:34). It should be mentioned that none of the scholars are able to provide information on Ruth's parents or relatives. However most scholars agree that Ruth was a Moabitess who

worshipped her own God in her own country, viz. Chemosh. When she followed Naomi to Judea, she decided to leave her home-town Moab and her parents including her own God. In other words, she adopted the religion of her in-laws.

This was proved from the statement she made to her mother-in-law Naomi. "Wherever you go I will go; your God will be my God; wherever you die I will die and there I will be buried" (Rt 1:16-17; Loader, 1992:34; Morris, 1974:261). This was a commitment of someone who had true love for the man and the family she married. There was love between the two parties i.e. Naomi and Ruth. When Ruth married her husband Mahlon, she did not love only her husband, but she had love for the whole family including Naomi's God. On the other hand Naomi loved Ruth in spite of her being a Moabitess a member of a 'nation of shame'.

Pardes (1992:102) stresses that the Book of Ruth is the only biblical text in which the word 'love' is used to define a relationship between two women. Once such love is represented, an intriguing re-writing of Genesis takes place. From the very opening of the book 'clinging' between women determines the movement of the plot. Ruth chooses to 'cling' to her mother-in-law Naomi as a sign of rejecting the option of returning to Moab to seek a new husband. In this case, to 'cling' means to recapture a primary unity, to return to a time when man and woman were 'literally' one flesh e.g. the story of creation (Gn. 2:24) when God created women out of Adam's body.

2.2.5 The purpose of the Book of Ruth

From a biblical point of view, it is important to mention a few points suggested by some of the scholars concerning the purpose of the book.

According to Morris (1974:239) various suggestions are made as to the purpose of the book.

- (a) **Universalism.** Some scholars suggest that it was written to counter exclusionist tendencies. There were Jews who thought so highly of the privileged position of their nation that they regarded all other people as outside the sphere of God's care and interest. To counter such tendencies, this book was written with its heroine a Moabitess, and a Moabitess who became an ancestress of the great King David. This view is usually made specific by suggesting that the book is a protest against the legislation of Ezra and Nehemiahs on the prohibiting of foreign marriages (Morris, 1974:239).
- (b) **Friendship.** The book of Ruth is a book about friendship. The devotion that Ruth shows to Naomi and the care that Naomi exercises towards Ruth, run through the book. It is worth mentioning that all three of the principal characters of the book are depicted as being mindful of their obligations to the family. Ruth does not forget her duty to Naomi and consequently to Elimelech. Naomi seeks out a marriage that will preserve the name of her deceased husband, while Boaz marries the Moabitess to raise up or to perpetuate the family name (Morris, 1974:241).
- (c) **The Genealogy of David.** The book of Ruth closes with a genealogy running back to Perez the son of Judah. It is suggested that the book was written to supply the missing genealogy. There is no intention to give a picture of the family life of pious Israelites in the time of the Judges from a civil and a religious point of view, but rather to give a biographical sketch of the pious ancestors of David the King (Morris, 1974:241).
- (d) **Levirate Marriage.** Morris (1974:242) states that the story deals with the plights of the childless widow. According to the Levirate law of the Israelites, the brother of the deceased man is required to marry the widow. The first child of the marriage is reckoned as the child of the deceased,

whose name is thus perpetuated (Dt 25:5-10). Therefore it is suggested that this book is written to inculcate the importance of carrying out this duty.

- (e) **Sovereignty of God.** Sovereignty of God refers to something between God and humanity. The implication throughout is that God is watching over His people, and that He brings to pass what is good. Therefore the book is a book about God. He rules over all and brings blessings to those who trust Him (Morris, 1974:242).

Vosloo (1992:69) avers that the Ruth narrative is not merely an idyllic story. It is a purposeful fore-runner to the advent of Israel's model King, David.

Furthermore, it illustrates how God works in the lives of people. The purpose of the book is to place David's Moabite descendant in its true perspective. The fact that his great-grandmother was a Moabite in no way disqualified him from becoming King.

The narrative proves furthermore that David's ancestors were not mere nomads from a foreign country, but that they had a legal right to their inherited property which was kept in the family in the correct way.

2.3 THE POSITION OF WIDOWS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

2.3.1 Definition of the term 'widow'

According to the Oxford Dictionary (1989:919), the term 'widow' is understood to indicate a woman whose husband has died either by natural death, accident or

due to severe sickness. Biblical scholars throughout the world concur with this definition. There appears to be consensus amongst writers regarding the meaning of the word 'widow' even though the meaning does differ slightly in the language used by different biblical scholars. Below are definitions of terms according to various writers.

(a) Widow

- Cowie (1989:460) - 'a woman whose husband has died and who has not married again'. This definition appears to be acceptable in most communities, including Umlazi community and is therefore relevant for the purpose of this study.
- Longman (1984:804) - this definition conforms to that of Cowie, but is broader in saying 'a widow is a woman whose husband spends much time away from her pursuing a specific activity'. This metaphorical interpretation does not comply with the purpose of this study.
- Thurston (1989:9) - *Almanah*, the Hebrew word for widow has its root 'Alem' which means 'unable to speak'. It is related to an Aramaic word meaning 'to be in pain'. A widow was thus 'the silent one'. *Almanah* was used especially to refer to the widow as helpless or exposed to oppression and harsh treatment. Widowhood meant 'silence'. He defines a widow as 'a woman who has lost her husband by death, has not remarried and has thereby acquired certain legal rights of inheritance from her husband's estate'. He distinguishes two different groups of widows:
 - (i) Real widows - these are women who have lost their husbands and have no other means of support. They have to be registered as real widows.

(ii) Widows with support - these widows are independent, as they own property inherited from their deceased husbands. They are also subdivided into two groups:

- * Boujours (Rich)
- * Middle working-class - these widows are usually professional and therefore independent. They might also receive assistance from their children.

(b) Childlessness

This is the state of having no children, either as a result of being biologically barren or having lost children through death. It can also be due to the choice not to have children. This term is applied to men as well as to women (Oxford Dictionary, 1989:138).

(c) Childless widow

According to Herbert (in Brenner, 1994:144) - 'a childless widow is called the *Almatu*. The concept refers to a woman who has lost her husband and has no children to take care of her. This term can be applied to Naomi and Ruth as well as to a woman in the same situation in African culture.

Umfelokazi ongenazingane is the traditional African term applied to a 'childless widow'. This is literally translated as a woman whose husband has ceased to be and she has no children to take care of her. Within the context of African culture a childless widow refers to a woman who has been unable to conceive or to one who has lost her husband and children through death (Oxford Dictionary, 1989:191).

2.3.2 The position of widows in the Old Testament

According to De Vaux (1980:28) the position of widows calls for some special remarks. A vow made by the wife continued to bind her after her husband's death (Nb 30:10). However, by the Levirate law, a childless widow could continue as part of her husband's family. If there were no brothers-in-law, she could remarry outside the family (Rt 1:9); spending the interval before her second marriage with her own father and mother (Rt 1:8; Gn. 38:11; cf Lev 22:13). The story of Tamar however shows that even during this period her father-in-law retained authority over her (Gn. 38:11; cf. Lv 22:13). The widow wore mourning clothes, at least for some time (Gn. 38:14; 2 S14:2; Judg 8:5; 10:3). However, the period of mourning is known to stretch over a period of more than three years. Judith was an exception (Judg 8:4).

De Vaux (1980:28) further states that Judith was a rich widow. In general, widows, especially those without children to support, were in a piteous condition (1 Ki 17:8-15; 2 Ki 4:1-7). They were therefore protected by religious law and commended to the charity of the people together with orphans and resident aliens; in fact all those who no longer had a family to assist them (Ex 22:21; and emphatically in Dt 10:18; 24:17-21; 26:12-13; 27:19; cf Is 1:17; Jr 22:3; note in contrast Isaiah, 1:23; Jr. 7:6; cf. also Jb 29:13). God himself is their protector, according to Psalms 146:9.

Thurston (1989:9) concurs with the above statement. It fits Naomi, Ruth and also Tamar (Gn. 38:7-30). Tamar (Gn. 38:7-30) was the widow of Er, Juda's first-born. Due to ill-health Er died and Judah instructed Onan his second son to marry Tamar according to the Levirate Law (Dt 25:5-10). Because Onan knew that the child born from that marriage would belong to the deceased, he spilled his seed on the ground so that there should be no child. Unfortunately Onan also died.

According to the Old Testament childless widows as well as widows of the Ancient Near East were poor and were depended on their in-laws, marriage (Gn. 38:24; Ex. 22:21; 1 Ki 17:8-15; 2 K 4:1-7). The lives and problems encountered by these widows can be compared to the childless widows of the South African Black society.

2.3.3 Widows and Inheritance

In Israel, widows, after the death of their husbands, were not allowed to inherit anything belonging to their husbands. The eldest son, if any, brother, or the nearest relative of the deceased could inherit property belonging to the deceased. The most important duty expected from the brother-in-law is to take the obligation of marrying the widow of the deceased in order to retain the name of his brother.

Loader (1992:90) and Gray (1967:422) state that it is a known fact or rather a tradition of the Israelites that the first child from this type of union i.e. according to the Levirate law belongs to the deceased. The case of Ruth and Boaz is an example of this type of marriage, even though Boaz was not the nearest relative of Naomi's husband. Another good example is that of Tamar and her brothers-in-law Er and Onan. This arrangement of a Levirate marriage was made by Tamar's father-in-law, Judah, in order to retain the family's name (Gn. 38:6-10).

2.3.4 Widows and prophets in the Old Testament

(a) The widow of Zarephath

In 1 Kings 17:8-24, we meet the poor widow of Zarephath who is unnamed. She feeds Elijah. Elijah in turn performs miracles on her behalf. God tells Elijah to go to Zarephath to live, because He has asked a certain widow there to feed Elijah (1 Ki 17:8-9). Elijah follows the instructions and finds a woman gathering sticks

at the city gates. Elijah asks for some water and also something to eat (1 Ki 17:10-11). The woman tells Elijah that all she has is just enough for her and her son to make one last meal before they die.

Elijah asks the woman to first make him a little cake and then to make one for her son and herself. Then he tells her that her jar of meal and flask of oil will not run out until God sends more rain (1 Ki 17:13-14). She does as requested. The jar and the flask remained full for many days (1 Ki 17:15-16).

Then her son became so ill that he was unable to breathe. The woman remonstrated with Elijah saying "What have you against me, O man of God? You have come to me to bring my sin to remembrance and to cause death to my son!" (1 Ki 17:17-18). Elijah takes the boy to the upper chamber. He lays him on his bed and prays for him to God. He stretches himself out over the child three times and prays some more (Ki 17:19-21). Then Elijah takes him downstairs and presents him to his mother, who exclaims, "Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the Lord really speaks through you!" (1 Ki, 17:23-24).

The last exclamation is the reason why the story is included in the Bible. The story is of great importance and interest because it tells us about the position of widows in the Old Testament.

Paul Hiebert (in Bellis 1985:170) analyses the economic situation of biblical widows. She notes that widows are often classed with orphans and sojourners as the most vulnerable members of Israelite society. Widows are defined differently in Hebrew society than in modern western society. However, according to Hiebert, a biblical widow is a woman whose husband is dead and who has no living sons to support her. Although the widow of Zarephath has a son, he is too young to support her, so she still fits the definition.

(b) An unnamed widow

In the Old Testament it appears as if widows were desperate, abused and in need of help. An unnamed widow seeks help and gets Elisha's help because her creditors are about to take her two children as slaves (2 Ki 4:1-7). Elisha performs a miracle similar to Elijah's miracle for the widow of Zarephath. Elisha asks her what she has in the house. She answers that she has only a jar of oil. He tells her to get as many jars as she can from neighbours and pour oil into them (2 Ki 4:5-6). Elisha tells her to sell the oil to pay for her debts, and live on what is left over (2 Ki 4:7).

Johanna van Wijk-Bos (in Bellis, 1985:172) speaks of the woman's need to name her pain and express it. She suggests that feminists also need to give voice and to name to their pain as a first step in changing. She also notes that the Hebrew verb *s'q* is more than a cry of pain. It implies a protest and a reproach; it is a cry of distress under oppression. It implies Elisha's responsibility toward her. However, Elisha's response is positive. He first listens, although listening to cries of pain and protest is not easy. Elisha asks the widow, what he can do for her. Next, he asks the widow what resources she has. To be able to help he uses the resources the woman has viz. a jar of oil.

It is therefore the premise of this dissertation that during the Old Testament times widows were desperate and in need of help even if they had children. They were always in pain with no-one to support them. At times, children were treated as slaves as in the case of the unnamed widow who cried to the prophet Elisha and asked him to prevent the creditors from taking her two sons (2 Ki 4:1).

2.3.5 Childless Widows in the Old Testament

Most biblical scholars in the Old Testament agree that a childless widow is a woman who has lost her husband and children by death or one who has no children to support her.

Bellis (1985:206) speaks of subversive women in subversive books. He avers that in the Old Testament, the stories of Ruth, Esther, Susanna and Judith convey the most liberating messages for women of any of the stories of women. Most readers miss the subversive points being made in these stories. Therefore, the stories must be seen in a new light. The story of Ruth is the first to be looked at.

(i) Ruth

- ▶ Most biblical scholars agree to the fact that the story of Ruth and Naomi is a story of loyalty and tragedy turned into triumph (Loader, 1992:33); Gray, 1967:407).
- ▶ It is a story of Naomi, whose husband and two sons die while they are living away from their Israelite homeland in Moab. It is also the story of Ruth, one of Naomi's two daughters-in-law, who decides to return to Israel with Naomi (Ruth 1). Ruth is a Moabitess who previously worshipped her own god Chemosh and transformed to Naomi's God after her marriage to Mahlon an Ephrathite (Judges 10:6; 11:24).
- ▶ Ruth meets Boaz, a relative of Naomi, as she gleans in his field and he praises her for her loyalty to Naomi (Ruth 2).
- ▶ Ruth 3 describes Naomi's plan for Ruth to present herself to Boaz where he is sleeping and Ruth's execution of the plan.
- ▶ Boaz again praises her for choosing him rather than a younger man.
- ▶ In Ruth 4, the final chapter, Boaz works out the legal arrangements for redeeming a field of Naomi's and marrying Ruth.
- ▶ A son Obed is born, who becomes the grandfather of King David according to the story (Rt 4:13-14).

According to La Cocque (in Bellis, 1985:207) Ruth's primary subversiveness lies in her ethnic identity. Ruth is a Moabite (Rt 1:4; 22; 2:2, 6, 21; 4:5,10). She is from Moab, one of Israel's most hated enemies.

The law of the Levirate is applied to the Moabite. This law allows an Israelite widow without heirs to mate with her deceased husband's brother to produce an heir. The custom is intended to preserve Israelite families and property. Here it is applied to the Moabite daughter-in-law of an Israelite widow. Ruth is praised for her *hesed*, her steadfast love and loyalty.

Part of the subversive effect of the book of Ruth comes from the parallel between it and the story of Tamar and Judah (Gn. 38). Ruth is the new Tamar. The unnamed man who forfeits his rights when he does not agree to redeem Naomi's field and marry Ruth (Rt 4:1-6) corresponds to Shelah in Gn 38 and the third son whom Judah withholds from Tamar. La Cocque further writes "Thus, by artistic transpositions, Tamar the Canaanite becomes Ruth the Moabite, and Judah's sons or Judah himself become 'so and so' the unnamed kinsman who refuses to buy Naomi's field. The symbolism is transparent, the post-exilic Judahites of the exclusivist party in Jerusalem are put on a par with Shelah or with Onan. They sterilise history" (La Cocque, 1985:207-208).

The story of Ruth is a story with profound subversive intent, which will be especially pleasing to both feminists and ethnic minorities.

Mieke Bal (in Bellis, 1985:208) analyses the story of Ruth from a literary perspective. Her approach is not inconsistent with La Cocque's. Rather, they complement each other. She challenges the traditional reading in which Boaz is seen as the generous, rich man who allows the poor women another chance at life.

Bal's reading turns on Boaz's response to Ruth at the threshing floor in Ruth 3:10. He said, "may you be blessed by the Lord, my daughter, this last instance of your loyalty (*hesed*) is better than the first; you have not gone after young men, whether

poor or rich". Boaz is not just a nice old man who helps poor young Ruth out of a bad situation. Although he is an old man, he is pleased to be chosen by an attractive, younger woman (Bellis, 1985:208).

In Ruth 4:11-12, the people together with the elders, blessed the marriage of Ruth to Boaz and wish her to be like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel. To Boaz they say "May you produce children in Ephrathah and bestow a name in Bethlehem, and through the children that the Lord will give you by this young woman, may your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah."

Rachel's childlessness and Leah's lack of access to her husband are solved when the two of them work together. Leah gives Rachel the mandrakes and Rachel gives Leah access to Jacob. In so doing, they break out of the narrow situation in which their father and husband have placed them. Thus Bal sees their story as subversive.

The second comparison is between Boaz and Perez, the son of Judah and Tamar. Bal states: As a son of his mother, he (Perez) is a transgressor of rules. His name means 'break': breaker of rules. When Boaz goes to court at the city gate, he identifies with Perez, the transgressor of rules, son and grandson of Judah, who is like himself a mediator. Boaz becomes the mediator between generations, sexes, classes, and people between law and justice. In other words, Boaz bends the rules to establish a higher justice (Bellis, 1985:209).

It is the premise of this dissertation that the book of Ruth is not only subversive of the law which excludes Moabites from participation in the Israelite community. By setting a justice higher than law and higher than charity, it implies a whole different way of determining religious right. It is subversive of every narrow reading of biblical law, especially biblical laws that oppress.

(ii) Esther

The story of Esther, like that of Ruth, is of historical fiction. The book is named after its female protagonist.

King Xerxes banishes Queen Vashti when she refuses to display herself before his guests at a banquet (Esther 1). After much preparation, Esther is chosen as a new queen (Esther 2).

Haman has been made the King's deputy and Mordecai Esther's uncle refuses to bow down to Haman. Haman then decides to get rid of all the Jews (Esther 3).

Mordecai advises Esther to report to the King the plan made by Haman (Esther 4:13-14). In Esther 5, Esther puts on her royal robes and stands at the inner court of the king's palace. She is welcomed by the King and Esther invites him and Haman to a banquet that evening.

In Esther 7, the second banquet sees Haman's downfall. Esther tells the king how Haman has planned the destruction of her people. Haman is sentenced to die on the same gallows that he has built for Mordecai.

La Cocque (in Bellis, 1985:214) sees the subversiveness in the book of Esther in its implication that the fate of Israel lies with the fate of the dispersed Jews. He makes several points that are important to us. One of them has to do with humour in the story. There is here an accumulation of grotesque excesses. Vashti is treated as a sex object to be displayed or summarily discarded when she refuses to comply with an outrageous demand that she plays the star of a burlesque.

(iii) Susanna and Judith

According to Bellis (1985:217), the stories of Susanna and Judith are not included in the Hebrew Bible or in the Protestant canon. They are part of the Catholic Bible. He further states that the reasons for the exclusion of these stories are unknown because they are similar to Ruth and Esther, in that they share the same literary genres and their religio-political standards are no more subversive.

Although these stories have been excluded from the Hebrew canon, this dissertation concurs with Bellis (1985:217) when he argues that they should be considered by Jews, Protestants and Catholics because they are both wonderful stories that read well. He further states that Judith is the more feminist of the two stories, but Susanna is high drama and should be missed. He (Bellis, 1985:217) describes Susanna as a virtuous Jew from a well-to-do family. She is very beautiful. He argues for the exclusion of her name in the Hebrew Bible. Scholars like La Cocque and Craven in Bellis (1985:218) give their interpretation of the two biblical women:

(i) Susanna

La Cocque in Bellis (1985:218) avers that Susanna is the hero of the story, but her role is sometimes considered to be secondary to that of Daniel. When Susanna is attacked by the elders, the villains of the story, Daniel becomes a hero, by saving her life through the instructions of God.

However, Susanna appears to be a heroine who is loyal and honest to herself and to God. When she is trapped, she does not despair, she cries out with a loud voice and says "O God, you know what is secret and are aware of all things before they come to be, you know that these men have given false evidence against me and now I am to die, though I have done none of the wicked things that they have charged against me". The Lord heard her cry just as she was being led off to execution. God sent a young lad, Daniel (vv:44-45) to save her life.

In concurrence with La Cocque, it is clear that Susanna is also a heroine who believes fully in God. She should be credited just like Daniel. Craven supports this version and believes that to miss Susanna's central role in the story is a mistake.

(b) Judith

Bellis (1985:219) avers that Judith is a much longer and more complex story than Susanna and one in which Judith is unquestionably the heroine. Unlike Naomi and Ruth, Judith is a rich widow (Judg. 8:7). Her wealth indicates that she is a wide manager like the good wife promised in Proverbs 31.

La Cocque in Bellis (1985:221) states that Judith is subversive by showing that a woman can take the lead and become the model of faith and martyrdom while 'elders' recoil in the holes of their complacency. As a rich widow (Judg. 8:7) she never remarries. She is independent and in need of no male protector. She uses both traditional feminine wiles as well as more masculine strategies. She "announces a new era". Judith has in common with Ruth self-sacrifice. Their sacrifices result in better lives for those whom they love.

According to Craven in Bellis (1985:220) Judith and her canonical sisters Esther and Ruth conserve ancient religious truth and preserve the life of the covenant community in ways suitable to their times. In Ruth and Judith, women bind together for mutual support. Ruth has the counsel of Naomi, Judith has the help of her favourable maid. Ruth, Ester and Judith teach that certain conventions may be forced to give way so that tradition can be faithfully preserved.

It is the premise of this dissertation that all four women mentioned above were heroes for liberation. They liberated not only themselves but also other people and the nation as a whole.

Ruth, Esther, Susanna and Judith are strong, virtuous women. They are role models, not just for women but for people of faith, regardless of gender.

2.4 THE LOCATIONS OF THE NARRATIVE

2.4.1 Bethlehem in Judah

Although there are different locations mentioned in the narrative, it primarily unfolds within Bethlehem in Judah. Gray (1967:408) and Loader (1992:19) distinguish the town Bethlehem from another town of the same name in the northern territory of Zebulun (Josh, 19:15). Bethlehem, 'The House of Bread' in Hebrew was Naomi's home-town. Naomi and Ruth arrived in Bethlehem during barley harvest-time from Moab (Rt. 1:23); Loader, 1992:3; Gray, 1967:412).

2.4.2 Ephrata

Ephrata means a 'fruitful corn area'. Ephrata is the district in which Bethlehem is situated (Mic. 5:2; Gen. 35:16-19; Gray, 1967:409). It was probably so named after the tribe that originally settled there. According to Gray (1967:408) Ephrata denotes Ephramite in Judges 12:5 and 1 Samuel 1:1, 17, 12. The whole family of Naomi were Ephrathites who migrated to Moab because of a severe famine in Ephrata (Rt. 1:1-2).

2.4.3 Moab

According to Judges 13:28, 29 Moab is 'a country situated near Bethlehem-Judah'. Ruth, Naomi's daughter-in-law was a Moabitess. Although the family migrated to Moab long before the onset of the narrative, the main location of the narrative should be seen as in Bethlehem Judah and not in Moab. In concurrence with scholars like Loader (1992), Gray (1967), Föhrer (1976) and the Biblical text this view is accepted.

2.5 THE CHOICE OF PERSONAL AND PLACE NAMES IN THE NARRATIVE

2.5.1 Introduction

Generally speaking it would appear as if in Ancient Israel, the use of personal and place names are symbolic of past events and instructive of future phenomena. In other words while a name could imply an illustration of historical events, it could also signal future expectation(s). It would appear as if the naming exercise was always associated with an identity with the meaning of/or the remembrance of significant events or with the expectations of further happenings.

(a) Examples

The names of Jacob's sons tell a similar story (Gn. 29:30-31). Rachel, dying in childbirth called her son Ben-Oni, "Son of Sorrow". Jacob changed this name of ill-omen to Benjamin "son of my right hand" (Gn. 35:18).

The names of Elimelech's sons Mahlon and Chilion predict something about one's future, viz., Mahlon (to be sick and barren). Of course he was a sickly man and died without having children (Rt. 1:5 Loader, 1992:18). The name 'Chilion' means (to be weak or to die early). This was proved when he died early after his marriage to Orpah without having children (Rt. 1:5; Loader, 1992:18).

However, Morris (1974:249), concurs with Loader (1992:22) when he avers that 'Mahlon' may have been derived from the root 'hlh' (to be sickly or weak). The name 'Chilion' is a name with an unpleasant ring. It signifies something like 'failing', 'pining', or even 'annihilation'.

In the Book of Ruth, the mother-in-law Naomi 'pleasant one' is pleasant to her daughter-in-law Ruth who then becomes a companion of her mother-in-law (Rt. 1:16-19).

2.5.2 Importance of the meaning of Personal and Place Names in the narrative

To the question whether the meanings of names used are of any importance to the relevance of the narrative, it is the premise of this dissertation that the meanings of names and places are appropriate and certainly very relevant to the unfolding of the plot. It is therefore not surprising to see how the characters of the individuals are attuned to the meaning of their names.

(a) **Examples**

(i) *Elimelech* 'God is King'

Morris (1974:249) avers that 'Elimelech' meaning 'God is King' or even 'my God is King' was thus named because he was the head of the household.

According to Loader (1992:22) the authentic proper name *Elimelech* is derived from the word for 'God' and the divine name *mlk* known from Ugarit and Ammon (1 Ki11:5). Originally, it would have meant My God is *mlk*. The word 'mlk' could be translated as "king" and the name Elimelech could therefore be translated as My God is king.

(ii) **Naomi** (pleasantness)

Loader (1992:22) quite correctly points out that Naomi's name is the most pertinent to the narrative. In terms of her name, it almost seems wrong that God should have made her suffer so much by losing her husband and her two sons and thereafter, turning her into a childless widow - virtually reducing her to the most unfortunate of women with nobody to take care of her (Rt. 1:20-21).

Föhrer (1976:250); Gray (1967:406) and Loader (1992:22) concur that the name is derived from the root 'ncm' which means pleasantness, delightful. Similar examples are also found in Ugaritic and Amorite names. As far as the abovementioned scholars are concerned this name is of Hebrew origin.

(iii) **Mahlon and Chilion**

According to Gray (1967:406), the names of Mahlon and Chilion certainly suggest fiction rather than history. Loader (1992:22) translates the names of Mahlon and Chilion as follows:

(a) **Mahlon** 'to be sickly and barren'

The name is derived from the root "hly" which means to be sickly or from the root "mhl" meaning to be barren. The contention is therefore that because of his poor health Mahlon died childless (Loader, 1992:22).

(b) **Chilion** (to be at the end)

The name "Chilion" means to be weak and also to be at the end or to die early. Loader (1992:22) further avers that perhaps because Chilion was of a weak disposition, he was also barren and also died leaving his wife barren.

Morris (1974:249) concurs with Loader (1992:22) when he avers that Mahlon may have been derived from the root 'hlh' to be sickly or weak'. Chilion also has connotations such as 'failing', 'pinning' and even 'annihilation'. The name means "to be at the end" (Morris, 248-249). All these names are good Canaanite names.

(iv) Ruth 'companion or friend'

Loader (1992:22) avers that Ruth was loyal and faithful to her mother-in-law. According to Pardes (1992:102) Ruth proved her loyalty and faithfulness by clinging to her mother-in-law. She accepts the God of the Israelites as her God and claims to go wherever Naomi goes, to die wherever she dies and be buried where she is buried. In other words, she can be described as a faithful companion.

(v) Orpah 'to be disloyal'

In contrast to Ruth, the faithful companion, Orpah shows her disinterest and her lack of loyalty when she turns her back on her mother-in-law. According to Loader (1992:122-124) and Gray (1967:406) this serves as proof of her infidelity to her in-laws.

(vi) Boaz 'strong'

Apart from the Book of Ruth in the Old Testament, the name Boaz is also found in the description of Solomon's temple (1 Ki, 7:21). "Hiram placed these two bronze columns in front of the entrance of the Temple: the one on the south side was named Jachin, and the one on the north was named Boaz. The hilly-shaped bronze capitals were on top of the columns; and so the work on the columns was completed."

It is furthermore found in Chronicles' genealogical lists (1 Chr 2:5) and also in the genealogy of Jesus in the New Testament (Matt 1:5).

According to Gray (1967:406) the name Boaz is derived from the word Baal, meaning 'stronger'. Boaz could also be a conflation of 'Baal az.' According to the

narrative he was Elimelech's relative. He lived in Bethlehem, Judah, and was also the man Naomi selected to act as redeemer of the family property. By acting as a *goél* (Rt 3:10-13) Boaz lived up to the meaning of his name, not only because he saved the family property, but also because he provided a descendent.

2.5.3 Conclusion

It is very interesting to note that all names used in the narrative play a significant role, in that they signify a specific trait of the characters of the individuals.

Loader (1992:21) also argues that the writers have a split decision. Some scholars say the names have no meaning, while most writers like Morris say they do have symbolic significance. Thus Dickens (in Loader 1992:21) maintains that the names carry connotations and are effective. An excellent example of course, is that of Naomi who plays the most important role. She follows the meaning inherent to her name by being pleasant to her daughter-in-law, Ruth. Even when she applied the traditions of the Israelites like the Levirate Law and also used Ruth as an instrument to perpetuate the name of Mahlon, one can sense her pleasantness, and her amicability Dickens in Loader, 1992:21).

In this respect De Vaux (1980:43) and Loader (1992:20) point out that throughout the Ancient Near East, personal names play an important role. According to De Vaux (1980:43) the name is defined as the essence of a thing. To bestow a name upon anything is to know it and to know it is to have power over it. In the earthly paradise, when God allowed man to name all animals (Gn. 2:19) it was a sign that He put them under man's authority (cf. also (Gn. 1:28).

Because of historical events and geographical features associated with names, it is vital to know and analyze personal and place names. In ancient times, names

described the nature, location, characters and plight as well as the habits of people in a particular region. The name not only revealed the character and destiny of the bearer, or was a symbol fabricated through rough etymologies (De Vaux, 1980:43). An excellent example is found in the Book of Ruth where Naomi means 'pleasantness' while Ruth means 'faithful friend'. The narrative then goes on to highlight the characteristics of these two women that concur with the meaning of their names.

Loader (1992:20) agrees with De Vaux (1967:36) in that people were named according to their characters and features.

2.6 PERSONAL AND PLACE NAMES IN ZULU CULTURE

2.6.1 Introduction

This section focuses on the use of personal and place names with special attention and references to the meanings of the names and their relevance in the Zulu culture. Furthermore, for the purposes of this dissertation, it is essential to determine whether personal names in Zulu culture also elucidate particular characteristics of a specific person.

2.6.2 The use of personal and place names in Zulu

(a) General

The Zulu personal name is a link through time from birth until a person dies. He/she is remembered by his Zulu name and not by any other name.

According to Koopman (1986:46) names are divided into four basic categories:

- (a) *Igama lasekhaya* (Zulu personal name);
- (b) *Igama lesilungu* (European personal name);
- (c) *Isidlalisiso/Isangelo/Isifekethiso* (shortened forms, nick-names, pet names);
- (d) *Amagama amabutho* (regimental names); and
- (e) Koopman (1986:44) further states that the most important category is the first name because it is the name given by the parents. He also suggests that the Zulu personal name is different from all other names in that the name is the person. It is part of a person - virtually an extension of the physical body. For this reason, the name is subject to respect and also fear. The proper or improper use of a name could lead to practices like *Ukuhlomipha* 'to respect' but also witchcraft which it is believed, controls a person through a particular use of a name (Koopman, 1986:46).

It is also very interesting that one may only be addressed by one's personal name by the following: parents, older kin, grandparents, aunts and uncles, older brothers and sisters (Koopman, 1986:46). Zulu personal names usually have a specific meaning or it might contain a message of past events or it could indicate something that is expected to happen in future. An excellent example is *Bhekisizwe*, a Zulu male name meaning 'to take care of the nation'.

The custom of calling a child after the circumstances of its birth is prevalent among many peoples including present day Arabs (De Vaux, 1980:43). The child is registered with this name in a Court of Law, school and church for identification purposes.

A similar method or mode of naming is also practised in many African societies, particularly in Kwazulu-Natal and therefore also in Umlazi

Township. Traditions and traditional names are also important. Thus the name *Shaka* has become a symbol of unity among the Zulu people. The name has a cultural mobility factor, and the annual ceremony commemorating Shaka's day among the Zulus revives the feelings, beliefs and the spirit of one shared historical ancestry. The name reminds the Zulu people of their heroic founder. Furthermore, in Zulu families, the usage of personal names is tied up with diverse beliefs and traditions. For example, Kidd (in Krige, 1965:75) points out that a number of beliefs held by the Zulu people about twins show that even when one of the twins dies, the other is never regarded as quite ordinary. The child that survives is given no name until it is over sixteen years of age, while the child that has died is of course also not named. This is purely based on Zulu traditional beliefs which continue to shape and determine the usage of names.

On a different level, in Israel, a woman who has given birth to a daughter only would call the first daughter *Zonalech* 'irritating' and the eighth *Taman* 'enough'.

(c) The Clan Name

According to Krige (1965:74) the use of personal names in isiZulu plays a very important role. One of the reasons that he gives to substantiate his statement is that names in the Zulu culture help to identify people in the same clan group. This would then enable them to trace their ancestral lineage. Nowadays, this clan name is recognised by South African courts of Law and may appear on all official documents.

(d) The Role of the Father in Naming a Child

Krige (1965:74) avers that a Zulu father or grandfather has to consult other members of the family before naming a child. This is an important custom of the Zulus and it serves to show respect to the family.

(e) The Role of the Mother in Naming of a Child

Krige (1965:61) points out that every individual passes through a number of well-marked and important stages. The most important stages are those of birth and death because both stages hold the beginning and the end of the life of an individual respectively.

In Zulu culture, the status of the mother in name-giving is very important because she, as a mother, takes part in all the activities involved in bringing up a child according to traditional beliefs. In most cases, the mother is the one who stays at home with the child, teaching and giving all the necessary advice.

When Koopman (1986:47) speaks of the name-giving of a child in Zulu culture, he points out that the mother as well as the father are entitled to give a name to the infant. This means that both parents may have at least one name: one from the mother and another from the father.

Krige (1965:26) avers that in Zulu culture names of children could also refer to the mother's status, when she got married and joined the father's family. For example, the older brother in a family may be named *Zabala* which means that at the time the mother got married, the father's family was not in favour of her. They might have preferred another woman to marry their son. Should this happen, the status of the woman is not on par with other family members. The child's name therefore serves as an indication that the mother was not accepted by the father's family and his name will always serve as a reminder of his mother's unwanted status at the time of her marriage and that she was not welcomed to the family.

When the mother of a child makes an input to the name-giving, the name she gives is only recognised as a 'pet-name'. Therefore, if a baby girl is

born and the name given by the father is *Lungile*, the mother may give a pet-name like Joyce or Lungie. These pet-names are usually very easy to pronounce and are often preferred at schools, in church and by friends.

(f) The Use of Fancy, Pet or Foreign Names in Zulu Families

The use of fancy and/or foreign names is very common in Zulus. Zulu names are always of historical importance in the life of a sibling.

Krige (1965:25) states that a Zulu father who has chosen an English or a fancy name e.g. like Eunice for his daughter, indicates that it is a new name in the family. It is referred to as 'my name'. When it is recalled by grandchildren, they will remember that it was a name chosen by their grandfather because he liked it.

In concurrence with Krige, Koopman (1986:36) points out that 'fancy' names are generally referred to as 'pet' names, known in Zulu as *Isidlaliso* or *isangelo*. Even so, they are of great importance. These names are usually used by the mother and older siblings. The following are examples of pet and/or foreign names:

Siponono - Little treasure, a pet name given by a mother to her son.

Mfana Wami - My son, a pet name given by a father to his son.

Eunice - It is an English name used as a pet name (Krige, 1965:2).

(g) **Personal Names of childless widows in Zulu Culture**

With reference to my survey at Umlazi Township, it was discovered that personal names play an important role in Zulu culture especially with

respect to the names of those childless widows who were interviewed. Most of the widows preferred to use their English names because they regarded these names as being more convenient especially for address purposes.

Most childless widows preferred not to use their personal names or indigenous names which are usually considered as the first name. Instead they preferred to use their 'pet' names, the so-called colonial names often used by the then missionaries for convenience sake to establish Christian identity.

2.6.3 Place Names in Zulu Culture

The usage of place names in Zulu culture is a process that takes place in an historical context and ensure cultural and language continuity.

In the Zulu language the naming of places signifies the upkeep and the restoration of Zulu culture. Often the name of a place serves to conjure up images of hope, good fortune. It even serves as an expression of personal happiness.

Examples of place names are:

EThembeni - a church name in Umlazi which means 'a place of hope'.

Ezibeleni - a place situated outside Umlazi which means 'kindness in abundance'.

Zwelethu - a place situated in Umlazi Township meaning 'our land'.

A comparison of place names in the Book of Ruth in particular and Umlazi township, show a number of interesting similarities. According to Court (1988:178) in Zulu these names suggest a spectrum of conceptions that range from

the abstract. Some of these names which reflect this conception are *Mzimkulu* which means 'great place'. *Umlazi Township* that was named after the Umlazi River and *Umzimnyama* which means 'dark city'.

In Israel, Bethlehem in Judah (House of Bread) and Ephrata 'fertile corn region'. Moab, Ruth's home-town, is a place name as well as the name of a people. Since the name defines the essence of a person or a place, it reveals the character and also destiny of the bearer.

It would appear as if personal and place names played a significant role in Ancient Israel. De Vaux (1980:43) and Loader (1992:20) concur with this view. He, De Vaux further states that to bestow a name upon anything is to know it. Dickens in Loader (1992:22) maintains that names carry connotation, and also signify the character of a person. For example, in the Book of Ruth, childless widows like Naomi, Ruth and Orpah were named according to their characters.

In Zulu Culture, Koopman (1980:44) refers to the first personal name as the most important name from all other names because it is the name given by the parents. Nevertheless, in a research conducted at Umlazi Township, the childless widows of Umlazi preferred to use their second English names as reflected in their official documents. Although these women encountered serious problems, none of them decided to change their names as in the case of Naomi, who decided to change her name to 'Marah' in order to suit her condition.

2.6.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has thoroughly highlighted the historical background, the origin and the dating of the Book of Ruth as projected by various scholars such as Loader (1992), Föhrer (1976), Soggin (1983), Efthimiades (1991) and Gray (1967). In this respect, Föhrer (1976:251) prefers to date the book of Ruth between the close of the fifth and the beginning of the fourth centuries. He states that the intellectual content of the book, its linguistic character as well as the placing in the division 'Writings of the Hebrew Canon' all point to a post-exilic period. Most biblical scholars in Loader (1992:6-7) agree with Föhrer that the book is post-exilic. They make reference to expressions which according to them, can only be possible at a later stage, such as the idea of the time of the Judges (Rt 1:1) which is supposed to have originated only after the period of the Deteoronomic movement. This was shortly after the sixth century (BCE).

Soggin (1983:395) agrees with Föhrer (1976:251) concerning a possible date beyond the fifth or fourth centuries. He Soggin, also dates the book of Ruth in post-exilic period.

Gray (1967:398) pinpoints the setting of the study in the days when the judges ruled. He further states that the mere fact that the opening words were taken at face value can be seen in the Babylonian Talmud, where it is argued that Samuel wrote the Book. Efthimiades (1991) concurs with the view that the Book of Ruth is located within the period of the Judges (R1:1) and at the beginning of the monarchy (Rt 4:18-22).

Loader (1992:1) gives rather a different opinion than that of Föhrer, Gray and Soggin. He states that the Book of Ruth was thought to have its right place before

the Book of Psalms. Possibly to preface the so-called 'Psalms of David' with the genealogy of David (cf. Rt 4:17, 18-22).

One would easily come to a conclusion that the gist of the story of Ruth and Naomi is about honesty, loyalty and tragedy turned into triumph, Loader and Gray suggest. The story of Ruth and Naomi demonstrate a heroic relationship of two outstanding widows who championed the course of the struggle for survival, inspired and guided by mutual respect, honesty, loyalty and most importantly love for each other. For both Naomi and Ruth, the source of hope was the strong belief in "God" who was regarded as everything to them.

Central to this chapter, the biblical background of the Book of Ruth and the position of widows in the Old Testament have also been highlighted and regarded as important by biblical scholars.

The setting of the story of Ruth unfolded in the area of Bethlehem in Judah. Bethlehem, the House of Bread in Hebrew was the home-town of Naomi. Apparently names of places were also vital because they had meanings for instance Ephrata means 'fruitful corn area', that is the district in which Bethlehem is situated. Ephrata denotes Ephramite in Judges 12:5 and 1 Samuel 1:1, 17, 12 (Gray, 1967:408). Moab, where Ruth originally came from, is a country situated near Bethlehem-Judah.

In Ancient Israel, the use of personal and place names are symbolic of past events and insensitive of future phenomenon. This meaning of personal and place names was vital because it was related to the character of individuals, events and areas, as shown in this chapter for example. Naomi means pleasantness and she had gestures of being a pleasant person.

In Ancient Israel, childless widows experienced many problems as they were usually unemployed and their last resort was usually to follow the tradition of the

Levirate law as in the cast of Ruth and Boaz (Dt. 25:5 10) to perpetuate the name of the family of Naomi and Ruth.

In the course of a research conducted at Umlazi Township for the purposes of this dissertation it was discovered that personal and place names continue to play an important role in Zulu culture, especially as far as the names are concerned of certain of the childless widows who were interviewed.

CHAPTER 3

3 TRADITIONS AND CULTURES

3.1 TRADITION: WHAT IS TRADITION?

3.1.1 General

Traditions can be identified in many different ways. As many different scholars from different fields of research all hold divergent views about traditions when studying the phenomenon of tradition, it is essential always to distinguish the material content of a tradition and the traditional way of passing on or handing down the content.

3.2 SCHOLARSHIP

3.2.1 Canonici

According to Canonici (1996:2) the word 'tradition' originated from the Latin verb *tradere* meaning to hand down or to entrust something that already exists, to the community. Therefore, it combines what was achieved and learned in the past with what is newly discovered. Hence it is said to be gradually changing from time to time.

3.2.2 Vansina

Vansina (1980:143) has a similar view as Canonici (1996:2), namely, that tradition is the collective memory of a society or a nation which is explaining itself to itself. It is an integral part of society. In other words, tradition is continuously learned and handed over to the next generation. Nevertheless, in order to learn it, one has

to look back to the past with an aim of making references. Hence Vansina (1980:143) aptly states that tradition requires a consistent return to the sources. Furthermore, meanings of tradition can be understood through learning, listening, communicating and examining its performance or practice.

3.2.3 Knight

Knight (1990:4) defines tradition as anything in the heritage of the past that is delivered down to the present and that can contribute to the make-up of a new ethos. Perspective scholars like Loader (1992:11) and Knight (1990:17) approach tradition from various angles of Religion and Sociology. However, conceptualization of tradition by Biblical scholars differs from one field of specialization to another.

3.2.4 Russell

The Faith and Order study of the World Council of Churches on Tradition and Traditions completed in 1963, summarises an ecumenical consensus that distinguishes between 'tradition', 'traditions' and the 'Tradition'. In this report, 'tradition' refers to the total traditioning process that operates in human history and society. 'Traditions' refer to the patterns of church life such as confession, liturgies and politics that have developed in each confessional church group. The 'Tradition' refers to the worship of God as Supreme Being, as the omnipotent, omniscient creator, i.e. God of all human kind (F & O Study of the World Council of Churches, in Russell (1967:74-75).

Furthermore, Russell (1967:75) defines tradition as a basic anthropological category. In this sense it is understood as a structural element of human existence in which the living and evolving past call for commitment in shaping the human community in the present as well as the future. Russell's reference to

anthropological factors is vital and indispensable when attempting to explain tradition because anthropological factors are often overlooked by Biblical scholars.

Unlike other writers who in their analysis of traditions tend to down-play anthropological factors, Russell (1967:75) suggests that the anthropological aspects in tradition should be construed as forming structural elements of the existence of human kind. This means that one should take into account the link that exists between tradition and other anthropological factors.

3.2.5 E.M. van der Aardweg and E.D. van der Aardweg (1988:235)

The above two scholars define tradition as a collection of beliefs, rules, customs and conventions handed down from one generation to the next, usually said by word of mouth or by practice rather than through a written text.

3.2.6 Definition of tradition of this dissertation

It is the hypothesis of this dissertation that any tradition should be divided and judged according to material content as well as processes of transmission. This viewpoint concurs with that of Knight (1990:6) who identifies *traditio* as the process of transmission and *traditum* as the material or the content being handed down.

However, for the purpose of this dissertation the concept 'tradition' in the context of Biblical studies, will be understood as anything inherited from the past and delivered to the present and that could contribute in formulating new ideas or beliefs, and/or add to existing ideas, beliefs etc.

3.3 CULTURE

3.3.1 Introduction

Definitions of culture differ from one perspective to another. For the purpose of this dissertation, culture will be regarded as acquired behaviour embracing the whole of life.

3.3.2 Scholarship

3.3.3 Knight *et al.*

According to Knight *et al.* (1990:9), culture embraces the whole of life, because it is a design for living. It could be seen as a plan according to which society adapts itself to its social and ideational environment. In other words, what Luzbetak implies is that society is influenced by its surroundings and social circumstances.

Culture involves a learning process (Goodman & Wallace in Knight, 1990:9). Therefore culture is something learned by a group of human beings. Translated, this means that culture is the acquired behaviour of group, society, institution or family.

3.3.4 Mbiti

In 1976 at the Pan African Christian Leadership Assembly held in Nairobi, Prof. Mbiti (1977:26) in Knight (1990:10) defines culture as a human pattern of life created or established in response to man's environment. In other words, cultural behaviour is not biologically transmitted from one generation to another, but it must be learned by each succeeding generation. Therefore, cultural behaviour could best be described as the sum total of the learned behavioural patterns and attitudes of a given community.

It is important to note that acquired patterns and attitudes are always determined by traditions. In this respect, the Book of Ruth is a good example of the above especially as to the way and the extent Ruth, the Moabitess was influenced by the culture and therefore also the tradition of her mother-in-law Naomi. This is clearly demonstrated in Ruth 1:16-17 where Ruth clings to her mother-in-law on their return to Naomi's home-town Bethlehem in Judah. When Naomi sends her two daughters-in-law back to Moab, Ruth confesses to her complete immersion in the culture of her in-laws. In fact, she proclaims in her own words, that she would rather continue on the journey with Naomi than returning to her own people in Moab.

3.3.5 Conclusion

As has been indicated earlier, this dissertation concurs with the viewpoint of scholars like Luzbetak (1970:61) and Knight (1990:9) who postulate that culture embraces the whole of life, because it is a design for living. It should also be emphasised that there can be no culture without traditions and the embroideries of tradition.

3.4 THE ROLE OF TRADITIONS IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

3.4.1 Introduction

According to the Book of Ruth, various traditions concerning childless widows existed in Israelite society to ensure continuation of the family name of a deceased man without an heir. Compare *inter alia* Loader (1992:47) and Gray (1967:414-417).

Thurston (1989:9) avers that in Israel a widowed daughter-in-law was known as an Almatu or Almanah viz. a widow. She was expected to abide by the Levirate law and was to be 'a silent one', because she was regarded as being helpless and

in pain for her deceased husband. Through the Levirate law, provision was made for a childless widow who needed an heir, for the woman was not allowed to handle anything and everything belonging to her husband. In the case of Naomi and Ruth, both were childless widows, but the Levirate law served to perpetuate the family name of Naomi and Mahlon, thus also that of Naomi's husband Elimelech. The Levirate Law entails that a brother or the nearest male relative of the deceased would be required to marry the widow (cf also Gn 38; Dt 25:5-10) and he automatically inherited everything that belonged to the deceased (Loader, 1992:90; Gray, 1967:422).

Therefore the first male child born from that marriage always belonged to the deceased man who was not the biological father. Thus Obed carried Mahlon's name and not that of Boaz who was the biological father (Rt. 4:13; Gray, 1967:421 Loader 1992;71; Morris, 1974:304).

3.4.2 Traditions identified in the Book of Ruth

In the Book of Ruth, the following traditions can be identified. These traditions were used prior to the Levirate marriage between a childless widow and a male relative. Scholars like Loader (1992), Gray (1967), Morris (1974) and De Vaux (1967) concur with this view.

3.4.3 Assembly of the Elders at the City Gate

Prior to a Levirate marriage between a childless widow and a male relative of the deceased, at least ten elders assembled - usually at the City gate so as to act as witnesses to the marriage contract of the two. A good example is the marriage of Ruth and Boaz. Boaz took the initiative to follow the tradition of the Levirate Law, by marrying the childless widow Ruth. The assembly of ten elders was and still is a tradition of the Israelites (Loader, 1992:11; Gray, 1967:421-423; Morris,

1974:309). In modern Judaism an assembly of ten men (a *minyan*) is necessary to establish a new congregation.

3.4.4 Exchange of the sandals

The role of the removal of the sandal in contract-making was the sign that all parties agreed to the conditions of the contract. This would then also apply to a case like that of Ruth when the first in the line of kinsmen declined or refused to marry the widow of the deceased (Morris, 1974:304; Loader, 1992:71; Gray, 1967:421; Rt. 4:13). This was because he probably did not want to harm the inheritance of his other son (Vosloo, 1992:69), although there is no mention of any other children born to either Boaz or the unnamed relative.

3.4.5 Inheritance of property in Ancient Israel

Thurston (1989:9) points out that in Ancient Israel a widow had no right to handle property. As the so-called 'silent one' she was considered to be weak and helpless. A male heir would be required to perform such functions.

The story of Naomi and Ruth is an excellent example. Boaz as a relative of Elimelech, Naomi's husband, took on the obligation of marrying Ruth the Moabitess, in order to secure Naomi's and Ruth's future (Rt. 4:1'3); Loader, 1992:78; Gray, 1967:424).

3.4.6 Ruth and Boaz on the Threshing floor

According to the precepts of the Levirate Law, the proposed "brother" or kinsman-redeemer and the widow had to meet prior to the Levirate marriage or union, to allow the proposed "brother" the opportunity to decide for or against the proposed

transaction (cf. *inter alia* Loader, 1992:58). Naomi initiates this meeting by sending Ruth to the threshing floor belonging to Boaz (Rt. 3:1-4).

Ruth sleeps at the feet of Boaz with the hope that he would notice her. Ruth then uses the opportunity to explain her problem and the fact that they need a redeemer. Boaz accepts and indicates that he would follow the correct procedure and approach the first Levir (Loader, 1992:58; Vosloo, 1992:68; Rt. 3:12-13).

3.5 SCHOLARSHIP CONCERNING TRADITIONS

Scholars like Knight (1990:11-12) emphasise that traditions are categorised by some scholars. For instance Harrelson (in Knight, 1990:11-12) and Grelot (1967:7) categorise traditions as oral, core and the tradition of the Sacred Word.

3.5.1 Oral Tradition

Most scholars aver that traditions were originally transmitted and presented orally to the community.

3.5.2 The Core Tradition

The core tradition could be defined as the belief in Yahweh as the God of the Israelites. This tradition was and is well-known. It has been remembered and handed down from one generation to another since time immemorial. The best time to determine the content and value of the core tradition at a specific moment is by studying the history of that period.

In the content of this dissertation the core tradition is defined as the belief that Yahweh is the God of Naomi and Ruth in whom they place their trust, their faith and their belief. Therefore it is of the presuppositions of this dissertation that core

tradition is the most important tradition in the Book of Ruth. According to the narrative, Naomi and Ruth believed in Yahweh and also that he would solve their problems. Therefore, when Ruth committed herself to Naomi and expressed her acceptance of the cultural traditions and the religion of the Israelites, the inference is that she accepted the core tradition of the Israelites (Rt. 1:15; Loader, 1992:34; Gray, 1967:411).

3.5.3 The Sacred Word

As far as the Core Tradition is concerned, the traditions found in the Sacred Word concern God, people and land. These traditions refer to the relationship between the Creator-God and his creation. This includes the history of the Israelites. Israelites as a people as well as individual (Naomi) and even proselyte Ruth.

The manner in which Naomi attempted to provide for her own future and also for the preservation and continuation of the family name through Ruth, affords us a glimpse of all the various traditions concerning childless widows and kinsman-redeemers (cf. Dt 25:5-10; Thurston, 1989:13). Therefore quite rightly, Knight (1990:11) avers that traditions represent the life expressions of groups. It is the duty of the dead man's brother to marry the widow of his late brother (Dt. 25:5-10).

Krige (1965:168) further states that there is a tradition among the Zulus that when a widow is to be *ngenwad* (in other words when the widow enters into the new marital relationship) a feast is held and a public declaration is made to the effect that the woman is being *ngenwad* by her brother-in-law. From that moment she would be recognised as his wife for all practical purposes. However as in the Israelite Levirate Law, the resulting children will be considered to be the offspring of the deceased. The purpose of this tradition is to keep the widow in the family because of the *Lobola* that was previously paid for her when she first got married

to her deceased husband. The term *Lobola* refers to a number of cattle and/or the amount of money paid by the groom to the father of the bride (the woman he married). Among the Zulus including the *Ngunis*, a number of cattle usually eleven (11) depending on the condition of the bride is sent to her home as payment for *Lobola*.

During the *Ukungenwa* ceremony, Zulu beer is made and a beast is slaughtered to inform the ancestors of the new transaction.

3.5.4 Conclusion

Knight (1990:6) correctly avers that tradition links the present, past and the future in a discerning and a sagacious manner. He also stresses that tradition refers to: *Traditio*, i.e. the process of transmission and *Traditum*, i.e. the materials / content being handed down.

In concurrence with the above statement by Knight, it is therefore the premise of this dissertation that a tradition is a human custom moulded by the nature of social ethics and morals of communities that gradually unfolds, evolves and continues to form historical, cultural events and customary practices. Hence every nation and tribe has its own traditions and cultures passed on from one generation to another.

As a social construct, tradition comprises habits, truths, attitudes, perceptions and behaviour of a group of people of a community, but never an individual (Knight, 1990:13). It is always a group activity of a community. Although the main thrust of tradition is a belief of the people in their historical and past cultural experiences, it is neither conceptualised or operationalised in the same way by scholars. Russell (1967:75) prefers to explain tradition from an anthropological aspect construed as forming structural elements of the existence of human kind.

3.6 THE ROLE OF TRADITIONS IN ZULU CULTURE

3.6.1 General

In accordance with the abovementioned discussion, the role of tradition in Zulu culture can also be explained.

Traditions help to revive customary practices and at the same time reinforce the significance of values and beliefs of and in a society. It is important to note that there is a continuous interplay between culture and tradition in the sense that culture consists of traditional practices that in turn reinforce the culture.

The focus of this section will be on Zulu traditions concerning childless widows.

3.6.2 Zulu traditions regarding widows

(a) Ukungenwa

According to Krige (1965:168) in the Zulu culture the traditions concerning widows come into operation immediately upon the death of a husband. The most important of these traditions is that of *Ukungenwa*. This term means that a widow is expected to marry the husband's brother and this brother could be older or younger. The ceremony of *Ukungenwa* is comparable to that of the Levirate Law of the Israelites where the brother or nearest relative of the deceased marries the wife of the deceased brother.

The woman is to abide by the rules and stay with the people of that kraal and she may not leave that family. The closest relatives will also be expected to bless her to reward her pleasing behaviour. The beast slaughtered on this occasion is known as *Inkomo Yamahlambo* (the beast for informing the ancestors and cleaning up).

All this is done before any sexual intercourse may take place between the widow and the new *ngenwad* (married) husband (Krige, 1965:169). In the case of a widow wanting to remarry outside the family, negotiations take place, a beast is slaughtered to inform the ancestors and the new family pays *Lobola* to the brother of the deceased.

3.6.3 Ukusoma (Premarital external intercourse)

Generally *ukusoma* in Zulu culture is a romantic process that takes place between two lovers, viz. a female virgin and a male. This is done for a number of reasons: (i) to save the virginity of the girl; (ii) to avoid pregnancy until the girl gets married; (iii) to save the virgin's family name from being blamed for not guiding and instructing their daughter about the wrong of promiscuity during her childhood stage. It would appear as if this premarital external intercourse among the Zulus is equivalent to what happened on the threshing floor between Boaz and Ruth when Boaz asked Ruth to lie down and stay there till morning. Ruth lay there at his feet but she got up early to go according to the instruction of Boaz (Rt. 3:13-14).

(c) Ukuhlobonga

Krige (1965:105) speaks of *Ukuhlobonga* (to have external intercourse) when referring to the Zulu tradition of *ukusoma*. In other words *ukuhlobonga* is another name for *ukusoma*. However, *ukuhlobonga* in Zulu refers to a male having sex with a female irrespective of whether she is a virgin or not.

A young boy who has been accepted by a new lover (a virgin) asks for permission from *Amaqhikiza* (grown-up or matured virgins) to have external intercourse with his lover or girlfriend. The purpose of this tradition is to save the virginity of the girl because Zulu societal laws prohibit internal intercourse or vaginal penetration before marriage. Internal intercourse is only tolerated or allowed between people who have been properly betrothed or married. The KwaZulu King

Zwelithini is a good example of an elderly man who sticks to the Zulu Laws or Tradition.

It would appear as if in the Book of Ruth (Rt. 3:13-14), Boaz and Ruth practised something similar to *ukusoma* or had external intercourse during the night when Ruth visited him on the threshing floor. In the first place before Ruth visited Boaz, she had anointed herself according to the instruction of her mother-in-law Naomi. This is how Naomi instructed her daughter-in-law: "So wash yourself, put on some perfume, and get dressed in your best clothes. Then go where he is threshing but don't let him know you are there until he has finished eating and drinking (Rt. 3:3). In Rt. 3:13-14 it is stated clearly that Ruth and Boaz laid on the threshing floor the whole night until morning. Under normal circumstances it is therefore impossible for a man to sleep the whole night with an anointed lady like Ruth as stated in (Rt. 3:13-14). But Boaz was aware that before he could go any further with Ruth, he had to follow the tradition of the Israelites concerning the Levirate Law before he could have intercourse with Ruth. Also, it was unacceptable for them to have sex before marriage.

(d) Inheritance of property

Among the Zulus it was traditional for the widow to take charge of the inheritance including all property left by her deceased husband, but this also depended upon her age (Krige, 1965:181-182). The widow with her late husband's property is passed to the heir, should she wish to remarry. She may only do so with the consent of the heir who will receive the new *Lobola* for the family. On the other hand, the widow may merely be passed to a brother of the deceased husband in accordance with the *ukungenwa* custom.

Today in African societies, more women are employed and they prefer to manage their own affairs. However, this was not the case with the Ancient Israelite or in Ancient Zulu tradition. Traditionally a widow had no right to handle property.

Thurston (1989:9) aptly avers that "a widow was expected to be a 'silent widow' as she was considered to be weak and helpless."

3.7 CONCLUSION

The abovementioned comparative discussion shows that in Zulu culture, there are many ceremonies identical to traditions found in the Book of Ruth like the *Ukungenwa* and Israelite Levirate Law, '*Ukusoma*' and the threshing floor is evident.

Krige (1967:181-182) discusses the ceremony of *Ukungenwa*. He points out that in Zulu culture, *Ukungenwa* means to remarry the widow of the deceased brother. Literally, the term *Ukungenwa* refers to an heir who officially takes over his late brother's estate including the wife and children should there be any. The wife of the deceased passes with the property of the deceased to the heir. However, if she wishes to marry outside the family, she may do so with the consent of the heir who receives the *Lobola* for the family or the *Lobola* is passed to the brother of the deceased in accordance with the *Ukungenwa* custom.

This ceremony is virtually identical to that of the Israelites' Levirate Law, (Dt. 25:5-11). The purpose of the Levirate as well as the ceremony of *Ukungenwa* is to retain or perpetuate the family name of the deceased though children born from the marriage belong to the *Levir*. The case of Ruth and Boaz in the Book of Ruth is an outstanding example. Boaz (Rt. 4:13; Loader, 1992:94; Gray, 1976:423) is the biological father of their firstborn, but the child is regarded as the perpetuator of the family name of a deceased man to whom he bears no relationship at all.

According to research conducted in the late 1990s in Umlazi Township for the purposes of this dissertation, it was discovered that the tradition of *Ukungenwa* and/or Levirate law belong to the past. Most of the widows take charge of their own affairs. Some are employed while others are self-employed and the rest receive a government pension (cf. personal interviews Zulu, B. L-Section 12, 13 April 1998. Personal interview Ndaba, A. A-Section 23, 24 May 1998).

CHAPTER 4 THE ROLE AND FATE OF CHILDLESS WIDOWS IN OLD TESTAMENT CULTURE

4.1 INTRODUCTION

After a very careful study has been made of the Book of Ruth as well as the major scholarship concerning this book, it would appear as if there are at least two major points that the author wished to make. In the first instance, there appears to be the total acceptance of the Israelite culture and religion by a foreign woman namely Ruth. In the second place and perhaps the most important point is the fact that although widows may be relegated to the ranks of the poorest of the poor or to the least important of all classes in society, they can still survive by means of their own resourcefulness. During this process they can and usually do contribute to society. They usually if not always, create a future for themselves and their dependants.

4.2 THE TRADITIONAL ROLE OF THE CHILDLESS WIDOW DURING THE OLD TESTAMENT ERA

The Book of Ruth is the portrayal of the struggle for survival of two women in a society governed by strict traditional customs and norms. However, it should be taken into consideration, that the childless widow played as important a role in Ancient Israelite society as any other woman. Although the important contributions that childless widows made and still make towards society and to their family circles, are seldom noticed, they do make significant contributions. However, it would appear as if very often their skills and talents unfortunately go unacknowledged.

An excellent example is that of Ruth the Moabitess, who went into the fields of Boaz to glean barley with the other women (Rt. 2:3). From this we can draw the

conclusion that as long as the childless widow in Ancient Israel could work and earn her own keep and not be a burden to society - she may have been relegated to the ranks of the poor, but could still provide for her own upkeep - she was honoured and respected in the society. This can be attributed to Boaz's remarks to Ruth while she was working in his fields. 'I heard about everything that you have done for your mother-in-law since your husband died. I know, how you left your father and mother and your own country and how you came to live among a people you had never known before. May the Lord reward you for what you have done'. (cf. Rt 2:11-12).

Based on Numbers 3:10 De Vaux (1980:40) avers that the marriage vow of a wife continued to bind the widow to her in-laws and also forced her to abide by the Israelite laws after her husband's death. Through the *Levirate* law a childless widow continued to be part of her husband's family, but if there was no suitable person in the family to marry, she could re-marry a relative outside the immediate family circle as in the case of Ruth and Boaz (Rt. 1:9). However, she could visit her own parents whenever she wanted to (Rt. 1:8). A widow was supposed to mourn for a certain period, but no specific time is mentioned (Gn. 38:14).

According to numerous narratives in the Old Testament (1 Ki 17:8-15; K 2 4:1-7) most widows and especially those without a son or sons were in a piteous condition. They were lonely and voiceless and also in need of spiritual support. According to Deuteronomy 25:5-10, after the death of the husband and if there were no children, a brother-in-law was expected to marry the widow in order to retain the name of his brother. Furthermore, widows were protected by the religious laws that commended them to the charity of the people. They were regarded as being in the same societal class as orphans and resident aliens and those without a family to assist them (Ex. 22:21; Dt. 10:18; 24:17-21).

4.3 DEFINITIONS OF TERMINOLOGY

4.3.1 Traditional Role

As has been indicated in Chapter 3 'tradition' refers to acquired behaviour (cf. also Knight, 1990:20). According to Waite (1994:561) *role* is defined as an activity performed by a person. Others then model themselves according to the example provided. The latter is then known as a role model. Turner (1974:232) in Shezi (1989:17) refers to role as behaviour that 'should' or 'ought' to be performed by individuals. Thus the death of a husband leads to the question of the role of the widow who loses status in society because her husband is deceased.

4.3.2 Fate

Hornby (1977:312) defines fate as a person's ultimate condition e.g. death or destruction. According to Waite (1994:561) fate should be defined as supposed power predetermining an event e.g. destiny, death and destruction.

4.3.3 Childless widow

Herbert in Brenner (1983:144) points out that the Hebrew term for a childless widow is *Almatu*. This means a woman who has lost her husband by death and has no children to take care of her. Thurston (1989:9) concurs with this statement. This term aptly fits Naomi as well as Ruth in the Book of Ruth and also Tamar in Gn. 38:7-30).

Tamar (Gn. 38:7-30) was the widow of Er, Judah's firstborn. Due to ill health Er died and Judah instructed Onan his second son to marry Tamar according to the Levirate Law (Dt. 25:5-10). Because the 'new' husband knew that the first-born child from that marriage would belong to his deceased brother, he spilled his seed

on the ground during intercourse, so that Tamar would not fall pregnant and thus there would be no offspring.

4.4 LITERARY GENRE IDENTIFIED IN THE BOOK OF RUTH

4.4.1 Introduction

The Book of Ruth could be classified as an historical narrative. The background is Bethlehem in Judah and also Moab. The events unfold against the background of a specific period, namely that of the Judges, when certain traditions especially the Levirate Law formed part of the way of life of the people.

Oswald Loretz in La Cocque (1990:88) has proposed that the object of the Book of Ruth is the threat of extinction of an Israelite family, therefore of its 'name'. The threat is changed through the turn of fortune into preservation of the name.

Rudolph in La Cocque (1990:89) avers that the Book of Ruth does not make an objective historical point. It says that without the Moabitess, there would have been no 'greatest and most celebrated king of Israel, prototype of the Messiah'. That is, without the Moabitess, history would be like a wadi whose waters have dried up. Ruth was not just a passive instrument for the preservation of the ancestral line of David, she was a beacon of *hesed* (faith, loyalty) for Israel, a woman to rank with the matriarchs of the nation. In view of the above it is the premise of this dissertation that the story of The Book of Ruth is about God empowering the powerless.

Lastly, in Ruth 2:12, Boaz's admiration for Ruth is based on her unselfish efforts to perpetuate an Israelite name even though she is a Moabitess (La Cocque, 1990:85).

This book written in narrative form is often described by scholars as representing feminist or liberation theology. Before one can elaborate about the literary genre in the Book of Ruth, it is imperative to first look at the definitions given by different scholars for both liberation and feminist theology.

4.4.2 Liberation Theology

(i) Russell

According to Russell (1967:20) liberation theology is an attempt to reflect on the experience of oppression and our actions for the new creation of a more humane society. In the words of Gustavo Gutierrez, a latin American Theologian: *theology of liberation attempts to reflect on the experience and meaning of faith based on the commitment to abolish injustice and build a new society. This theology must be verified by the practice of that commitment*, by active, effective participation in the struggle which the exploited classes have undertaken against their oppressor (Russell, 1967:20).

(ii) Ogden

Ogden in Cobb (1980:viii) defines liberation theology as a call to join others in working toward a still more adequate understanding of faith and freedom. To do so, he argues, we must distinguish without separating a double meaning in the idea of liberation. Liberation includes both redemption and emancipation. Ogden identifies God's redemption as the boundless acceptance of all things, even sinners, in the divine life. *Knowledge of our acceptance frees us to share in the work of emancipating people from the many bondages under which they labour.*

4.4.3 Feminist Theology: Scholarship

(i) Russell

Russell (1967:20) correctly avers that feminist theology is a liberation theology. It is a theology mainly concerned with the liberation of people (especially women) to allow them to become full participants in human society. Furthermore, Russell maintains that feminist theology is written out of the experience of oppression in society. It interprets the search for salvation as a journey towards freedom, as a process of self-liberation in a community with others in the light of the hope in God's promise.

(ii) Kassian

Kassian (1990:142-143) describes different types of feminists i.e. those at the core he sees as radical feminists while those at the periphery are relational feminists. He also identifies biblical feminists and relational spiritual feminists.

(iii) Fiorenza

According to Kassian (1990:144-145) Fiorenza (1986) states that feminists will reject any Bible passage on the basis of its androcentricity or male centredness. She says that the Bible cannot be interpreted in what she regards as a regular fashion because of its male authorship. It can only be interpreted by bringing it into line with feminist thought. *Biblical feminism encourages a 'consciousness raising' in order to enable women to see the Bible and tradition with different lenses. Biblical feminists invent rationalizations to explain away Bible passages with which they are unhappy* (Fiorenza, 1986) in (Kassian, 1990:144-145).

4.4.4 Does the Book of Ruth Represent Liberation or Feminist Theology?

In response to the above arguments by various scholars, it is quite clear that Liberation theology is the main category with a number of sub-categories like feminist, biblical, radical, relational theology.

According to the viewpoint of this dissertation, the process which took place between Naomi and Ruth should be seen as a personal liberation of two individuals struggling against the odds of traditions. A number of biblical scholars like Gray (1967) accept the view that at the time when Naomi decided to return to Bethlehem, she was too old to remarry and to conceive and bear children according to the Levirate Law of the Israelites. She, therefore, needed a replacement. *Somebody young enough to remarry and follow the tradition and thus to secure their future.* For this reason Naomi manipulated Ruth into a marriage in order to liberate both of them.

On the other hand, Ruth also needed her mother-in-law to secure a future, especially because she did not know the traditions and customs of the Israelites (cf. *inter alia* Loader, 1992:34). Loader (1992:38) points out that Naomi was instrumental in introducing Ruth to the inhabitants of Judah and to her kinsmen in her search for security.

4.5 THE ROLE AND THE POSITION OF A 'DAUGHTER-IN-LAW'

Prior to the discussion of the role and the position of a daughter-in-law in an Israelite family, it is necessary to first give the general definition of the term 'daughter-in-law'. This followed by a description of her role and position in the family she married into. This will be followed by a discussion of the role of a daughter-in-law in a typical Zulu family. As far as the latter is concerned, these roles will be discussed from an historical and a contemporary perspective.

Finally, an attempt will be made to compare the roles of daughters-in-law in Zulu and in Ancient Israelite families.

4.5.1 Definition of the term 'Daughter-in-Law'

The term 'daughter-in-law' applies to the wife of the son of specific parents (Waite *et al.*, 1994:158). This definition does not differ from culture to culture and is therefore applicable to Ancient Israel as well as to African societies.

De Vaux (1980:28) defines a daughter-in-law as a female who has left her family and joined another family by marriage contract. She is known as a wife of the man she married and is expected to play an important role in the family by bearing his children. Ruth, Naomi's daughter-in-law (Rt. 4:12), and Rebecca, Isaacs wife, (Gn. 24:67) are good examples of how daughters-in-law were expected to behave in Old Testament times.

4.5.2 The Role and the Position of a Daughter-in-Law in a typical Ancient Israel Family

4.5.3 Scholarship

Concerning the role and the position of a daughter-in-law a typical Ancient Israel family, scholars like (De Vaux, 1980:30; Loader, 1992:61; Gray, 1967:11, Pardes, 1992:304; Laffey, 1988:206) concur with one another, and give the following views.

4.5.4 De Vaux

De Vaux (1980:30) avers that the wife of an Israelite (that is a daughter-in-law) was by no means on the same level as a slave. A man could sell his slave or even

his daughters (Ex. 21:7), but he could never sell his wife, even when he had acquired her as a captive in a war (Dt. 21:14). This implies that she was respected and well looked after by the family. However, she was also expected to perform important duties of which the most important was that of bearing children in order to perpetuate the family name. This remained her most important duty especially if the husband had died and left her behind without any offspring.

From the Book of Ruth it would therefore appear as if, in an Israelite family, a daughter-in-law was expected to be faithful to her husband and his family even after his death - and behave like Ruth towards Naomi, her mother-in-law. In other words, she was expected to be faithful not only to the living, but also to the dead and the family ancestors (Loader, 1992:61). She was expected to accept traditions and customs strange to her upbringing. Ruth is an excellent example in this regard when she makes the following statement: 'wherever you go, I will go, your God will be my God. Wherever you die, I will die and there I will be buried' (Rt. 1:16-17; Loader, 1992:61; Gray, 1967:11; Pardes, 1992:104).

4.5.5 Laffey

According to Laffey (1988:206) Ruth's statement in Ruth 1:16-17 should be taken as showing her dependence on Naomi (Laffey, 1988:206). She was clinging to Naomi's back. Both women were concerned about their survival, but when Ruth decided to remain with Naomi, it doubled Naomi's responsibilities, but also opened up the possibility of using the Levirate Law to save both of them.

In order to succeed in his aims, Naomi had to manipulate Ruth and use among others, the fact that the latter could still bear children. Naomi knew that Ruth's loyalty would not allow her to abandon her mother-in-law and therefore Ruth would fall in with whatever plans Naomi could advise for their future (cf. also Laffey, 1988:206; La Cocque, 1990:95-96; Loader, 1992:25, and Pardes,

1992:104). In other words, Ruth's decision (Rt. 1:18) gave Naomi the confidence to continue even though her daughter-in-law was 'clinging' to her back on their journey to Bethlehem.

In view of the above, it would appear as if the role of the widowed daughter-in-law as reflected in Ruth's case was determined by the mother-in-law namely Naomi. Therefore in this narrative, Ruth acted only on the authority of her mother-in-law to such an extent that Naomi turned Ruth into an instrument to be manipulated for the good of both. It is interesting that Ruth never acts on her own accord. Ruth indeed clung to the back of Naomi (cf. *inter alia* Laffey, 1988:206). Without Naomi, Ruth was helpless in a strange land with strange customs. On the other hand, without Ruth Naomi had nobody to help her in her struggle for survival.

4.6 THE ROLE AND POSITION OF A DAUGHTER-IN-LAW IN A TYPICAL ZULU FAMILY

4.6.1 Introduction

There are many aspects to the traditional role of the Zulu daughter-in-law that concurs with traditions in Ancient Israel. Always, it is the woman that leaves her own family to join that of the husband. This 'joining' could be regarded as an unwritten marriage contract binding her to the family of the man she married.

As the wife of the husband, she is expected to play a very specific, but also a very important role, e.g. that of bearing children and then especially male children, to provide her husband with an heir. Thus she provides a new head of the family in the event of the death of the father/husband.

4.6.2 The Role and Position of a 'Daughter-In-Law' in a Zulu Culture

(i) Historical perspective

According to Krige (1965:155), historically, a Zulu bride lived under the control of her mother-in-law for the first year of the marriage. She would have no fire in her own hut. Should she have one, she would have to share it with her husband at night. She would work very hard doing all the domestic work expected from her, e.g. cooking, sweeping, gardening, gathering wood and grinding corn for the family. Should the mother of the husband die, the bride or daughter-in-law would be placed in the hut of the chief woman of the family in which her husband's mother belonged. This period is known as *Ukukotiza* and usually lasted until the birth of her first child.

(ii) Contemporary perspective

According to research conducted during 1997-1999 at Umlazi township, it is clear that the role and the position of a daughter-in-law has remained virtually intact in Zulu culture and is still largely identical to that of Ancient times. She is still expected to do the domestic chores under the supervision of her mother-in-law as mentioned by Krige (1965:155) and attend to all other duties assigned to her by her in-laws.

It is part of the culture and norms of African society and not only of the Zulu people that a daughter-in-law should respect her in-laws, otherwise she will be labelled as being stubborn and irresponsible. However, she is also shown respect by not being addressed with her family name, but by being addressed by her own father's surname with the prefix *Ma* e.g. *MaDlamini* or *MaNkosi*. This means that she is born from a *Dlamini* or a *Nkosi* family, but is now the wife of somebody else. However nowadays, she could also be addressed by her husband's surname *Mrs Ndlovu* or *Nkosikazi Ndlovu* (in Zulu).

Furthermore, today most daughters-in-law are primarily under the control of their husbands. This is unlike ancient times, when they were under the control of their in-laws. This could possibly be because nowadays many urban women are professional women and also because women *per se* today work to assist their husbands financially. Therefore, the traditional subservient role of a daughter has and is still changing.

4.6.3 Comparison between Ancient Israel and Zulu tradition

As in Ancient Israel, the most important role of any married woman is that of bearing children in order to perpetuate the family name. Should the husband die without an heir or before any children at all were born, she is expected to stay with the in-laws (Krige, 1965:182).

The *Ukungenwa* ceremony (to marry the brother of the deceased) may take place (Krige, 1965:182) and this could be equated to the Levirate Law of the Ancient Near East (Dt. 25:15-10). According to research conducted in Umlazi in the late 1990s, it was discovered that the *Ukungenwa* is no longer compulsory for the Zulu widow. In most cases, she has to decide whether she would stay with her in-laws or return to her family in order to remarry somebody else after a suitable and accepted period of mourning. However, this is never the decision of an individual. The parents on both sides have to discuss the matter and make a decision; because a *Lobola* was previously paid by the in-laws. Usually, the families would agree that the 'new' husband of the widow has to pay *Lobola* to the previous in-laws as a replacement of the *Lobola* paid by the deceased.

It is interesting that Naomi also gave Ruth and Orpah the choice of continuing with her to Bethlehem, or to return to their families to remarry (cf. Rt. 1:8-9). However, no mention is made of any repayment of the dowry. Lastly, when comparing Ruth, as an example of the position of a daughter-in-law in Ancient Israel with that of Zulu daughters-in-law, there are numerous similarities.

The definition of a daughter-in-law in African and Ancient Israel societies does not differ much. It would appear as if their role and function would and could differ from one family to another depending on aspects like the culture and religion that determine influence customs and traditions.

4.7 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN A MOTHER-IN-LAW AND A DAUGHTER-IN-LAW

4.7.1 Definition of the term 'Mother-in-Law'

According to Waite (1994:413), traditionally, the word 'mother-in-law' refers to a husband's or wife's mother. Therefore, a woman's Mother-in-Law' is a mother of one's husband by virtue of birth. This applies to all societies.

4.7.2 Relationship between a 'Mother-in-Law' and a 'Daughter-in-Law' in an Israelite family with special reference to Naomi and Ruth

In the Book of Ruth, the relationship between Naomi and Ruth started when Mahlon, Naomi's son, married Ruth, the Moabitess in the land of Moab where the family was in temporary sojourn. Chilion, a younger brother, married Orpah who was also a Moabitess (Pardes, 1992:102; Loader, 1992; Rt. 1:4).

According to Laffey, 1988:205), and other writers like Gray (1967:409), the relationship and also the obligations of a daughter-in-law became apparent when Naomi decided to return to her homeland in Judah. The relationship is usually associated with love, faith and loyalty. It would appear as if Naomi's intention was to leave her daughters-in-law in their own home-town so as to enjoy a happy future through a new marriage in their own country (Rt. 1:12; Loader, 1992:25). Orpah accepts the offer and returns to her home-town. Ruth on the other hand chooses to accompany Naomi (Rt. 1:14; Loader, 1992:125; Laffey, 1988:205). It is possible that Ruth's decision (Rt. 1:18) gave Naomi confidence to continue

with her journey to Bethlehem and form a new future. Ruth's unconditional commitment to Naomi is evidence that rivalry is not necessarily a predominant feature in relationships between women, even those types of relations customarily prone to conflict (Pardes, 1992:102).

It is clear from this narrative that Ruth and Naomi were supportive of one another as would be expected of women from a particular family. Naomi alone could not have survived. However, she had the experience and the knowledge of the customs and traditions of the Israelites and therefore she could provide a future for both of them. At the same time she managed a future for both of them. She also managed to perpetuate the family name by using Ruth as an instrument. According to Laffey (1988:206), Naomi is vindicated through Ruth, who, though a Moabitess, acts like a faithful Israelite. She provided both of them with a future and she perpetuated her dead husband's name by marrying his next-of-kin. In the end Naomi has a grandson by the name of Obed (Rt. 4:12).

4.7.3 The Relationship between a 'Mother-in-Law' and a 'Daughter-in-law' in a typical Zulu Family

According to Zulu customs, a mother-in-law and a daughter-in-law are bound together by the bond of marriage. In other words they both belong to the same family which they married. The bond is brought about by the ancestors *Amadlozi* and the elders of the family by slaughtering a goat and pouring the 'bile' on the daughter-in-law's forehead and feet on arrival to the new family.

Krige (1965:148) concurs with this view. Krige avers that the bile is poured over the daughter-in-law in her husband's kraal. This symbolic act indicates that she has been changed into a woman and thereafter belongs to the new family.

In the words of Professor Mbiti some Africans believe that a person dies, yet continues to live. He is a living dead. When a person dies he goes to the world

of the dead underground, where life continues in very much the same way as it does on earth. *Abaphansi* (Zulu name for those who are dead and buried) never break a relationship with the living. This is the main reason why ancestors are respected and always involved in most African ceremonies.

The Mother-in-law is a senior member of the family only if her husband is deceased. A daughter-in-law takes instructions from her mother-in-law, and her husband while he is still alive. The mother-in-law is also responsible for teaching her daughter-in-law to have respect for everyone in the family otherwise she is labelled unfaithful and not fit to be a member of that family.

4.7.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be stated that the status or the plight of Ruth complies with the definition of a 'daughter-in-law'. As reflected in Ruth's case it was determined by the mother-in-law, namely Naomi.

In this narrative, Ruth acts only on the authority of her 'mother-in-law' to the extent that Naomi turned Ruth into an instrument to ensure their future and the name of the family. It is interesting that Ruth never acts on her own accord. She only acts according to the instructions of her mother-in-law. Ruth indeed clung to the back of Naomi (cf. Laffey, 1988:206). Without Ruth and the possibility of a Levirate marriage even the land that belonged to the family of Elimelech was virtually without any value to Naomi.

Contrary to the above information, in a typical Zulu family, the plight of 'daughters-in-law' is partly different from that of daughters-in-law of ancient Israel. Although according to Krige (1965:155) a bride lives under the control of her mother-in-law, this procedure is practised only for the first year of marriage. Today most wives of African men stay with their husbands in the townships.

Many of them are professional people and are employed either in the public or in the private sector in order to assist their husbands financially.

CHAPTER 5

NAOMI OF UMLAZI

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In the preceding chapters of this dissertation the role, fate and the destiny of childless widows in Ancient Israel were examined. Thereafter a study was made of the role, the fate and the destiny of Naomi of Bethlehem. According to the hypothesis of this dissertation it is Naomi and not Ruth who should be regarded as the main protagonist in the narrative found in the *Book of Ruth*. Certainly the most important theme of this biblical book is the struggle for survival by the women joined together by the bond of marriage through a deceased son/husband. It is furthermore postulated that in this survival struggle the main determinant is the social status of women and then especially that of the childless widow in a predominantly female unfriendly society.

During the historical period outlined in the *Book of Ruth*, traditions, societal roles, laws and regulations determined the status, the rights and also the total dependency of widows upon the goodwill of relatives and the community. However, the plight of a widow would not have been too precarious if there had been a son who could become head of the family (cf *inter alia* De Vaux, 1965:29, Dt. 21:17, cf. 2 K 2:9, Gn. 43:33).

In the case of Naomi and Ruth the situation was indeed even more difficult because both women were childless. Naomi may have been relegated to the lowest societal classes due to her widowhood and the demise of her sons, but, fortunately even though she may be seen as destitute she was not all that poor. Naomi owned property (Rt. 4:3-5). Therefore the problem facing them was how to use this land to procure a future for both Naomi and Ruth and also to ensure the continuity of the family name.

In order to attain these objectives, Naomi relied very heavily on the second childless widow in this narrative, namely her daughter-in-law, Ruth the Moabitess. These basic facts led to the formulation of the main premise of this dissertation, namely that a childless widow (a Naomi) cannot survive without the help and assistance of a Ruth. To test this hypothesis, situations and roles similar to that of Naomi, were examined historically, critically as well as by means of a questionnaire (cf. Addenda 1-3) compiled for this purpose.

5.2 RESEARCH

There are as many often quite divergent definitions of research as there are different scholars working in this field. For the purposes of this dissertation the definitions of Reaves (1992:8) and Kerlinger (1992:10) are regarded as being the most appropriate.

5.2.1 Reaves

According to Reaves (1992:8), research is a purposeful and systematic way of answering questions about the work, generally using measuring instruments and methods such as questionnaires, observations, interviews and surveys.

5.2.2 Kerlinger

Kerlinger (1992:10) conceptualises research as a systematic, controlled, empirical and critical investigation of natural phenomena guided by theory and hypothesis about the presumed relations between such phenomena.

5.2.3 Nel

Nel (1998:12) defines research as a systematic attempt to provide answers to questions. This definition seems to concur with the viewpoint of Reaves (1992:8) Furthermore, the questionnaire used provided questions to be answered by the

interviewees and these questions were based upon observations and surveys conducted by the researcher.

5.2.4 Conclusion

The viewpoint concerning research in this dissertation concurs mainly with that of Kerlinger (1992:10). He stated that research is a controlled empirical and critical investigation of natural phenomena. He also avers that when called for, any investigation should be backed by questionnaires, controlled observations, scientific surveys and interviews with identified people and/or target groups.

5.3 AREA OF RESEARCH

5.3.1 Introduction

The topic of the dissertation determined but also limited the area of research i.e. Umlazi Township.

5.3.2 Umlazi Township

Umlazi Township lies 20 kilometres south of Durban and forms part of Durban Metro. Umlazi Township is the second largest Black township in South Africa. It is also one of the most densely populated areas in the country. According to the Umlazi South Community Needs Assessment Document of May 1997, Umlazi accommodates a population of fifty thousand (50 000) residents. The latest official figure from the Department of Central Statistical Data in Pretoria is close to two million people, primarily Black South Africans. The size of the population made it impossible to find and interview all childless widows. Also, only a very small segment of the so-called childless widows were willing to be interviewed as indicated in the Bibliography (Addendum).

Historically Umlazi Township was named after the Umlazi river. It is inhabited predominantly by Black South Africans. Seventy-five percent (75%) are Zulus from Natal, almost twenty-five percent (25%) are Xhosas and Sothos who left their homelands and decided to reside at Umlazi in Natal. Most of the inhabitants could be categorised as working class people earning fairly low salaries and wages. Their occupations vary from highly qualified professional people to labourers and self-employed. Although there are no official statistics available at present, it is commonly known that there is a significant number of unemployed people in Umlazi Township.

The Township is divided into twenty-two sections numbered alphabetically. For the purposes of this study the focus will fall on five (5) sections only, namely Sections A, C, H, J and L. It should be noted that these sections were randomly selected and with no specific reason in mind.

5.3.3 Format of the Questionnaire

(a) Introduction

The purpose and the aims of the study also influenced the format of the questionnaire. However, the information required also affected the format, the formulation and the wording of specific questions. As the study progressed it became increasingly clear to the researcher that one of the most important aspects of this research project would be to decide whether any comparison could be drawn between the two subjects, i.e. between Naomi of Bethlehem and Naomi of Umlazi.

Furthermore, as the study progressed it became increasingly clear that eventually there were far more at stake than mere corresponding historical backgrounds and a similarity in certain traditions. The past is important. Traditions are important.

However, the crux of the matter is that historically even Naomi of Umlazi belongs to a past that cannot be compared with the present situation. While it is true that the past does play a role in the present through traditions especially, social circumstances have changed so radically that many traditions and traditional values have been relegated to oblivion. One of the major social factors is of course the increase in violence and the accompanying instability of the South African scene. A further complication is the fact that urbanization and economic factors have also contributed to a disappearance of many traditions, values and norms. Hiebert's (1998:125) premise is quite correct that research on women in as well as women and the Bible, does not mean that the past and also more recent biblical studies should be set aside or be negated. Hiebert's (1998:125-126) observation that many women doing biblical research are now applying the methodologies and the interpretive models of such fields as *inter alia* sociology, is also in line with the aims of this dissertation. Therefore, one of the postulates of this dissertation is that if the background history of and the societal influences on today's childless widows in Umlazi are not taken into account no valid comparison can be drawn between Naomi of Bethlehem and Naomi of Umlazi.

Although the interviewees, their number, ages and other details will be discussed at a later stage, it is imperative to mention at this point that only a very small segment of the category of *childless widows* were willing to be interviewed. Reasons for their reticence were never given and therefore it is difficult to judge or criticise their unwillingness to participate.

(b) Definition of the term *Questionnaire*

According to Babbie (1992:132) a questionnaire is a device construed to secure answers to specific questions by means of a particular form in a specific format (cf. Addenda 1-3).

(c) Basic requirements when compiling a questionnaire

(i) Personal details

Questionnaires may or may not contain personal and even intimate details about respondents. Therefore, it is imperative at all times to treat information received as confidential. It is also essential that all respondents should be fully aware of this confidentiality.

(ii) Misinterpretations

The individual questions should be so carefully worded that virtually all chances of misinterpretation are eliminated (cf. Babbie, 1992:132).

A critical factor when formulating the questions in a questionnaire is therefore not to use words and sentences that might be misunderstood and thus defeat the intended purposes of the research.

Questionnaires should never be completed with the involvement of a third party, because this could easily lead to a misunderstanding of contents and context. Therefore, to avoid incorrect interpretation of facts no illiterates were interviewed and thus no third parties were involved.

(iii) Stating of research objectives

Furthermore, it is essential that the researcher should clearly state and explain his/her objective(s). This will not only limit unnecessary delays in returning the questionnaires to the researcher, but it will also limit the number of copies discarded. For this reason the questionnaire used (cf. Addenda 1-3) was drawn up in English and Zulu. All targeted respondents were individually albeit verbally informed of the *raison d'être* for this particular research project.

(iv) Number of respondents and budget

The number of people involved in the research and the budget should at all times be carefully determined and officially approved by the Head of the Department and/or the supervisor of the research. However in this case no budget was allocated and no sponsor was approached. The number of respondents (ninety) involved was approved by the first supervisor, namely Prof. H.W. Nel (Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies).

It is interesting that although all targeted respondents (ninety in number) showed enthusiasm when informed, in the end only forty-five completed the questionnaires. No explanations were offered by or were sought from those who failed to complete the questionnaires.

(v) General remarks by respondents

Provision should be made for targeted individuals to make general comments or pass general remarks concerning the difficult questions. This was in fact encouraged during the completion of the questionnaires (see Addenda). It was felt that individuals might have suffered experiences that they could have regarded when they happened, and may still regard, as unique to their own situation.

Because it is essential that there should be a unity of trust and relationship between the researcher and the interviewee, great trouble was taken for all interviews to be as personal as possible.

(vi) Literacy

Although all women interviewed were literate, the degree of literacy varied. This was another reason why great care was taken to ensure that

all questions were as logic and as straight-forward as possible to prevent any misunderstanding and/or unnecessary delays. The intervention of a third party was also greatly eliminated.

(d) Terms used in this questionnaire

(i) Unemployed

This term refers to someone who does not work and who consequently receives no salary or wage for duties performed from either an institution, organization or an individual (Little Oxford Dictionary, 1994:723).

It is interesting to note that according to the questionnaires returned the number of unemployed childless widows exceeds that of employed / self-employed. Their ages range between 40 to 72 years. In virtually all cases they have no income to support themselves, although those who are sixty years of age and older do get financial support from the State through the so-called State / Government Pension Scheme for the Elderly.

(ii) Employed

The term refers to someone who is employed by an organization, an institution or another individual and who earns income and is therefore dependent upon a regular income (Little Oxford Dictionary, 1994:208).

We find these women in various sectors of employment, *inter alia* labourers like domestic and factory labourers, etc. Many are professional people (nurses, teachers, clerks and lawyers) employed by the State and/or private institutions. These women primarily belong to the middle-class.

(iii) Self-employed

This term refers to someone who earns an income through services rendered and who does not earn or receive a regular income from an identifiable permanent source, organization, institution or individual. The self-employed depend on the acceptance of services rendered or the sale of articles offered (Waite, 1994:588).

Many of these women live on the proceeds of small unregistered businesses, e.g. trading in fresh products and fruit. Unfortunately in South Africa it is the self-employed childless widow who suffers most. Their ages range between 40 to 55 years and because they have not yet reached pensionable age, they are the group that suffers the greatest hardships.

(iv) Concluding remarks

From the information supplied by respondents approximately one third (33,33%) of these women regard themselves as being employed. An interesting factor that came to the fore is that the one common characteristic of all childless widows is an intense feeling of loneliness.

(e) Section

(i) Introduction

In the different sections of this questionnaire great pains were taken to ensure that all respondents have clarity concerning their own anonymity and also the purpose and aims of the researcher. Furthermore, the questions in the different sections were carefully compiled and worded to extract as much information as possible pertinent to the research topic.

(ii) Sections

(1) Section A

This introductory section served to inform interviewees of the procedure that would be followed. Furthermore, it also served to assure them that any information provided would be treated as highly confidential and would not be leaked to any unauthorised person.

(2) Section B

Because of the comparative aspect of this topic, it was regarded as essential to determine the living conditions of childless widows in Umlazi township.

Section B was therefore formulated specifically to extract biological and biographical information. The biographical information was deemed to be necessary to determine how relative the meanings of their traditional and English names were to these women's present circumstances.

2.1 Table 1: Biographical information with reference to age

Number of participants		Age Group			
Respondents	Non-Respondents	30-49	50-69	70-72	Over 72
45	45	19	21	5	-

The average age of respondents appears to be between 50-69 years of age.

The youngest respondent was a Mrs K Khambule of J1390, Umlazi Township. She gave her age as 30 years (cf. attached Questionnaire No.9). Because of her

age she could best be compared to Naomi of Bethlehem who already had daughters-in-law. This caused the researcher to treat her case with great circumspection.

The oldest respondent was a Mrs A Msomi of J848 Umlazi Township (cf. attached Questionnaire No. 4). She gave her age at 72 years. Unfortunately she also could not be compared with Naomi of Bethlehem, because she never had any children at all and therefore she was never a mother-in-law.

It was found that there were a number of probable reasons why childless widows in Umlazi Township did or did not participate in this research project. These will be mentioned and discussed at a later stage.

However, from the above Table, it is clear that only half (50%) of the childless widows who originally indicated their willingness to participate in this research project actually completed and/or returned questionnaires. Although no specific reason for their non-participation were given, it would appear as if the underlying reason was of a twofold nature:

- ▶ an almost inherent fear of publicity;
- ▶ the highly problematical matter of illiteracy and the fear of possible respondents to publicise what they regard as a personal shortcoming in their social and economic situation.

When it became apparent that this fear of so-called exposure was becoming a major stumbling block, the researcher consulted with the supervisor of this dissertation (Prof. H.W. Nel) and it was decided that a fifty percent (50%) response would be regarded as acceptable for the purposes of this dissertation. Furthermore, because it was not of major importance to the outcome of the research, no respondent was pressurised to supply proof of literacy.

2.2 Table 2: Composition of sample

It was roughly estimated that from the abovementioned figure of 50 000 residents approximately seven thousand (7 000) could be categorised as childless widows. Approximately one hundred and fifty (150) of the seven thousand residents are childless widows residing in Sections A, C, H, J and L. Out of one hundred and fifty (150) a sample of ninety childless widows was selected to participate in this research project.

Categories of childless widows	No. of participants	No. of respondents	No. of non-respondents
Unemployed	40	20	20
Employed	30	15	15
Self-employed	20	10	10
Total	90	45	45

2.3 **Table 3: A summary of personal statistics**

No. of questionnaires issued	No of respondents	Gender	Educational qualifications			Literacy		No. of children born to childless widows		Status of children		Total Monthly income	Religious affiliation		Cultural affiliation	
			Professional.	Skilled artisans	Labourers	Literate	Illiterate	Boys	Girls	Deceased	Disappeared		Christian	Indigenous African churches	Zulu	Non-Zulu
90	45	Female	5	10	20	10	-	8	10	10	8	R500 - R5 000	30	15	45	-

While a number of the respondents never had any children, there were also those whose children had died like those of Naomi, unfortunately the ages and the marital status of the deceased children were not researched. In some cases children of the respondents had disappeared and could not be traced at all. It must be noted or highlighted that most childless widows live under difficult and abnormal conditions especially because they have no children of their own. However this dissertation will not focus on children who disappeared and/or on reasons of disappearance as there were too many problems in tracing those children. To assist them, the women were referred to social workers who were responsible for tackling their problems.

2.4 Table 4: Employment status of childless widows

No. of questionnaires	No. of respondents	No. of self-employed	No. of employed	No. of unemployed
90	45	10	15	20

In order to evaluate their economic circumstances for comparative purposes, the respondents were further categorised as:

- ▶ unemployed
- ▶ employed
- ▶ self-employed

Twenty-two comma two (22,2%) percent of the respondents described themselves as self-employed. Typical business ventures include:

- ▶ shopkeepers (3)
- ▶ seamstresses (5)
- ▶ street stall-keepers (2)

When questioned, they did mention probable incomes, albeit they seemed to be very wary to reveal net incomes.

Because this matter was regarded as important, it did not play a major role in the research. Therefore, it was decided not to place too much emphasis on the matter of income.

2.5 **Table 5: Relationship between occupation and ages of childless widows**

	30-49	50-69	70-89	TOTAL
1. Unemployed childless widows	15	3	2	20
2. Employed childless widows	10	5	-	15
3. Self-employed childless widows	6	4	-	10
4. Total	31	14	-	45

According to the above table, it would appear as if a high figure of the unemployed childless widows fall under age group 30-39 years namely fifteen (15) respondents or thirty three percent. The number of widows in the age group 50-69 years were only three (3) respondents. In the age group 70-89, there were only seven (7) unemployed childless widows. It would appear as if most childless widows fall in the age groups 30-49 and 50-69 years.

2.6 **Table 6: Mother-in-law and daughters-in-law**

No. of questionnaires	No. of respondents	No. of mothers-in-law	No. of daughters-in-law	Approx. ages of daughters-in-law			Do they receive any help?		If yes, from whom?	Church, state, employers?
				20-29	30-39	40-49	Yes	No		
90	45	4	4	-	2	2	✓		Church/ Employer	Spiritual support Material and wages respectively

According to the above table, four widowed mothers-in-law have four widowed daughters-in-law. Contrary to the situation portrayed in the *Book of Ruth* these daughters-in-law were employed and therefore not dependant upon their mothers-in-law. Furthermore, according to these eight women, they did not regard their relationship as permanent or of long-standing despite the family ties.

TABLE 7: UNEMPLOYMENT CHILDLESS WIDOWS AND THEIR PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR OWN COMMUNITY

Employment situation of Respondents																						
No. of ques- tion- naires	No. of resp- ondents	No. of unem- ployed	Do you exer- cise rights as child less widows ac- cording to the Zulu culture?		Do you attend Religious meetings regularly?		Do you own land?		If you own land, where is it situ- ated?		Do you regard yourself as being inhibited by custom ary law?		Do you receive help from a Relig- ious body or state?		Is help you re- ceive material?		Is the help psy- cholog- ical?		Are you physic- ally disabled?		Are you ill-treat- ed by rel- atives?	
			Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Um lazi	Els ewh ere	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
90	45	20		20	15	5	2	18	18	2	20	-	15	5	15	5	-	20	-	20	20	-

- ▶ Most of the childless widows are unskilled labourers and are unemployed. Seventy-five percent (75%) receive help from the state. Government Pension Scheme while one third (33,33%) live on wages received for casual jobs.
- ▶ However, although most of them are unskilled, they are able to do jobs like sewing, domestic work, gardening, but they usually end up by selling vegetables and fruit and making virtually no profit at all from their selling ventures.
- ▶ The land owned by childless widows was found to be at Umlazi Township, e.g. Mrs S. Khambule of J 1390 (Questionnaire No. 9) lived in her own site. Mrs B. Dlamini of J 498 (Questionnaire No. 3) also occupied her own site which was previously her late husband's. Both use their land for residential purposes.
- ▶ Out of twenty unemployed childless widows only two owned land in rural areas e.g. Umbumbulu. The remaining eighteen either lived with relatives in their houses while others rented one or two rooms from the lessor landlord.
- ▶ Some of these women are being accused by their in-laws of having taken part in their husband's death as well as that of their children. Those who never had children are addressed as *Inyumba* (a person who is unable to bear children. Therefore the word *Inyumba* is used as an insult to describe, embarrassment or to degrade a woman who cannot bear children.

(f) Conclusion

As indicated previously, the questionnaires were handed out to childless widows who reside in particular areas chosen at random in Umlazi Township. However,

the aim was to seek or ascertain the validity of a comparison between Naomi of Bethlehem and Naomi of Umlazi Township based upon a similarity in certain traditions pertaining to childless widows and despite the vast differences in time and location. The reason why the questionnaire focused on certain situations only, is that the main *motive* was to find a valid basis to compare similar social conditions.

Primarily the initial readings consisting of a detailed historical-critical study of Naomi of Ancient Israel *vis-à-vis* the role, fate and destiny of the childless widow in Zulu history, revealed very pertinent similarities between the cultures, viz that of the Ancient Near East and the Zulu people. However, contrary to the initial belief that it would be possible to draw comparisons between Naomi of Ancient Israel and Naomi of today's Umlazi Township, the questionnaire brought to light that should such a comparison be based on a survey of the Ancient Israelite *vis-à-vis* the Ancient Zulu culture, then it would be a valid comparison. However, the Naomi of today's Umlazi Township can no longer be compared to Naomi of Ancient Bethlehem especially so because of change and changing circumstances of especially a social and an economic type, brought about a totally changed society. In this changed society many traditions and customs have been relegated to oblivion. This is especially the case with traditions pertaining to widows in general and the childless widows in particular. Unfortunately, very few points of agreement could be found between modern-day Naomi of Umlazi and her counterpart in Ancient Israel. This despite the fact that most of the cultural and societal laws and customs regarding widows within the Zulu cultural context are still acknowledged and practised.

From the responses as well as from personal interviews the following concurrences and discrepancies, were identified:

► Loneliness

Certainly a universal characteristic of childless widows is their loneliness. This was as true of Naomi of Bethlehem as much as it is found to be true of Naomi of Umlazi. A number of scholars like Loader (1992:18), Gray (1967:46) and Laffey (1988:206) correctly aver that Naomi of Ancient Israel probably only began to suffer loneliness after the death of her husband and her two sons Mahlon and Chilion, even though she was left with her two daughters-in-law who unfortunately were also childless (Rt. 1:3-5). The author of the *Book of Ruth* does not mention age, but it remains one of the premises of this dissertation that Naomi was an elderly, lonely woman. In fact in Ruth 1:12, she says that because of her age, she can no longer bear sons to remarry.

It is interesting that one of the very first matters all respondents from Umlazi Township mentioned, is the abject loneliness a childless widow endures. And this is the case even when there are widowed daughters-in-law around.

This was proved by one of the widows, Mrs E. Ndaba of L644 Umlazi Township (Addendum No. 8) who lives with her daughter-in-law and grandchildren. It should be noted, however, that Mrs Ndaba could not be regarded as a childless widow as she had three grandchildren. She could only be regarded as an ordinary widow. Her case shows how traditions are kept on the one hand and how they are disregarded on the other hand.

The relationship between Mrs Ndaba and her daughter-in-law was found to be extremely bad primarily because the mother-in-law could not accept her daughter-in-law's boyfriend. According to Mrs Ndaba it is against the traditions of Zulu culture for a widow to bring a boyfriend into the dead man's house. The animosity was so great that it turned into hatred and the daughter-in-law seemingly influenced her three sons to hate the grandmother to such an extent that she had

to prepare her own food and also nobody would look after her when she became sick. This bitter atmosphere carried on until the mother-in-law died in December 1998.

► *The problem with land*

Secondly, twenty-five percent (25%) of the respondents mentioned that they encountered serious problems with accommodation in Umlazi Township because they had lost their husbands while living in rural areas.

Apparently even in the rural areas these women were landless. After being widowed, circumstances forced them to migrate and to seek employment in urban areas in order to survive.

Even in the case of so-called widowed landowners, changing views of traditions have influenced their situations. For instance the tradition of *Ukungenwa* (cf. Levirate Law) of the Israelites is nowadays no longer practised.

It was found that as some of these widows are professionals, they do not seem to need assistance from their next of kin unlike Naomi and Ruth. This seems to be especially in cases when they are self-employed (perhaps managing their small businesses in the township) and they seemingly prefer to manage their own affairs which they appear to do with ease.

Furthermore, it would appear as if the childless widow of today has come to terms with the fact that the Levirate law (*Ukungenwa*) is no longer practised and that there is virtually no possibility of being taken care of by a man who would be replacing the late husband.

All respondents indicated that they accept God as their protector. They even refer to Him as *Indoda Yabafelokazi* ie *the husband of the widow* because they regard

Him as the one who cares for them and solves their problems. Like a husband would do under normal circumstances.

Another function of the *levir* has been taken over by the State, namely the Government Pension Fund for the elderly. In other words, the State is seen as provider of housing, food, and so on.

► *Societal Inhibitions*

Historically in most African Communities, e.g. the Zulu people, once a woman has lost her husband, she previously could not remarry outside the family clan. She had to follow customs laid down by the family. like mourning for her dead husband for a period of at least one year and indicating that she is in a state of mourning by wearing only black or navy outfits.

Furthermore, she was often expected to stay in her husband's house with her in-laws. If she owned a house she was expected to stay alone for at least one year while in mourning. She was also expected to do domestic work and take charge of everything that belonged to her late husband e.g. property, money and so forth.

However, this only applied if they were married in community of property. Even today after the mourning period of one year, the unveiling of a tombstone usually takes place. The widow is liable for all costs, but usually her in-laws would assist her.

It would appear from the information provided by respondents that within the present emancipated era, widows like many other women regard themselves as being free to act as they think best. This freedom not historically, but according to their current views, is the freedom of actions without the inhibitions prescribed by traditions stringently upheld by in-laws. To the emancipated Zulu women of Umlazi mourning for a dead husband does not equal total obedience to the in-laws.

The position of the childless widow in Umlazi Township can hardly be equated with that of a childless widow in the rural areas where traditions are still very important. Therefore, traditional societal norms and values applicable to childless widows are usually applied far more stringent than in the urban areas. The influence of urbanisation is visible in the changing cultures and especially in the traditions of the resently Black people. These changes also affect the position and the role of the childless widow. One of the best examples in this respect is the traditional surrounding the death of a husband. Although tradition determines that the widow should mourn for her husband for at least one year after the burial (cf. Krige, 1965:166).

The death of the breadwinner usually forces the widow to go out and try to earn a living in order to survive. The questionnaires show that many of these women feel that remnants and/or memories of traditions and prejudices of society marginalize them and relegate them to a position of inferiority (cf. Addenda Mrs T. Ntombela of J 1654 Umlazi Township (Questionnaire No.5) 30 June 1997 and Mrs.B. Dlamini of H 217 Umlazi township (Questionnaire No. 16) 14 March 1998.

Many of the women (*inter alia* Mrs A. Msomi of J866 Umlazi Township (Questionnaire No. 4) 13-14 June 1997 and Mrs B. Zulu of L645 Umlazi Township) (Questionnaire No. 14) 11 January 1998 complained that their marginalization cause intense loneliness and this in turn leads to abuse by relatives and so-called concerned members of society. Mrs C. Kubheka who resided at C Section (Umlazi Home of the Aged) (Questionnaire No. 2) 3 May 1997 indicated a report that she would rather stay in an old age home rather than with her relatives. Perhaps, it would be more explanatory to translate this *abuse* with *financial blackmail*. One of the tragedies in the lives of many childless widows is that their aloneness leads to intense loneliness and this in turn leads to mental, emotional and often even physical abuse. The true tragedy is that they allow this

abuse against themselves because they crave attention. However negative attention is better than no attention at all.

5.4 THE GOD OF NAOMI AND RUTH

5.4.1 Introduction

One of the observations of the narrator is about how God worked and saved the lives of the two childless widows, Naomi and Ruth while they were desperately in need of a redeemer in Bethlehem.

However, God and His attributes are never explicitly mentioned in the *book of Ruth*, albeit God and His interference in the lives of Naomi and Ruth are obvious throughout the book. Even though Ruth's declaration in Ruth 1:16 borders on a conversion confession, the only references to God are of a general nature. These references (Rt. 1:16-17) could actually be seen as a way of emphasising a particular point.

5.4.2 Creator - God

Inter alia Genesis 1 and 2, Psalm 8 and Isaiah 65:17-18 portrays the God of the Israelites as creator - God. In the lives of Naomi and Ruth this Creator-God plays a very important role. This statement is confirmed by Morris (1996:312) when he refers to Ruth's son after his birth as *God's Gift*. He further states that in the *Book of Ruth*, there is a consistent thought that God is over all and works out of His will. According to Ruth 4:16-17 it is He who transforms (re-creates) the futureless lives of these two women (Naomi and Ruth) to one with a future. Naomi the childless widow becomes Naomi the surrogate grandmother. Ruth the childless widow is transformed (re-created) into a wife and mother of the Israelites (Rt. 4:13; Loader, 1992:94).

5.4.3 The omniscient God

Inter alia Job 1:12; 12:4-25; 28:20 and 28:23-28 attempt to depict the omniscience, the infinite knowledge of God according to scholars like Loader (1992:78-79).

There exists many theories about the dating of Ruth 4. However, it is one of the postulates of this dissertation that Ruth 4 forms an integral part of the *Book of Ruth* (cf. Rt. 4: 13-32; Gray, 1967:423-424; Loader, 1992:78; Laffey, 1944:209). Furthermore, this chapter clearly depicts God's omniscience with regard to people. Although this might be regarded as a dogmatic statement, but in accordance with Morris (1976:313) the women of Bethlehem ascribed what had happened to the hand of God. "Blessed be the Lord" was a usual way of expressing thankfulness. It is the one of the viewpoints of this dissertation that in His infinite wisdom God provided the future great King David with a foremother from the land of Moab in order to allow for the eventual bonding of widely divergent national and cultural groups in David.

5.4.4 God is merciful

According to Waite (1994:397) the word *mercy* refers to compassion or sympathy to the defeated enemies. According to Isaiah Is.55:14; Exodus Ex. 14:13-14 God is merciful. He provides for the past, the present and the future. God is not only the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, he is also the God of Elimelech, Mahlon, Chilion, Naomi, Ruth and Boaz. In the *Book of Ruth*, God is merciful, He provides future for the powerless widows namely Naomi and Ruth. He makes Naomi use the traditions of the Israelites by manipulating Ruth her daughter-in-law to enter into a Levirate marriage with Boaz as kinsman redeemer (Dt. 25:5-10) in order to secure a future for both of them. God makes Ruth reject her own gods and accept the God of the Israelites. The God she chooses, blesses her for being

faithful to her mother-in-law and to the dead. Through the mercy of God, Ruth is given a husband and a son. Naomi is also blessed, the son who Ruth bears is her son, her dead son's son and her grandson who will perpetuate the family name of Elimelech (Laffey, 1944:209; Loader, 1992:94, Rt.4:13).

5.4.5 God is Almighty

According to Genesis 1:1-27) God is almighty, Creator of the universe. This means that He is all powerful. In the *Book of Ruth* He empowers the powerless childless widow Ruth by converting her to accept the God of the Israelites. He makes Ruth to be used as an instrument by Naomi in order to secure a future for them. God is Almighty and plays an important role.

It is He who transforms the futureless lives of these two women to one with a future. Naomi the childless widow becomes the surrogate grandmother. Ruth the childless widow is changed into a wife and mother.

5.4.6 God of Naomi of Umlazi Township

During the research conducted at Umlazi township, KwaZulu-Natal, it appears as if a hundred percent (100%) of childless widows interviewed believe that *UNkulunkulu* (God) is the creator of the universe (cf. Gn. 1:1). According to the theologian Setiloane (1989:45) the name *UNkulunkulu* means the Big, Big, One. He is also known as *Umvelinqangi* according to African traditions. *Umvelinqangi* means *the one who came first before everything*.

UNkulunkulu is the only God worshipped by Naomi of Umlazi Township. For her He is the same Creator of the Universe as in Genesis 1:1. Widows and especially childless widows usually refer to *Unkulunkulu* as *Indoda Yabafelokazi* (i.e. the husband of the widows) and *the Father of Orphans* (cv. Ex. 22:21; Dt. 10:18, 24).

They regard Him as their only Protector and the only one able to overcome their problems (cf. also Ps. 146:9). God is experienced spiritually in their worship in church and also in their homes. They believe that their problems are being overcome just by calling His name and explaining their problems. For these women He is omniscient (Job 1:12; 12:4-25), merciful (Is. 55:1) and also almighty.

5.4.7 Who is Ruth the Moabite?

According to the *Book of Ruth*, Ruth the Moabite was the wife of the late Mahlon, Naomi's son (Rt. 1:3-4). Therefore she was Naomi's daughter-in-law.

According to *inter alia* Loader (1992:18); Gray (1967:409) Morris (1976:250), Ruth left Moab with her mother-in-law and along the way converted to the God, and the people; and the land of the Israelites (Rt. 1:16-17). It is not clear whether she did it merely to show her sympathy towards her mother-in-law or whether she actually expressed her own convictions. However this moot point has no bearing upon the postulate of this dissertation.

5.4.8 Who is the Ruth of the Naomi of Umlazi Township?

According to the information gathered, it is the premise of this dissertation that Naomi of Umlazi has two Ruths.

(a) The first Ruth

The first Ruth of Naomi of Umlazi is in fact herself. Naomi of Umlazi Township can no longer call upon tradition to safeguard her. The Levirate Law has become desolate in Umlazi Township due to economic reasons. Childless widows have to fend for themselves, as there is nobody else to see after their needs. Naomi of

Umlazi has nobody but herself to provide for her needs and is therefore totally self-reliant. As her own breadwinner she is independent, albeit a lonely independence.

(b) The second Ruth

There is also a second Ruth. It would appear as if this second Ruth is the church or religious group/society where these women worship God. Most of the respondents indicated their spiritual dependence upon religion. For those that describe themselves as Christians the church as the 'House of God' is the provider, the almighty, the all-merciful, the omniscient. As far as Naomi of Bethlehem is concerned, it is not clear from the narrative itself whether Naomi placed her trust in God. However, what is clear is that Naomi wilfully and purposefully steered Ruth to catch the attention of a man like Boaz who eventually became the two women's kinsmen.

5.4.9 Conclusion

It would appear as if Naomi of Bethlehem was regarded by society as being helpless. Thurston (1989:9) describes a widow as one who is silent helplessly mourning for her dead husband. Apparently, she was unemployed and in need of support - both financially and spiritually. Therefore, Naomi needed Ruth's youth and vigour to secure a future for both of them. On the other hand, Ruth in strange surroundings among foreign people also needed Naomi who had traditional experience, wisdom and the *chutzpa* to use and manipulate traditions and people for her and Ruth's benefit.

In Umlazi Township, most of today's Naomis do not need a Ruth probably because of today's societal conditions and employment possibilities. Although there are exceptions, it would appear as if primarily they manage their own affairs.

Those who are unemployed devote their lives to the church as the 'House of God' where they believe they receive spiritual assistance from God. However, often this spiritual assistance is a way of alleviating their loneliness.

In those cases where the childless widows is unemployed, her Ruth is a mere government pension. In the township of Umlazi, today's Naomi can in certain ways still be compared to Naomi of Bethlehem as far as innovative ideas and plans to survive are concerned. However, circumstances and numerous societal changes and adverse circumstances like urbanization have forced women to become more and more self-reliant.

It was indeed an eye-opener to note that in those sections of Umlazi Township where the research of this dissertation was conducted, childless widows seemingly do not need assistance and therefore do not ask for assistance - not even to alleviate their loneliness. In fact, it is one of the tragedies of today's shallow societal relationships that the plight of childless widows remains unnoticed and is never mentioned.

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

6.1 INTRODUCTION

History should always be understood as an attempt by a historiographer to explore past happenings and to tell a story about these perceived happenings and events.

The *Book of Ruth* is certainly as far as the topic of this dissertation is concerned, one of the most contentious books in the Old Testament, albeit there are as many divergent interpretations as readers. However, unfortunately scholars do not always do justice to all characters in the narrative, because virtually all commentaries and/or other literary and scholarly work based on and written about this book, highlight the character of Ruth - often to the detriment of Naomi. Therefore, in the dissertation the focus falls on Naomi and on her daughters-in-law and on their societal status, namely that of childless widows in a female unfriendly culture.

Traditions, especially traditions concerning childless widows in the Ancient Near East and especially in the Israelite culture, were then examined and compared with that of the Zulu culture - both historically and contemporary. As Naomi came from and returned to a very specific Israelite town, i.e. Bethlehem, it was decided to compare the status of childless widows in very specific surroundings, namely that of Umlazi Township in the greater Durban area situated in KwaZulu-Natal.

In concurrence with Ancient Israelite and Zulu traditions, the emphasis in the dissertation falls on Naomi, the mother-in-law figure. Contrary to the usual tendency to regard Ruth as a heroic young women who managed to provide for her mother-in-law before and after the Levirate marriage with Boaz had been contracted, a distant relative. However, unbeknown to both women, this Levirate

marriage would cause Ruth the Moabitess to become the matriarch of the (later) King David and his descendants.

Despite these so-called accomplishments of Ruth in a foreign country with a culture unknown to her, this dissertation attempted to show that she was merely a pawn in the capable hands of astute women faced with a very specific problem to solve, namely that of their survival.

According to Ancient traditions concerning widows and orphans, these two women had no future, but Naomi was evidently a remarkable resourceful woman and well conversant with local and therefore also with Israelite traditions. She used this knowledge to aid and abet her in her manipulation of Ruth. In the process of implementing her plans, she manipulated and steered the main players as well as the situation. Thus she managed to ensure a future for herself and her daughter-in-law and at the same time managed to secure the continuation of the family name.

6.2 CHAPTER 1

It is the hope of the student and author of this dissertation that the aims stated in the first chapter, have been met; that conclusions drawn are honest and have only been replaced after a thorough study of the problems encountered by the childless widow.

6.3 CHAPTER 2

In Chapter 2 the historical background, the origin and the dating of the *Book of Ruth* were examined. Furthermore, the Biblical background of the Book of Ruth, an overview and the purpose of the Book have been discussed at large. The position of widows in the Old Testament, widows and inheritance including childless widows were also analyzed and examined. Finally the role and the meanings of the names used in the narrative were also examined *vis-a-vis* name-

giving in the Zulu culture and traditions *per se* in particular in Umlazi township among childless widows.

6.4 CHAPTER 3

In chapter 3 research centred around culture and traditions in Ancient Israel in particular and especially as found in the *Book of Ruth* was examined. Thereafter traditions concerning widows in the Zulu culture were researched. Specific traditions identified in the Book of Ruth were compared with similar traditions found amongst the Zulu people. It was interesting to note that virtually the same traditions could be identified in both cultures.

6.5 CHAPTER 4

Chapter 4 is one of the most important chapters of this dissertation. In this Chapter the role and fate of childless widows in Ancient Israelite culture as well as the Zulu culture were examined. It was important to note that while widows are portrayed as being seemingly powerless, the *Book of Ruth* sets out to prove the opposite.

Also the role and position of a daughter-in-law in the two cultures were examined and compared. Once again, many similarities and divergences were observed.

One of the most important relationships in a family is that of the mother-in-law *vis-a-vis* the daughter-in-law. It would appear as if the mother-in-law not only played a pivotal role in the ancient Israelite family circle, but she is also a pivotal figure in the Zulu family concept.

Out of the results of the research documented in this chapter came the conception that, the survival of the two women depended upon the success of Naomi's manipulation of Ruth. This observation then gave rise to the question whether

today's Naomi on crossroads of Umlazi Township, also need a Ruth to ensure survival.

6.6 CHAPTER 5

Chapter 5 contains the results of the research done in this respect in Umlazi Township. A questionnaire was used for this purpose and an example will be found under Addenda. The information gleaned from the questionnaire that has been distributed to only a segment of childless widows found in Umlazi Township, on the one hand nullified the premise of this thesis concerning a Naomi's need for Ruth, because of the greater independence of women today and also because of economic factors involved. On the other hand, it was also determined that in all cases every single Naomi does have a Ruth. Only today's Ruth is not of necessity a person. In fact, it is more often an institution than a person.

This chapter emphasised the view of this dissertation that Naomi could only survive because she could manipulate Ruth. The question that this chapter would need to highlight is whether today's Naomi is still in need of a Ruth and (even more important) who is her Ruth?

6.7 CHAPTER 6

Chapter 6 contains the summary and findings of the Research.

6.7.1 The Questionnaire

The information gleaned from the questionnaires distributed to a segment of the childless widows found in Umlazi proved how independent yet also dependant the childless widow of today still is.

6.7.2 Interpretation of findings

Based on the data collected, it has become apparent that the moment childless widows relate their problems, they do so with severe pain. The sense of being a childless widow instills a feeling of agony and trauma, hence when they explain their conditions most of them feel hurt by the past experience which they believe is contemptuous.

Other childless widows narrate their experience and problems with courage. The fact that some of them have been able to overcome their problems elevate their confidence in their abilities, that reinforces the notion that they are not different from other ordinary women. During the course of the research, it has transpired that the pillar of their strength flows directly from the Mighty God, who they recognise as their overarching redeemer. Same applies in the case of Naomi and Ruth of Israel, who unservedly acknowledge His power behind their success. It was discovered that the childless widows did not choose to be in that position instead God put them in such a position. This was vindicated by Mrs Gerbashe, Addendum 1, one of the childless widows when she quoted from the (Ecc. 3:1) "Everything that happens in this world is according to God's will". To add on that, she said "my husband died because of God's will, I will also die according to His wish".

In Umlazi, most of these women are actually disempowered and poor as they lack material means to fulfil their goals. All in one their hope is entirely in the hands of God.

6.7.3 Conclusion

The primary task of this study was to investigate the plight of childless widows in Ancient Israel with the aim of making a comparative assessment of the conditions in which childless widows live in African communities and Ancient Israel.

The conclusion is based on literature evaluation on the story of Ruth and the data collected in Umlazi Township through interviews and questionnaires based on the literature evaluated on the subject of the *Book of Ruth*. It could be concluded that the lives and fates of all human beings, be it a childless widow or widow with children and ordinary people, is purposefully and divinely, determined, guided by the will of God. This is clearly illustrated by Vosloo (1992:69). "The Lord controlled events in order to allow a Moabite woman to become one of the Lord's covenant people, for he is not bound by the descent and background of a person." Vosloo suggests that the lives and destinies of human beings are in the hands of God.

In making human beings in His image, God has a purpose. The *Book of Ruth* provides some lessons to childless widows which warrant further elaboration. Firstly the *Book of Ruth* teaches all human beings at large, about human behaviour their God works in such a way that their actions, decisions and events are mainly guided by Him.

The view posited by Laffey (1988:208) with respect to the story of Ruth could be correct. According to his standpoint, the story of Ruth is about God's empowering the powerless. It is further argued that in Israel a childless widow was regarded as the most lowest and powerless social serrata on category in the society. Therefore Ruth, Naomi and Orpah were considered in that light. Hence, Laffey also contends that "the story or Ruth is about how God vindicates Ruth". God blessed and finally rewarded Ruth with a son for making a supreme sacrifice by becoming considerate and faithful to her mother-in-law. In this respect, acts of embracing her mother-in-law's God and maintaining her dead husband's name, by marrying his next of kin in an expression of faith. Usually it is not easy for widows to remarry the husband's next of kin.

However, the fact that Ruth obeyed the instruction from Naomi is a good illustration that Ruth had confidence and love not only to her late husband but she

had love to the entire family of her husband, more particularly so to Naomi. Ruth showed the everlasting love to her mother-in-law through many actions and behaviour rather than mere words, which may mean something different from what one says orally.

To LaCocque (1990:106) other women in the Ancient Near Israel appeared as the foundational elements of society. They are also the most intuitive and open to creativity in their relations with Ruth through Naomi. They were supportive, embracing, accommodative and sympathetic to both Ruth and Naomi. On a different note by blessing Ruth, God was by implication enabling her to assist Naomi who Ruth regarded as her true mother.

Following from what is said by various scholars, apparently God created human beings for certain purposes and uses them to achieve those purposes.

The significance of the Ruth narrative as purported by Vosloo (1992:59) is that if one is prepared to sacrifice oneself for the sake of other fellow human beings, particularly the needy people, one usually receives the Lord's blessing. In the literature, it is suggested that God "guides" by means of ordinary events and blesses those who sacrifice themselves for other people. In influencing and blessing His children, God does not expect them to be perfect in their actions and conduct. Evidence in the study seems to indicate that in the light of the sacrifice willingly made by Ruth to Naomi, she (Ruth) in turn was rewarded by God with most of all what she achieved. The sacrifice made by Ruth was also acknowledged by amongst other writers, LaCocque (1990:106) when he states that "Before Ruth was faithful to her new husband, she first showed hesed (steadfast love, fidelity, dedication) to another woman. Indeed, as I have insisted, she went with her mother-in-law for Naomi's sake and with a total relinquishing of herself".

On a comparative note, the data analysis and research findings have shown how childless widows in Umlazi township live, and reflect to problems and challenges facing childless widows in African communities. Some of these challenges facing childless widows in Umlazi African Societies, where interviews were conducted are not much different from the problems experienced by Naomi and Ruth in Ancient Israel Society. For instance in African societies the following are some of the challenges confronting childless widows.

One of the interviewees by the name of E. Dlamini complained of lack of financial support while A. Msomi, raised the issue of accommodation as the main problematic issue. Two of the interviewees S. Khambule and B. Ndlovu highlighted the problem of poverty and loneliness which they experienced in their lives, they feel like being deserted by their relatives. B. Gerbashe as a childless widow grievously complained about her property including her pension money which was unscrupulously confiscated by the in-laws who we think they took advantage of the death of her husband.

By and large, these problems were once encountered by Naomi and Ruth in the Ancient Near East whereby Ruth had to choose whether she wanted to remain with her parents or to go with Naomi to perform the Levirate law of the Israelites. On their arrival in Bethlehem, Naomi and Ruth were in desperate need of help from a relative hence Naomi suggested that Ruth should accept the marriage to Boaz, their next of kin who was Elimelech's relative.

In all, the advice Naomi gave to Ruth was in accordance with the tradition, cultures and customs of the Israelites.

In response to the initial questions posed in Chapter one, namely (a) Who is the Ruth of Umlazi?, (b) What motivated Ruth to be so adamant in her belief that going with Naomi to a foreign land would be advantageous to her? and (c) What

lessons are to be learnt by the childless widows of African Societies from the story of Ruth?

To answer the first question; the Ruth of the childless widows of Umlazi is the Government of South Africa. This is confirmed by a number of childless widows who were interviewed especially the aged, unemployed childless widows. They regard the Government financial support in the same light as the support that Ruth gave to Naomi.

Referring to the second question, literature evaluated on the story of Ruth reveals that the rationale behind Ruth's decision to follow Naomi was the sense of deep attachment, love, respect and sympathy for her mother-in-law.

Turning to the third question: there are many lessons to be learnt in the story of Ruth, however, I will mention only three lessons.

One It is important for childless widows to be trustworthy and to devote themselves to God.

Two The Story is a good illustration of the fact that perseverance is the mother of success, so says the idiom.

Three God blesses those people who are prepared to sacrifice or even suffer for others as Ruth sacrificed for her mother-in-law.

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- Addendum 12 : SHABALALA, V. Personal interview. J 848 Umlazi Township, 16 November 1997.
- Addendum 13 : MBUTHO, G. personal interview. J 890 Umlazi Township, 18 November 1997.
- Addendum 14 : ZULU, B. Personal interview. L 645 Umlazi Township, 11 January 1998.
- Addendum 15 : MAJAVU, S. Personal interview. Q 100 Umlazi Township, 11 February 1998.

- Addendum 16 : DLAMINI, E. Personal interview. J 498 Umlazi Township, 12 May 1997.
- Addendum 17 : NGCOBO, I. Personal interview. H 104 Umlazi Township, 20 May 1998.
- Addendum 18 : HLANGU, B. Personal interview. D 104 Umlazi Township, 27 May 1998.
- Addendum 19 : XABA, J. Personal interview. Section C. (Home of the Aged) 30 May 1998.
- Addendum 20 : CELE, B. Personal interview. AA 827 Umlazi Township, 02 June 1998.
- Addendum 21 : MTHEMBU, F. Personal interview. C 112 Umlazi Township, 02 June 1998.
- Addendum 22 : MBHELE, T. Personal interview. J 989 Umlazi Township, 10 July 1998.
- Addendum 23 : KUBHEKA, H. Personal interview. G 454 Umlazi Township, 25 July 1998.
- Addendum 24 : MKHUNGO, X. Personal interview. A 1030 Umlazi Township, 25 July 1998.
- Addendum 25 : LUNGWAZI-DLAMINI, V. Personal interview. K 125 Umlazi Township, 28 July 1998.

Addendum 26 : XABA, MAHLANGU, E. Personal interview. L 241
Umlazi Township, 01 August, 1998.

Addendum 27 : MCHUNU, R. Personal interview. E 451 Umlazi
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Addendum 28 : MBAMBO, V. Personal interview. J 301 Umlazi
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Addendum 29 : SHEZI, V. Personal interview. R 200 Umlazi Township,
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Addendum 30 : MATHIBELA, Z. Personal interview. Q 550 Umlazi
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AD After Death of Christ
BC After birth of Christ
LXX Septuagint

Gen. Genesis
Ex. Exodus
DT. Deuteronomy
Nb. Numbers
Ps Psalms
1 Ki. 1 Kings
2 Ki. 2 Kings
1 Chr. 1 Chronicles
Mic. Micah
Dan. Daniel

Judg. Judges
Rt. Ruth
Is. Isaiah
Jr. Jeremiah
1 Sam. 1 Samuel
2 Sam. 2 Samuel
Jb. Job
Josh. Joshua
Ezr. Ezra
Neh. Nehemiah