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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

- Naomi's role: mentor and strategist

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

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

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

- Boaz's role: authority and ally

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

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

- Ruth's leadership: initiative and adaptability

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

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

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

- A collaborative leadership model

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

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

- Leadership beyond hierarchies

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### 4.4 Historical context and impact on leadership

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

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

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

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

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

Comparison to African socio-economic and legal structures.

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

#### 1. Patriarchal standards

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

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

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

## 2. Land ownership

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

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

## 3. Marriage as economic standing

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

## 4. Provisions for the poor in a community

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

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

## 5. Extended family

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

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

### 4.4.1.1 Legal constraints

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

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

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

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

#### 4.4.1.2 Leadership within constraints

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

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

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

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

## 4.5 Contemporary relevance and applications

### 4.5.1 Leadership lessons for modern contexts

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

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

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

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

#### 4.5.1.1 Resilience as a core leadership trait

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

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

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

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

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

#### 4.5.1.3 Strategic adaptability within constraints

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

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

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

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

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

#### 4.5.1.4 Implications for modern leadership models

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

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

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

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

#### 4.6 Gender equality and empowerment

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

##### 4.6.1 Reflecting on patriarchal perspectives

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## 4.7 Synthesis

### 4.7.1 Summary of key findings

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

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

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

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

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

#### 4.7.2 Contribution to scholarly discourse

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### 4.7.3 Suggestions for future research

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## CHAPTER 5

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### 5.1.1 Historical context

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

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

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

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

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

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

### 5.1.2 Current perspectives

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### 5.1.3 Challenges faced by women leaders today

#### 5.1.3.1 Gender biases and stereotypes

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

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

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

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

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

#### 5.1.3.2 Work-life balance issues

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

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

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

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

#### 5.1.3.3 Structural barriers and glass ceiling effects

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### 5.1.4 Case studies and examples

##### 5.1.4.1 Profiles of prominent women leaders

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### 5.1.4.2 Success stories and lessons learned

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

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

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

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

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

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

### 5.2.1 Lessons for modern leadership

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*The Journal of Corporate Responsibility and* highlights how Ruth's strategic approach in aligning herself with Boaz demonstrates the value of proactive positioning and seeking out opportunities in uncertain contexts (Lu, 2016:55-71). For instance, modern leaders like Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala have proactively positioned themselves in global governance roles, using strategic alliances to amplify their influence. This reflects the need for women today to be both strategic and bold in pursuing leadership roles, especially in sectors where they are

underrepresented (Maran, 2025:83). By being proactive, as Ruth was, modern leaders can create opportunities even in challenging situations, such as navigating cultural biases or organizational restructuring. Moreover, Ruth's ability to adapt and thrive in unfamiliar circumstances is echoed in the experiences of women like Indra Nooyi, former CEO of PepsiCo, who led the company with a focus on innovation and adaptability, reshaping its business strategies to align with changing global trends (Carmeli, 2010:250).

African leaders such as Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and Amina J. Mohammed have also embodied these qualities. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, as the first elected female head of state in Africa, demonstrated remarkable courage and strategic thinking by leading Liberia out of a prolonged civil conflict and building stable governance structures (Amutabi, 2024:78). Her resilience in confronting both national and international challenges mirrors Ruth's bravery and adaptability. Similarly, Amina J. Mohammed, the Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations, has showcased strategic positioning in her career, particularly through her role in driving sustainable development policies at both national and global levels. Mohammed's ability to align herself with key stakeholders and build coalitions resonates with Ruth's alliance with Boaz, showing that strategic alliances are pivotal for influencing policy and promoting inclusive development.

Graça Machel, who has tirelessly advocated for children's rights and women's empowerment across Africa, demonstrated strategic adaptability and courage, particularly in her work challenging societal expectations and transforming policy (Okorodudu, 1998:349).

## 5.2.2 Implications for contemporary female leaders

### 5.2.2.1 Practical approaches derived from the book of Ruth

The narrative of Ruth provides an enduring framework for proficient leadership, particularly beneficial for present-day female leaders manoeuvring through intricate organizational and societal contexts. Through her conduct, Ruth illustrates several selective fundamental leadership methodologies:

#### 1. Leading with empathy

Ruth's expression of empathy, manifested through her prioritization of Naomi's welfare, underscores a leadership paradigm that emphasises compassion and altruism. Contemporary

scholarship supports this model, indicating that empathy not only builds trust but also enhances team engagement. Graves (2024:241) assert that empathetic leadership improves team dynamics by establishing a nurturing environment in which team members feel acknowledged and valued. Leadership driven by empathy strengthens cohesion and boosts productivity, especially within diverse teams. By addressing the distinct needs of individual team members, empathetic leaders can cultivate an inclusive atmosphere that enhances job satisfaction and reduces turnover—key metrics of effective leadership.

Empathy as a characteristic of leadership is essential because it enables leaders to understand the emotions and perspectives of their team members (Nakamura et al, 2025:1-38). This understanding allows leaders to respond to challenges in a way that not only addresses the practical aspects of a situation but also supports the emotional needs of those involved. Empathetic leaders are more attuned to the well-being of their teams, which helps create a supportive work environment where individuals feel empowered and motivated (Mud-Fegett et al, 2024:63-83). Leaders who demonstrate empathy foster loyalty, engagement, and a sense of security, which are critical in achieving long-term organizational success. Empathy encourages open communication, fosters trust, and helps resolve conflicts more effectively, ultimately leading to stronger team relationships and improved performance.

Ruth's dedication to Naomi's welfare, even at significant personal sacrifice, embodies a leadership style grounded in understanding and genuine care for others. This type of leadership fosters trust, loyalty, and an invaluable sense of belonging—attributes essential for impactful and sustainable leadership.

A modern illustration of empathetic leadership is exemplified by Jacinda Ardern's compassionate decision-making during crises (Le Fevre, 2021:165-179). As New Zealand's Prime Minister, Ardern demonstrated empathy through her heartfelt responses to critical incidents, such as the Christchurch Mosque shootings and the COVID-19 outbreak. Her ability to connect with people, communicate with authentic care, and prioritize citizens' welfare earned her respect both nationally and globally. Ardern's approach demonstrates that empathy in leadership transcends mere feelings; it involves taking proactive actions that prioritize collective well-being, making difficult decisions that support community welfare, and engaging in communication that provides solace and unity.

The leadership styles of Ruth, Jacinda Ardern, and African leaders such as Ellen Johnson Sirleaf collectively show that empathy-driven leadership is both powerful and transformative (Nakamura, 2025:38). Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, who held the esteemed position of President of

Liberia in the past, exemplified a profound sense of empathy throughout her tenure, particularly during the devastating Ebola crisis, as she prioritized the well-being and welfare of her citizens while simultaneously engaging in relentless and unwavering efforts to foster unity and cohesion within the nation. Such leadership connects people during times of conflict, inspires confidence in moments of uncertainty, and unites individuals under a common purpose. In an era where challenges often seem overwhelming, leaders who prioritize empathy bring hope, resilience, and a sense of belonging that motivates communities to persevere.

## 2. Building strategic alliances

Visser (2011:128-145) research emphasises that strategic networking is a vital tool for women in leadership roles, particularly as they navigate predominantly male-dominated sectors like corporate and political arenas. By creating connections that reach beyond their local surroundings, women can obtain essential information, guidance, and opportunities that empower them to progress in their professional journeys. Patel and Thompson argue that these networks not only provide support but also help in challenging gender-based barriers that often inhibit women's progression in leadership roles.

Ruth's alliance with Boaz illustrates the power of strategic partnerships, a critical tool for overcoming systemic barriers. Visser (2011:128-145) research indicates that strategic networking is essential for women in leadership, enabling them to navigate male-dominated fields such as corporate and political spheres. Alliances, as exemplified by leaders like Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, facilitate significant advancements and allow leaders to drive meaningful change (Salawu, 2023:1-6). These partnerships not only support career progression but also contribute to a broader impact within organizations and communities.

The example of Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala illustrates this concept effectively. As the Director-General of the World Trade Organization, Okonjo-Iweala has skilfully utilized strategic connections to enhance her influence and promote transformation. Her ability to form and sustain alliances across diverse political and economic groups has contributed significantly to her success in a global, highly competitive environment. Strategic networking, as Patel and Thompson highlight, is not just about building professional contacts; it is also about cultivating mutual trust and long-term relationships that can catalyse transformative change within institutions.

This methodology aligns with the comprehensive structure of leadership evolution that accentuates the essential nature of mentorship and cooperative relationships for women in leadership capacities. For example, Olson et al (2009:47-60) notes that mentorship, which is often facilitated through effective networking, plays a key role in empowering women to take on leadership challenges confidently. Thus, strategic networking, combined with mentorship and advocacy, becomes a powerful mechanism that allows women leaders to thrive despite structural challenges.

### 3. Demonstrating resilience in adversity

Resilience is another key attribute drawn from Ruth's story. Her ability to adapt to new circumstances despite adversity mirrors the resilience modern leaders need in volatile environments. Walsh et al (2024:3474) explains that resilience helps leaders maintain stability, guiding their teams through uncertainty with assurance. Resilient leaders can pivot strategies in response to change, turning challenges into opportunities. Ruth's example inspires today's women leaders to face obstacles with determination, continuously adapting to achieve long-term success.

For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, President Samia Suluhu Hassan of Tanzania had to navigate the complexities of taking office amidst a global health crisis. Her ability to steer her nation through this period with a focus on public health and economic recovery is a testament to her resilience as a leader.

Similarly, Amina J. Mohammed, the Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations and former Minister of Environment in Nigeria, has shown resilience in her leadership roles, particularly in promoting sustainable development and addressing environmental crises. Her dedication to tackling climate challenges and advocating for global partnerships demonstrates the kind of adaptability needed in volatile situations (Mohammed, 2024).

These examples reflect the importance of flexibility and courage in leadership, much like Ruth's unwavering commitment to Naomi and her determination to adapt in new and uncertain surroundings. The ability to adjust course, take decisive action, and embrace change is crucial for leaders facing the complex challenges of today.

### 5.2.2.2 Encouragement and inspiration from biblical narratives

The narrative of Ruth serves as a powerful wellspring of encouragement, offering women leaders timeless lessons in courage, loyalty, and faith:

#### 1. Embracing purpose and confidence

Ruth's decision to leave her familiar world for an uncertain future inspires leaders to step beyond their comfort zones. Narratives like Ruth's can foster a profound sense of purpose, reinforcing confidence amid societal challenges. Ruth's courage encourages women leaders to take risks essential for personal and professional growth.

This theme resonates strongly in the context of African women who have made history by embracing their purpose and stepping into leadership roles, often against significant societal pressures. One such example is Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the former president of Liberia and the first elected female head of state in Africa. Sirleaf took on the challenge of leading her nation after a prolonged civil war, navigating economic turmoil, and advocating for women's rights (Sirleaf, 2009:45). Her journey mirrors Ruth's in her decision to step into an uncertain and demanding role, embodying confidence, and determination despite daunting obstacles.

Another exemplary leader is Wangari Maathai, the first African woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize. Maathai founded the Green Belt Movement, dedicating herself to reforestation, environmental conservation, and women's empowerment in Kenya (Maathai, 2006:102). Like Ruth, Maathai embraced a purpose beyond herself, challenging political norms and societal expectations to promote environmental and social justice. She faced strong opposition but remained steadfast in her commitment, a powerful illustration of courage and purpose-driven action.

Helen Zille, the former Premier of the Western Cape in South Africa, is another leader who embodies these qualities. Zille has been a prominent advocate for good governance, transparency, and education reform. Despite the political challenges she faced, Zille remained committed to her vision of a better society, demonstrating resilience and determination akin to Ruth's story (Zille, 2016:67).

Joyce Banda, the former president of Malawi, also exemplifies purpose and confidence. Banda took office during a time of economic instability and significant political unrest. She made bold decisions to promote economic recovery, fight corruption, and advance women's rights.

Banda's leadership reflects Ruth's willingness to face uncertainty with courage, stepping into a leadership role that required bold and sometimes unpopular decisions (Banda, 2013:54).

These African women leaders, much like Ruth, demonstrate the courage to make transformative decisions. They have embraced their purpose and confidently pursued their visions, even when these paths were uncertain or fraught with challenges. Their stories offer powerful examples of how stepping beyond one's comfort zone can lead to impactful change, both on a personal level and within broader society.

## 2. Loyalty and support networks

Ruth's loyalty to Naomi exemplifies the profound impact of nurturing strong relationships and support systems. This narrative, situated in the context of family commitment and interpersonal commitment, extends its relevance beyond its ancient setting into contemporary leadership dynamics. Agba and Agba (2025:45) aptly highlights the invaluable role of loyalty and meaningful connections in leadership, emphasizing that "the cultivation of deep relationships facilitates collaboration, trust, and mutual support, which are often pivotal to achieving success." The story of Ruth and Naomi serves as a powerful reminder of the strength that emerges from genuine dedication to others, particularly in times of hardship.

In modern leadership contexts, this principle is amplified through the concept of strategic networking. Visser (2011:128-145) research emphasises that strategic networking is a vital tool for women in leadership roles, particularly as they navigate predominantly male-dominated sectors like corporate and political arenas. By creating connections that extend beyond local surroundings, women can obtain essential information, guidance, and opportunities that empower them to progress in their professional journeys. Such networks not only provide support but also challenge the gender-based barriers that often inhibit women's progression in leadership roles.

Ruth's alliance with Boaz illustrates the power of strategic partnerships, a critical tool for overcoming systemic barriers. These alliances enable women leaders to navigate complex fields, with examples such as Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala demonstrating their effectiveness. As the Director-General of the World Trade Organization, Okonjo-Iweala has skilfully utilized strategic connections to enhance her influence and promote transformation. Her ability to form and sustain alliances across diverse political and economic groups has contributed significantly

to her success in a global, highly competitive environment. These partnerships, not only support career progression but also drive meaningful organizational and community change.

Strategic networking is not merely about building professional contacts but also about cultivating mutual trust and long-term relationships that catalyse transformative change within institutions. Visser (2011:128) notes that “strong relational networks serve as protective buffers against the numerous challenges that leaders face, providing emotional resilience and practical assistance.” For women leaders, this concept is particularly salient. Building and maintaining loyalty within support networks helps female leaders overcome structural barriers, enabling them to form resilient teams that thrive on mutual support and solidarity.

The comprehensive structure of leadership evolution also emphasises the essential role of mentorship and cooperative relationships. Olson et al (2009:47-60) notes that mentorship, often facilitated through effective networking, plays a key role in empowering women to take on leadership challenges confidently. Strategic networking, combined with mentorship and advocacy, becomes a powerful mechanism for women leaders to thrive despite structural challenges.

The narrative of Ruth and Naomi, paired with Ruth’s alliance with Boaz, provides timeless lessons in the transformative potential of loyalty and strategic networking. It underscores how unwavering commitment to others and the cultivation of meaningful partnerships can empower individuals and communities. In today’s interconnected and competitive leadership landscape, these lessons remain as relevant as ever, offering a model for building supportive, resilient networks that drive progress and collective success.

### 5.2.3 Integration of faith and leadership

#### 5.2.3.1 Faith and spirituality supporting leadership roles

Faith and spirituality play significant roles in supporting individuals, particularly women, in leadership positions by providing them with moral and emotional resilience. Biblical examples of women who demonstrated faith and spirituality include Deborah, Esther, and Hannah. Deborah, a judge, and prophetess, displayed strong leadership grounded in her faith, guiding the Israelites during a time of crisis (Judges 4-5). Esther's courage to approach the king and save her people, despite the potential danger to her own life, exemplifies faith in action (Esther 4:16). Hannah's persistent prayers and her dedication of her son Samuel to God demonstrate a

deep spiritual resilience and trust in divine providence (1 Samuel 1-2). The story of Ruth, as seen in the Hebrew Scriptures, serves as a compelling example of how faith can offer a strong foundation for leadership. Ruth's unwavering commitment to her mother-in-law Naomi and her courage to step into unfamiliar territory demonstrates how faith inspires a leadership style marked by devotion, humility, and courage. Her spiritual strength empowered her to make challenging decisions, an essential trait for leaders facing uncertainties in their roles.

Recent literature on faith in leadership emphasises the importance of integrating spiritual practices for enhancing leadership effectiveness. The concept of spirituality endows leaders with a profound sense of meaning and purpose, thereby facilitating their capacity to exhibit heightened levels of empathy and resilience in the context of leading others. In the context of women in leadership, faith often serves as a vital source of strength against societal barriers, enhancing their ability to navigate challenges with grace. Ruth's story exemplifies how faith-based moral support can empower women to persist in leadership roles despite hardships, cultivating an environment of hope and perseverance.

Ruth's unwavering faith also provides a model of vision-centered leadership, particularly inspiring for leaders facing ambiguity. Faith-based leadership helps leaders maintain focus and resilience, even in challenging circumstances. Leaders like Graça Machel and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf exemplify how faith, coupled with personal resilience and support networks, fuels transformative change in communities.

African scholars such as Mbiti (1990:1-2) emphasize the role of faith in enabling leaders to overcome obstacles and inspire others in their communities, particularly in contexts where adversity is common. Historical African women, such as Nehanda of Zimbabwe, Yaa Asantewaa of Ghana, and Makeda, the Queen of Sheba, also exemplify faith and spirituality in leadership. Nehanda's spiritual leadership played a crucial role in the resistance against colonial forces in Zimbabwe (Kroesbergen, 2020:5).

Yaa Asantewaa demonstrated faith and resilience in leading the Ashanti rebellion against British colonialism (Arhin Brempong, 2000:97; Appiah & Gates, 1999:276), while Makeda's wisdom and spiritual depth are celebrated in Ethiopian tradition (Munro-Hay, 2001:45). These examples, alongside Ruth's narrative, reinforce the importance of resilience, vision, and community for women leading in complex, evolving environments.

#### 5.2.3.2 Role of ethical and moral guidance in leadership

The story of Ruth offers profound insights into the role of ethical and moral guidance in effective leadership. Ruth's decision to remain loyal to Naomi and her commitment to adopting the customs of her new community reflect deep integrity and adherence to moral principles. These qualities not only highlight Ruth's character but also provide a timeless framework for contemporary leadership. In modern contexts, ethical leadership emphasises upholding values such as honesty, fairness, accountability, and community welfare, which are critical for fostering trust and sustainable impact (Kathayat, 2024:17-28). This includes:

*Ruth as a model of ethical leadership:* Ruth's informal yet impactful leadership is a testament to the power of moral courage and resilience. Her actions—from gleaning in the fields to ensure provision for herself and Naomi, to aligning with the ethical practices of her adopted society—demonstrate a servant-leadership model rooted in service to others. Robert Greenleaf's theory of servant leadership underscores the importance of putting others' needs above personal interests, which aligns closely with Ruth's story (Greenleaf, 1977:13). This selfless approach inspires trust and loyalty, making it a foundational principle for effective leadership across various domains.

*Ethical leadership in African contexts:* Women in African leadership have historically been celebrated for their ability to integrate ethical principles with effective governance. Figures like Nehanda of Zimbabwe (spirit medium and anti-colonial leader, see [scielo.org.za](http://scielo.org.za)) exemplify ethical leadership through their commitment to community welfare and justice during times of adversity. Yaa Asantewaa of Ghana demonstrated ethical leadership through her faith and resilience in leading the Ashanti rebellion against British colonialism (Arhin Brempong, 2000:97; Appiah & Gates, 1999:276), while Makeda's wisdom and spiritual depth are celebrated in Ethiopian tradition (Munro-Hay, 2001:45). Contemporary leaders such as Graça Machel continue this legacy by prioritizing collective well-being and moral accountability, calling for “moral courage” rooted in justice and empathy (Okorodudu, 1998:349). Their leadership styles resonate with spiritual and ethical values, emphasizing the importance of faith, moral courage, and communal solidarity in decision-making.

*Cultural Values and Leadership:* African cultural values often prioritize collective welfare, moral courage, and the pursuit of justice. These values reinforce the servant leadership model, which places the needs of the community above personal gain. Such cultural paradigms align with Ruth's actions, as she demonstrated an unwavering commitment to Naomi's well-being and the ethical standards of her community. This alignment highlights the universality of ethical leadership principles, making them relevant across different cultural and historical contexts.

*Ethical Leadership in Modern Frameworks:* Modern leadership frameworks increasingly recognize the importance of ethical practices as key pillars of sustainable leadership. As noted by Northouse (2021:215), morality and ethics are essential for building trust, fostering loyalty, and achieving long-term success. Leaders who embody these values are better equipped to navigate complex challenges and inspire their teams toward collective goals. Ruth’s example serves as a powerful reminder of the transformative impact of ethical decision-making, particularly in environments where integrity and trust are paramount.

Practical Applications: Ruth’s story offers valuable lessons for contemporary leaders:

1. **Integrity in Decision-Making:** Ruth’s unwavering loyalty to Naomi underscores the importance of aligning actions with moral values. Leaders today can draw inspiration from this example to make principled decisions, even in the face of adversity.
2. **Service to Others:** By prioritizing Naomi’s needs over her own, Ruth exemplifies the servant leadership model. Modern leaders can adopt this approach to foster stronger relationships and build cohesive teams.
3. **Building Community Trust:** Ruth’s integration into her adopted community highlights the significance of respecting and adhering to communal values. Leaders who engage with their communities ethically and authentically are more likely to inspire trust and cooperation.
4. **Resilience and Adaptability:** Ruth’s ability to navigate a new cultural and social landscape demonstrates resilience—a critical trait for leaders facing change and uncertainty.

**Bridging Biblical and Contemporary Perspectives:** The ethical and moral principles demonstrated by Ruth are not confined to biblical narratives; they have profound implications for modern leadership. Whether in corporate settings, political arenas, or community initiatives, leaders who prioritize ethical standards can create lasting impact. By embodying integrity, accountability, and compassion, they can build authentic and impactful leadership models that resonate across generations.

Ruth’s story stands as a dual emblem of historical and contemporary guidance in ethical leadership. Her unwavering dedication to moral principles and servant leadership reveals the profound impact of values-driven actions. Ruth’s life not only exemplifies the strength derived from moral courage and integrity but also underscores the importance of putting others’ welfare above personal gain. In today’s complex leadership landscape, her principles resonate as timeless wisdom, offering leaders a framework for building trust, resilience, and fostering a

culture of communal welfare. Modern leaders can draw from Ruth's example to navigate ethical dilemmas, inspire loyalty, and create sustainable impact that transcends immediate challenges, leaving a legacy rooted in authenticity and compassion.

### 5.3 Implications

The implications of contemporary views on women in leadership, in dialogue with the biblical narrative of Ruth, extend far beyond theoretical discussions, encompassing actionable strategies for creating equitable leadership landscapes. Leadership studies over the last decade have increasingly focused on bridging the gap between gender representation and effective leadership, highlighting the systemic challenges that women face and the transformative potential of inclusive practices (Eagly A.H. & Heilman M.E, 2016:355).

Recent scholarship underscores the necessity of policy reforms, tailored leadership development programs, and interdisciplinary research to dismantle structural barriers and foster environments where women leaders can thrive. For instance, Ely, Ibarra, and Kolb argue for a reimagined approach to leadership training that integrates both gender-specific challenges and broader societal influences (Ely, Ibarra & Kolb, 2011:480). Reave emphasizes the importance of contextualising leadership strategies within cultural and ethical frameworks, a perspective that resonates with the moral and relational principles exemplified in the Book of Ruth (Reave, 2005:655).

In this segment, the goal is to improve and enrich the grasp of women's leadership by systematically investigating and assessing various aspects such as the organizational guidelines that influence the structure within which leadership exists, thorough leadership training frameworks that are intended to cultivate and develop the capabilities required for impactful leadership, along with examining potential research avenues that might arise, all of which synergistically strive to encourage a more inclusive and broadened perspective of women's leadership in the intricate and diverse contexts that characterise contemporary multifaceted environments.

#### 5.3.1 Policy recommendations

The success of women in leadership requires deliberate and targeted policy interventions to dismantle systemic barriers and foster inclusive environments where women can thrive.

Businesses that support and cultivate a greater extent of gender diversity in their leadership teams not only show improved financial results when contrasted with their less diverse counterparts, but they are also inclined to present significantly heightened innovation levels alongside a more adept approach to decision-making. However, deeply ingrained gender biases and institutional barriers persist, requiring holistic policy reforms at both organizational and societal levels to achieve meaningful progress.

#### 5.3.1.1 Organizational policies supporting women in leadership.

*Mentorship and Sponsorship Programs:* Mentorship and sponsorship have emerged as critical tools for fostering women's leadership development. Mentorship programs provide guidance and career planning, while sponsorship ensures that women leaders gain visibility and access to strategic opportunities. Research by Ibarra, and Silva (2010:84) shows that women with sponsors are 22% more likely to achieve leadership roles compared to those without. Organizations should institutionalize these programs to create formal networks of support and advocacy.

*Gender Diversity Initiatives:* Organizations that implement gender diversity initiatives, such as quotas and representation goals, see substantial improvements in leadership inclusivity. A study by Adams and Ferreira (2009:250) highlights that companies with gender-balanced boards demonstrate enhanced decision-making and stronger governance mechanisms. Policies must focus on equitable hiring practices, representation in leadership pipelines, and accountability mechanisms to ensure sustained progress.

*Flexible Work Policies:* The necessity for creating work environments that allow for greater flexibility has become increasingly evident and emphasized, particularly in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has significantly altered our approach to work. Implementing flexible policies, which include providing options for remote work, offering generous parental leave, and ensuring adequate childcare support, empowers women to effectively manage and harmonize their professional obligations with their personal responsibilities in a way that promotes overall well-being and productivity. Such initiatives reduce attrition rates among women leaders and create a more sustainable leadership pipeline. Additionally, organizations should actively monitor the effectiveness of these policies through employee feedback and adapt them to support diverse needs, including those of single parents and caregivers.

### 5.3.1.2 Strategies for creating inclusive and supportive environments.

*Training and Sensitization Programs:* Organizations should invest in training programs that address unconscious bias and promote inclusive leadership. These programs encourage teams to challenge stereotypes and recognize diverse leadership styles (Visser, 2011:128). Organizations which implement and maintain regular, systematic bias training programs tend to experience a notable increase of approximately 15% in the perceptions held by their employees regarding the fairness and equity within the workplace environment. Training initiatives should also include scenario-based learning to help employees practice inclusive behaviours in real-world settings.

*Equitable Resource Allocation:* Ensuring that women leaders have equal access to resources such as training budgets, leadership coaching, and high-visibility assignments is essential. Lack of access to these resources perpetuates inequality and hinders career progression (Salawu, 2023:4). Organizations must audit their practices to identify and rectify disparities in resource distribution. Furthermore, developing transparent criteria for resource allocation can help build trust and accountability within teams.

*Recognition and Celebration:* Celebrating the achievements of women leaders reinforces their contributions and inspires others. Recognition programs can include awards, public acknowledgments, and promotions tied to performance metrics. Highlighting success stories fosters a culture of encouragement and motivation for aspiring leaders (Walsh et al. 2024:3474). Additionally, showcasing these stories through internal and external communication channels can enhance the organization's reputation as a champion of gender equality.

By implementing these policy recommendations, organizations can create ecosystems that not only support women leaders but also enhance overall organizational success and societal equity.

### 5.3.2 Educational and training programs

Developing targeted educational and training programs is vital for empowering women leaders and addressing the specific challenges they face. Recent research highlights the importance of designing curricula that account for gender dynamics, cultural contexts, and the evolving demands of leadership (Madsen & Ngunjiri, 2023:67). Effective training programs can equip women with the skills, confidence, and networks needed to succeed in leadership roles.

### 5.3.2.1 Leadership programs tailored for women

*Customized Leadership Development:* Tailored programs focusing on women's leadership can bridge critical gaps in traditional leadership training. These programs should emphasize confidence-building, negotiation skills, and strategies for overcoming workplace bias. Participants in gender-specific leadership programs increase in ability to navigate male-dominated spaces (Mudd-Fegett et al. 2024:63-83). Integrating practical workshops with mentorship opportunities ensures participants receive both theoretical knowledge and actionable insights.

*Peer Networking and Community Building:* Programs that foster peer networks among women leaders create a support system that is crucial for long-term success. These networks provide spaces for sharing experiences, strategies, and encouragement. Women involved in professional networks are 35% more likely to advance in their careers (Visser, 2011:128-145). Training initiatives should include dedicated time for peer interaction and collaborative projects.

### 5.3.2.2 Incorporation of insights from Ruth into training curricula.

*Courage and Resilience from Ruth's Narrative:* Lessons from the Book of Ruth offer timeless insights into leadership qualities such as courage, resilience, and adaptability. Ruth's determination to overcome societal expectations can inspire modern women leaders to navigate adversity with grace. Training modules can use Ruth's story as a case study to teach perseverance and strategic thinking.

*Ethical and Relational Leadership:* Ruth's commitment to Naomi exemplifies relational leadership—an approach that values empathy, collaboration, and mutual support. Integrating these principles into leadership training helps create leaders who are not only effective but also compassionate. Programs can include reflective exercises that encourage participants to align their leadership style with ethical and relational values.

*Practical Applications:* Educational and training programs should include practical exercises such as role-playing, scenario analysis, and project-based learning to enhance skills in real-world contexts. By focusing on education and training, organizations and institutions can build a robust pipeline of women leaders equipped to navigate the complexities of modern leadership. These programs not only benefit individual participants but also contribute to creating more inclusive and dynamic leadership landscapes (Maran, 2025:90).

### 5.3.3 Future research directions

#### 5.3.3.1 Need for future research

The field of women's leadership offers numerous avenues for future research, particularly at the intersection of gender, culture, and leadership frameworks. Recent studies emphasize the need to deepen understanding of systemic challenges and innovative strategies that can support women in achieving leadership success. This section outlines key areas for further exploration and interdisciplinary approaches that can enrich the dialogue on women in leadership.

#### 5.3.3.2 Areas for further study on women in leadership

##### 5.3.3.2.1 Cross-cultural leadership dynamics

Examining how cultural contexts influence women's leadership experiences is essential for developing global leadership models. Research highlights that societal norms and cultural perceptions significantly affect the opportunities and challenges women face in leadership roles (Eagly & Chin, 2010:217). In the African context, for example, women leaders often navigate a complex interplay of traditional expectations and modern aspirations. Studies show that while African women leaders are making strides in sectors such as education and public health, they continue to face barriers rooted in patriarchal cultural norms and limited access to leadership training (Nkomo & Ngambi, 2009:50). Further, Ampofo and Boateng (2017:102) emphasize that rural women are often excluded from leadership opportunities due to systemic socio-economic barriers and insufficient policy support.

Future research should explore how indigenous leadership practices and community-based strategies can inform global models and support African women in leadership roles. Indigenous leadership practices in Africa, such as Ubuntu, which emphasises community and collective well-being, offer a rich source of insight into relational and ethical leadership styles. These practices can provide alternative frameworks that challenge individualistic and hierarchical models prevalent in Western contexts. Community-based strategies, including grassroots leadership development programs and women's cooperatives, have already demonstrated success in fostering leadership among women in rural and underserved areas. Additionally, exploring the intersection of traditional practices with modern leadership challenges, such as navigating digital transformation and global markets, will provide a comprehensive understanding of their applicability in contemporary settings.

### 5.3.3.2.2 Sector-specific challenges and opportunities

Different industries present unique barriers and enablers for women leaders. For example, the tech industry often grapples with significant gender disparities, while healthcare tends to have higher female representation but limited progression into top executive roles. Exploring sector-specific dynamics can provide actionable insights for addressing disparities and leveraging opportunities in various fields.

### 5.3.3.2.3 Impact of digital transformation on women's leadership

The rise of digital technologies has reshaped organizational structures and leadership roles. Future research should investigate how digital transformation influences women's access to leadership opportunities, particularly in remote and hybrid work environments. According to Angelici and Profeta (2020: 4), remote work enables the narrowing of gender gaps by improving women's work-life balance—but only when mediated by equitable digital communication practices. Similarly, Pal and De (2021: 7) caution that digital platforms can both bridge and widen gender gaps depending on how ICTs are designed and governed.

For example, in Africa, where internet penetration varies widely between urban and rural areas, digital transformation has the potential to either empower or exclude women leaders. Digital tools like e-learning platforms and virtual mentoring programs have enabled women to access leadership training without geographical constraints, as seen in initiatives like the "African Women Leadership Network" (AWLN). Similarly, the "She Leads Africa" platform, a digital and entrepreneurial initiative aimed at empowering African women through mentorship, business resources, and leadership training (Osei & Belo-Osagie, 2014).

It seeks to close the gender gap in leadership by providing access to tools, networks, and opportunities that enable women to thrive in competitive environments and become change-makers in their communities. has demonstrated the potential of digital platforms to provide mentorship and entrepreneurial resources to women. However, limited access to reliable internet and digital devices in many regions perpetuates existing inequalities.

Additionally, cultural biases in technology adoption and digital literacy gaps present significant barriers. For instance, in regions where technology use is predominantly associated with men, women often face stigmatization when engaging with digital tools. Future studies should focus on how to bridge these divides by promoting affordable access to digital tools, incorporating

localized content, and addressing gender biases in technology design and implementation. Policies such as subsidized internet access and digital literacy campaigns targeted at women could play a crucial role in mitigating these barriers and fostering equitable access.

### 5.3.3.3 Interdisciplinary approaches combining theology and leadership studies.

#### 5.3.3.3.1 Integrating biblical narratives with modern leadership models.

The Book of Ruth and other biblical texts offer rich insights into ethical and relational leadership. Future research should explore how these narratives can be integrated with contemporary leadership theories to create faith-informed leadership models. Studies suggest that ethical frameworks rooted in theology can enhance decision-making and organizational integrity (Joseph & Gaba, 2020:7). For instance, Ruth's loyalty and strategic decision-making under adverse circumstances serve as examples of relational and adaptive leadership that resonate with contemporary challenges in organizational contexts.

The narrative of Ruth highlights principles of inclusivity and perseverance, which can inform leadership training programs aimed at fostering diversity and resilience. Integrating these principles with current leadership theories, such as servant leadership and transformational leadership, can bridge the gap between ancient wisdom and modern organizational demands. Future studies should also explore the cross-cultural applicability of these biblical insights, particularly in multicultural leadership settings where values of empathy and ethical decision-making are crucial.

#### 5.3.3.3.2 Gender studies and theological perspectives

Combining gender studies with theological insights can provide a nuanced understanding of women's leadership. This interdisciplinary approach can highlight the interplay between faith, culture, and gender roles, offering fresh perspectives on leadership development. In the African context, theological perspectives often intersect with cultural norms, creating a unique set of challenges and opportunities for women leaders.

Research by Kanyoro (2002:10) and Phiri (2004:23) emphasises the importance of addressing patriarchal interpretations of Scripture that have historically limited women's leadership roles. For instance, reinterpretations of Proverbs 31 as a model of active and resourceful leadership rather than domesticity are gaining traction in African faith communities.

Initiatives such as the “Women of Faith Leadership Program”, a transformative initiative aimed at equipping women with the skills and theological grounding needed for leadership in both faith-based and secular contexts, have demonstrated how theological education can empower women by equipping them with leadership skills grounded in faith and ethics (Phiri, 2004:25).

By integrating gender studies, future research can explore how faith communities in Africa are reinterpreting theological narratives to empower women leaders while respecting cultural values. This intersectional analysis is critical for advancing both theoretical frameworks and practical applications in leadership development. Additionally, a comparative study of gender-inclusive theological practices across African nations could shed light on regional variations and the role of interfaith dialogue in fostering leadership equity.

#### 5.3.3.4 Methodological innovations

##### 5.3.3.4.1 Innovative research methods

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## 5.4 Synthesis

Women's leadership in Africa has made significant strides, yet systemic challenges persist due to deeply ingrained patriarchal norms and structural barriers. While policies and advocacy efforts have increased gender representation in politics, business, education, and religious institutions, women still face heightened scrutiny, exclusion from key networks, and cultural resistance. The *Ubuntu* leadership model, which emphasises relational and collective leadership, provides a viable alternative to traditional hierarchical leadership structures. The biblical story of Ruth mirrors this concept, demonstrating how loyalty, adaptability, and strategic alliances can help women navigate leadership spaces. Ruth's resilience in overcoming societal constraints serves as a guiding framework for modern female leaders striving to break barriers.

The chapter highlights the experiences of prominent women leaders such as *Ellen Johnson Sirleaf*, *Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala*, *Samia Suluhu Hassan*, and *Malala Yousafzai*, who have defied gender norms through strategic networking, advocacy, and ethical leadership. These leaders embody the core principles of Ruth's story—resilience, relational influence, and faith-driven leadership. Women occupying leadership roles frequently encounter supplementary obstacles, including the necessity to reconcile professional obligations with caregiving responsibilities, restrictive mentorship availability, and the phenomenon commonly referred to as the glass ceiling. To effectively mitigate these impediments, it is imperative to implement focused interventions, which may encompass mentorship initiatives, reforms within workplace structures, and transformative cultural shifts that reconceptualize leadership beyond frameworks traditionally dominated by males.

The integration of faith and ethical leadership plays a crucial role in empowering women to lead with integrity and purpose. Ruth's unwavering commitment to Naomi and her moral-driven leadership demonstrate how faith can serve as a foundation for resilience and community-building. In contemporary contexts, servant leadership models that prioritize inclusivity, ethical governance, and collective well-being are essential for sustainable change. In order to promote women's leadership, it is imperative to adopt systemic reforms, engage in cultural advocacy, and implement faith-based leadership frameworks, thereby guaranteeing that women not only attain access to leadership positions but also flourish within these roles.

## CHAPTER 6

### Synthesis

#### 6.1 Introduction

##### 6.1.1 Research problem and scope

This study has addressed a significant gap in Ruth scholarship by exploring leadership as a central theme in the Book of Ruth, reframing the narrative to highlight how leadership transcends formal titles and manifests through actions, decisions, and the ability to navigate societal and cultural complexities. By analysing Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz, the research uncovered a model of dispositional leadership rooted in ethical decision-making, relational intelligence, resilience, and strategic adaptability. These qualities enabled the characters to shape their community's future within a patriarchal society that did not formally recognize female leadership.

##### 6.1.2 Aim(s) and objectives

The aim of the research is to explore Ruth's leadership within biblical narratives using an Afro-centric hermeneutical approach, examining how her story challenges patriarchal structures and provides valuable insights for contemporary female leadership in male-dominated environments. The research was guided by three primary objectives:

1. To examine Ruth's leadership attributes and actions through an Afro-centric hermeneutical lens: This approach provided a fresh perspective by contextualizing Ruth's story within African traditions and perspectives. It illuminated how leadership in the narrative parallels the resilience, relational strength, and communal emphasis found in many African cultural contexts. By adopting this lens, the study revealed the relevance of Ruth's story to modern readers, particularly within societies that value communal collaboration and social resilience.
2. To evaluate how patriarchal structures influence female leadership within biblical narratives: By critically examining the interplay of societal constraints and leadership emergence, this objective highlighted the systemic barriers Ruth and other characters faced. The research demonstrated how Ruth's leadership was not only a personal triumph but also a profound subversion of the societal norms that often-side-lined women. It underscores the importance of

understanding patriarchal structures in shaping leadership narratives and their implications for women navigating similar contexts today.

3. To synthesize lessons from Ruth's narrative that can inform contemporary leadership, especially for women in male-dominated contexts: Ruth's resilience, relational intelligence, and strategic adaptability offer timeless insights for leadership in restrictive environments. By distilling these lessons, the study provides a practical framework for empowering women leaders in contemporary male-dominated contexts, bridging ancient cultural realities with modern leadership challenges.

Central to achieving these objectives were the following questions:

- How does Ruth exemplify leadership within her cultural and societal constraints?
- In what ways does an Afro-centric framework enrich the understanding of female leadership in biblical texts?
- What practical applications can Ruth's narrative provide for modern leadership challenges?

Through these guiding questions, the research synthesized theological, cultural, and leadership studies, creating a nuanced understanding of leadership dynamics in the Book of Ruth. By examining the intersection of leadership and societal structures, it challenged traditional views, advocating for an inclusive model that prioritises marginalised voices.

The study's integration of theological insights with cultural and leadership analysis bridges the gap between ancient and contemporary leadership discussions. Ruth's story serves as a profound model for leadership that thrives under constraints, emphasising resilience, ethical action, and strategic foresight. By adopting an Afro-centric hermeneutical lens, the research contextualized Ruth's leadership in ways that resonate with modern readers, particularly in African and other communal societies. This perspective enriches the narrative, showing how it continues to speak to issues of gender equity, social justice, and leadership dynamics.

The findings affirm that Ruth's leadership is deeply relevant in empowering women leaders who face systemic barriers in male-dominated spaces. Her story offers a timeless reminder that leadership is not defined by positions or offices but by the courage to act ethically, build relationships, and adapt strategically to challenges. Naomi and Boaz's contributions further

reinforce the importance of collaborative leadership, rooted in covenantal faithfulness and justice.

By revisiting the primary objectives and questions, this research concludes with a synthesis of Ruth's enduring significance as a model for leadership. It highlights the relevance of her story for addressing contemporary challenges, particularly in empowering women to navigate restrictive environments with resilience, agency, and relational intelligence. In doing so, this study not only enriches biblical scholarship but also provides actionable insights for modern leadership studies, advocating for more inclusive and dynamic leadership frameworks in diverse cultural contexts.

### 6.1.3 Afro-centric female leadership paradigm.

An Afro-centric perspective underscores communal values, resilience, and adaptability—qualities that are deeply embedded in Ruth's narrative. This research situates Ruth within a broader cultural and theological paradigm, presenting her as a leader whose story resonates strongly with African contexts of community-Centered leadership, relational influence, and the importance of strategic alliances. Ruth exemplifies leadership that thrives in adversity, relying on ethical decision-making and faith-based actions to navigate and transform her circumstances.

Recent scholarship reinforces these perspectives, enriching the study's analysis. Mburu (2019:45-47) emphasises the significance of African hermeneutics in reading biblical texts, highlighting how communal values and relational agency are central to leadership in African contexts. Mburu argues that characters like Ruth embody resilience and adaptability, key traits in African leadership traditions.

Oduyoye (2001:88-90) discusses the vital role of women in theology and leadership within patriarchal structures, identifying parallels between Ruth's narrative and the lived experiences of African women who lead through relational influence and strategic foresight. Oduyoye's work affirms Ruth as a model of female agency that challenges systemic inequalities while maintaining communal harmony.

Haddox (2020:23-126) contributes further by examining the integration of ethics and leadership in biblical narratives. His analysis aligns with Ruth's actions, demonstrating how ethical decision-making and covenantal faithfulness not only serve personal interests but also

contribute to communal flourishing. Haddox's insights frame Ruth's story as a paradigm for ethical leadership, one that transcends cultural and historical boundaries while offering timeless lessons.

Afro-centric interpretations of Ruth's leadership resonate deeply within African contexts. Mburu (2021: 85–87) emphasizes that biblical narratives, when read through local cultural frameworks, reveal how relational intelligence and community alliances are vital for overcoming systemic constraints. Diko (2024: 5–6) reinforces this by highlighting Ruth's collaboration with Naomi and Boaz as emblematic of African leadership models that prioritize collective progress over individual gain.

By interpreting Ruth's story through this Afro-centric lens, the research bridges cultural and biblical narratives, showcasing how Ruth's leadership transcends the confines of patriarchal norms. Her actions demonstrate that leadership is not about positional authority but about relational influence, ethical decisions, and a commitment to communal well-being. This perspective enriches the study's contribution to understanding female leadership dynamics, particularly in contexts where women navigate systemic barriers.

#### 6.1.4 Chapter outline

This chapter synthesises the findings from a comprehensive study of leadership in the Book of Ruth. It addresses a gap in biblical scholarship by highlighting how effective leadership transcends formal authority, emerging instead from personal qualities such as resilience, adaptability, relational intelligence, ethical decision-making, and faith.

The research employed an Afro-centric hermeneutical lens, revealing how Ruth's leadership resonates powerfully within communal contexts, especially in African cultural settings emphasizing values such as community, interconnectedness, and strategic alliances. Ruth's story was used to demonstrate how female leadership can effectively navigate and challenge patriarchal structures, providing insights applicable to modern leadership contexts.

Key findings include Ruth's resilience in adversity, her strategic adaptability to cultural changes, and her influential relational intelligence. These qualities are critical in contemporary leadership, particularly for women facing systemic barriers in male-dominated environments. Ruth's ethical integrity further illustrates how ethical choices contribute to enduring communal benefits and personal transformation.

Practically, the chapter advocates for integrating these insights into leadership training curricula and policymaking, emphasizing mentorship, relational collaboration, and ethical grounding. It recommends the creation of targeted mentorship programs, strategic alliances, and culturally sensitive policies inspired by Ruth's approach.

Finally, the research highlights the value of interpreting biblical narratives through an Afro-centric lens, bridging theology, culture, gender studies, and leadership theory. Ruth's story exemplifies dispositional leadership, underscoring the timeless relevance of leadership grounded in faith, integrity, and relational wisdom, thereby providing a robust model for leaders in diverse contemporary contexts.

## 6.2 Key findings

### 6.2.1 Insights on female leadership from Ruth

Ruth's leadership provides profound insights into female leadership within contexts of adversity, marginalization, and cultural transition. This analysis draws on Mburu's (2019:45) hermeneutical framework, which underscores African communal values, and Kouzes & Posner's (2017:175-210) leadership principles, which emphasize enabling others to act and inspiring a shared vision. Her leadership traits include:

- *Resilience*: Ruth demonstrates extraordinary resilience in the face of personal loss and societal marginalization. Despite being a Moabite widow in a patriarchal society, she takes decisive action to support herself and Naomi, showcasing a determination that transcends cultural and societal constraints. This aligns with Mburu's (2019:45-47) hermeneutical framework, which emphasises communal values and perseverance as critical aspects of leadership in African contexts.
- *Adaptability*: Ruth's remarkable and commendable ability to gracefully adapt to a new cultural and social environment, which is often quite challenging for many individuals, is undeniably pivotal to her overall success in navigating this complex world. She learns and adopts the practices of Naomi's community while maintaining her integrity and values. Kouzes and Posner (2017:92-96) discuss adaptability as a hallmark of effective leadership, emphasizing the ability to navigate new contexts and leverage opportunities for growth. Ruth's adaptability is most evident in her strategic approach to securing her future through Boaz, as seen in Ruth 3:1-11.

- *Influence:* Ruth's actions inspire trust, cooperation, and goodwill, impacting Naomi, Boaz, and the broader community. Her decision to remain loyal to Naomi (Ruth 1:16) exemplifies relational leadership, a concept also emphasized in Burns (2003:3-5) theory of transformational leadership, which highlights the ability of leaders to inspire and influence others through relationships rather than authority.

Ruth's leadership resonates strongly with African communal leadership models, which prioritize relational influence, collective well-being, and resilience. As Oduyoye (2001:88-90) argues, women's leadership within patriarchal contexts often emerges through relational and situational dynamics rather than formal positions of power. Ruth exemplifies this by leveraging her relationships with Naomi and Boaz to bring about systemic change, securing stability and prosperity for her family.

Northouse (2021:56-60) underscores the importance of ethical decision-making and cultural intelligence in leadership, both of which are evident in Ruth's ability to navigate the cultural and societal complexities of Bethlehem. Ruth's leadership reflects a deep understanding of social structures and ethical principles, demonstrating that effective leadership is not limited to positional authority but is rooted in relational intelligence and moral action.

Haddox (2020:123-126) complements this perspective by exploring the integration of ethics and leadership in biblical narratives, affirming that Ruth's actions align with covenantal faithfulness and justice. Her leadership, therefore, is a model of how ethical decision-making can lead to transformative outcomes, even in restrictive environments.

## 6.2.2 Contributions of patriarchal perspectives to leadership analysis

The patriarchal structures depicted in the Book of Ruth play a dual role, functioning as both barriers and enablers of leadership. While these systems marginalise women, they also create frameworks within which innovative and transformational leadership can emerge. Ruth's story exemplifies how individuals navigate societal constraints to exercise agency and influence, offering profound insights into the interplay between systemic limitations and leadership potential.

Mburu (2019:56-58) and Haddox (2020:133-135) emphasize, patriarchal constraints often paradoxically create opportunities for innovative leadership by forcing individuals to adopt strategic and adaptive approaches. Similarly, Oduyoye (2001:92-94) highlights how women

navigate these structures through relational intelligence and strategic decision-making, demonstrating the power of agency within restrictive contexts. Ruth's ability to work within societal boundaries illustrates how transformational leadership and personal agency can emerge even when systemic barriers persist. By inspiring trust and cooperation, she not only reshapes her own future but also contributes to the flourishing of her community. Her story bridges ancient cultural contexts and modern leadership challenges, particularly for women navigating male-dominated spaces.

Kouzes and Posner (2017:130-135) observe, enabling others to act and inspiring a shared vision are hallmarks of effective leadership. These principles are central to Ruth's journey, as she leverages relational intelligence and ethical decision-making to overcome barriers and achieve transformational outcomes. Her story challenges rigid, hierarchical, and exclusionary ideas of leadership, advocating instead for inclusive and relational approaches that emphasize collaboration, trust, and resilience.

Through this lens, Ruth's narrative offers timeless perspectives, demonstrating that leadership is not defined by positional authority but by the ability to navigate constraints and inspire collective action. These insights hold relevance for contemporary leadership, where systemic barriers to women's leadership remain prevalent. Ruth's example provides a powerful framework for empowering leaders who thrive through adaptability, relational influence, and ethical decision-making.

### 6.2.3 Contemporary applications of Ruth's leadership insights

Ruth's story offers practical lessons for modern leadership: Her life exemplifies how leadership can emerge through adversity, ethical integrity, and faith-driven actions. These lessons are particularly potent for addressing contemporary challenges in leadership, including navigating cultural barriers, and fostering inclusive environments.

#### 6.2.3.1 Relational intelligence

Relational intelligence is the ability to understand and manage relationships effectively. This is a cornerstone of transformative leadership. Building trust, fostering alliances, and creating pathways for collective success are critical for overcoming challenges and achieving sustainable outcomes. In the narrative of the Book of Ruth, relational intelligence emerges as a

pivotal quality, exemplified by both Ruth and Naomi in their interactions and decision-making. Their ability to navigate societal structures and maintain strong interpersonal bonds underscores the importance of this leadership trait.

Ruth's unwavering commitment to Naomi, captured in her famous declaration, "*Where you go, I will go; where you stay, I will stay*" (Ruth 1:16-17), highlights her profound relational intelligence. By choosing to remain with Naomi, despite the personal risks of leaving her homeland and entering a foreign society, Ruth demonstrates an ability to prioritize relationships over immediate security. This decision not only cements their bond but also sets the foundation for their collective resilience. Relational intelligence here is not merely about emotional connection but about forging a partnership rooted in trust, loyalty, and shared goals.

Ruth's actions also reflect her keen awareness of the cultural dynamics in her new environment. For instance, her decision to glean in Boaz's field (Ruth 2:2-3) demonstrates a calculated effort to build alliances within a society where her status as a foreigner might have marginalised her. Ruth's respectful approach to Boaz and her initiative to work hard and seek favour illustrate how relational intelligence involves understanding and navigating social hierarchies to foster cooperation and goodwill.

Naomi, too, demonstrates relational intelligence through her guidance of Ruth. Despite her initial despair upon returning to Bethlehem, Naomi strategically advises Ruth on how to engage with Boaz, recognizing his potential as a kinsman-redeemer (Ruth 3:1-4). Naomi's ability to understand the cultural and legal structures of her society enables her to guide Ruth in a manner that not only protects their dignity but also creates opportunities for a secure future. Naomi's relational intelligence is evident in her strategic foresight, which balances societal expectations with Ruth's well-being.

Naomi and Ruth's relationship illustrates how relational intelligence can create partnerships that transcend generational and cultural boundaries. Naomi's wisdom complements Ruth's resilience, and together, they form a dynamic leadership team that navigates systemic barriers with relational adaptability and mutual support.

*Theoretical Perspectives on Relational Intelligence:* Relational intelligence, as discussed in leadership studies, is a critical factor in creating and sustaining successful alliances. Goleman et al. (2002:210-215) explores how relational intelligence underpins effective leadership, emphasising the importance of empathy, adaptability, and communication in fostering trust and collaboration. Goleman highlights that leaders who excel in relational intelligence can navigate

complex interpersonal dynamics, build loyalty, and inspire collective action—qualities that are vividly displayed in Ruth and Naomi’s journey.

From a cultural perspective, Mburu (2019:64-66) highlights the significance of relational intelligence in communal leadership models prevalent in African contexts. Mburu argues that in many African societies, leadership is less about individual authority and more about relational influence and the ability to build consensus within the community. This perspective resonates with Ruth’s story, where her success is deeply tied to her ability to form meaningful relationships with Naomi, Boaz, and the broader community of Bethlehem.

The relational intelligence demonstrated in Ruth’s story offers timeless lessons for contemporary leadership, particularly in contexts where collaboration and adaptability are essential. One of the most significant takeaways is the power of trust in fostering resilient partnerships. Trust is crucial for employee engagement and organizational success. Leaders who, like Ruth and Naomi, prioritise trust-building can create environments where people feel valued and motivated to contribute to collective goals.

Another important perspective is the role of relational intelligence in navigating systemic barriers. Ruth and Naomi operate within a patriarchal society where their agency is limited, yet they leverage their relationships and cultural knowledge to achieve transformative outcomes. This has direct applications for women in modern leadership roles, particularly in male-dominated industries. By building alliances, fostering trust, and exercising strategic foresight, women can overcome systemic challenges and create pathways for success.

The concept of relational intelligence also emphasises the importance of cultural sensitivity and adaptability. Ruth’s ability to integrate into a new cultural context without losing her identity demonstrates how leaders can navigate diverse environments effectively. This is especially relevant in today’s globalized world, where leaders must often manage multicultural teams and operate across different cultural frameworks.

*Scholarly Foundations and Broader Implications:* Relational intelligence in Ruth’s story is not an isolated theme but part of a broader narrative that integrates leadership with cultural and theological insights. Burns (2003:3-5), in his seminal work on transformational leadership, discusses how relational influence is central to inspiring and empowering others. Kouzes and Posner (2017:130-135) argue that enabling others to act and fostering collaboration are

hallmarks of exemplary leadership. These frameworks align with the relational dynamics in Ruth's story, where her leadership is exercised through trust, loyalty, and strategic partnerships.

The broader implications of relational intelligence also extend to communal and organizational contexts. Northouse (2021:125-127) notes, relational leadership approaches that emphasise empathy, collaboration, and adaptability are increasingly recognized as critical in today's complex and fast-changing environments. Ruth and Naomi's journey exemplifies the application of these principles for individual achievement and communal change.

Relational intelligence emerges as a defining characteristic of leadership in the Book of Ruth, shaping the narrative's outcomes and offering valuable lessons for modern leadership studies. Ruth's unwavering commitment to Naomi, her ability to navigate societal structures, and Naomi's strategic guidance underscore the transformative power of trust and collaboration. The story demonstrates that relational intelligence is not merely a soft skill but a critical leadership competency that enables individuals to overcome challenges and inspire collective resilience.

By drawing on the insights Goleman et al. (2002), Mburu (2019), Burns (2003), and Kouzes and Posner (2017), this analysis bridges biblical narratives and contemporary leadership frameworks. It highlights how relational intelligence, rooted in empathy, adaptability, and cultural sensitivity, continues to shape leadership dynamics across diverse contexts. The enduring relevance of these principles underscores the value of Ruth's story as a model for inclusive and relational leadership in both ancient and modern settings.

#### 6.2.3.2 Ethical decision-making.

Ethical decision-making is a central theme in the leadership exemplified in the Book of Ruth. The narrative highlights how Ruth and Naomi consistently act with integrity and purpose, demonstrating that ethical leadership is not only about following rules but also about navigating complex moral landscapes with courage, strategic thinking, and a commitment to the well-being of others. Their choices reveal that effective leadership requires balancing cultural expectations, personal values, and the needs of the broader community.

Ruth's decision to glean in Boaz's field (Ruth 2:2-3) exemplifies her commitment to lawful and ethical practices, even in the face of personal vulnerability. As a foreigner and widow, Ruth's societal status placed her among the most marginalised. Yet, instead of resorting to potentially dishonest or desperate actions, she chooses to glean—a practice protected by

Mosaic law that allowed the poor to gather leftover grain (Leviticus 19:9-10). By doing so, Ruth respects the cultural and legal norms of her adopted community while exercising her agency to provide for herself and Naomi. Her actions demonstrate an alignment of ethical behaviour with purpose-driven leadership, where her personal values guide her choices in a way that inspires trust and respect.

Ruth's integrity also extends to her interactions with Boaz. When Ruth follows Naomi's advice to approach Boaz at the threshing floor (Ruth 3:1-4), she does so with respect and propriety, maintaining her dignity while navigating a delicate social situation. This moment reveals Ruth's ability to act decisively within the bounds of ethical and cultural norms, using strategy and humility to secure her and Naomi's future. Her behaviour models how ethical leadership involves not only moral rectitude but also the wisdom to act appropriately within the constraints of societal systems.

Naomi also exemplifies ethical decision-making through her guidance of Ruth. Her advice to Ruth regarding Boaz is strategic yet deeply rooted in cultural traditions and legal frameworks. As a kinsman-redeemer, Boaz had a potential obligation to protect and provide for Naomi's family, but Naomi's approach ensures that Ruth's actions remain respectful and honourable. By guiding Ruth within the bounds of societal norms, Naomi demonstrates how ethical decision-making can be both strategic and culturally sensitive. Her leadership underscores the significance of ethical foresight in decision-making.

*Theoretical Perspectives on Ethical Leadership:* Haddox (2020:142-144) emphasise the integration of ethics in leadership, particularly in biblical narratives where leaders often face complex moral dilemmas. Haddox observes that the actions of figures like Ruth and Naomi reflect a deep understanding of the importance of ethical decision-making in building trust, fostering cooperation, and achieving transformative outcomes. Ruth's commitment to lawful practices and her respectful approach to Boaz align with Haddox's argument that ethical integrity is a hallmark of effective leadership, particularly in situations of vulnerability or adversity.

Goleman et al. (2002:220-222) argue that ethical integrity is foundational to effective leadership. Their research highlights that leaders who consistently act with integrity inspire trust and loyalty, enabling them to build strong relationships and navigate challenges with confidence. Ruth's narrative illustrates this principle, as her ethical actions not only earn her

the respect of Boaz and the community but also serve as a catalyst for transformative change in her and Naomi's circumstances. By remaining true to her values, Ruth models a form of leadership that is both principled and impactful.

*Broader Implications for Leadership:* The ethical decision-making exemplified in Ruth's story provides timeless lessons for contemporary leadership. Ethical issues often arise from conflicting interests. Ruth's narrative demonstrates that ethical leadership requires aligning one's actions with core values, even when facing systemic barriers or personal hardship. This principle is particularly relevant in today's complex and fast-paced environments, where leaders must navigate competing priorities with integrity and purpose.

One significant lesson from Ruth's narrative is the necessity of decisions that emphasize the welfare of others. Ruth's actions, guided by her commitment to Naomi, reflect a selfless approach to leadership that balances personal goals with collective needs. In organizational settings, this relates to leaders prioritizing the welfare of their teams, clients, and communities, thus fostering trust and cooperation.

Cultural sensitivity is crucial in ethical decision-making. Naomi's advice to Ruth demonstrates how effective leadership requires understanding and respecting cultural norms while pursuing strategic goals. In today's globalized world, leaders must often operate across diverse cultural frameworks, making cultural intelligence a vital component of ethical leadership.

Finally, the narrative underscores the long-term benefits of ethical decision-making. Ruth's integrity and adherence to ethical practices ultimately lead to her inclusion in the lineage of King David and, by extension, Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:5-6). This outcome highlights the enduring impact of ethical leadership, reminding us that principled actions can create lasting legacies.

Ethical decision-making is a defining feature of the leadership demonstrated by Ruth and Naomi. Their ability to navigate complex moral landscapes with integrity and strategic foresight offers a powerful model for modern leadership. By examining their story through the lens of scholars such as Haddox (2020) and Goleman et al. (2002), this analysis bridges the gap between biblical narratives and contemporary leadership theory, highlighting the timeless relevance of ethical integrity as a cornerstone of effective leadership.

In both ancient and modern contexts, ethical leadership inspires trust, fosters collaboration, and creates pathways for sustainable success. Ruth's narrative illustrates that true leadership transcends titles, it is rooted instead in integrity and purpose. Her example serves as a guide for

leaders who seek to navigate complex challenges with wisdom, empathy, and a commitment to ethical principles.

### 6.2.3.3 Faith-based leadership (Christian)

#### 6.2.3.3.1 Introduction

Faith-based leadership, as illuminated in the Book of Ruth, underscores the pivotal role of spiritual grounding in fostering resilience, guiding ethical decision-making, and enhancing effective leadership, particularly in complex and challenging contexts. Ruth's steadfast reliance on her faith serves as a foundation for her bold decision-making, her ability to inspire trust, and her capacity to navigate and overcome societal constraints. This demonstrates that leadership rooted in religious principles possesses the transformative power to transcend cultural and systemic barriers, offering a model for leaders in diverse contexts to lead with purpose and integrity.

Ruth's declaration to Naomi, "*Your people will be my people and your God my God*" (Ruth 1:16-17), is a profound expression of faith that defines her leadership journey. This act of spiritual commitment is not only a personal decision but also a leadership act rooted in trust and purpose. Ruth's faith inspires her to leave behind the familiarity of Moab and step into an uncertain future, guided by her belief in divine providence. Her faith-driven decisions set a tone of courage and determination that continues throughout the narrative.

Her choice to glean in Boaz's field (Ruth 2:2-3) reflects not just her resilience but also her reliance on religious to guide her actions. As a foreigner in a patriarchal society, Ruth is vulnerable to rejection or mistreatment, yet her faith motivates her to act with dignity and integrity. By trusting in God's provision, she seizes opportunities that lead to transformative outcomes, not only for herself but also for Naomi and their family line.

Ruth's faith is further evident in her approach to Boaz on the threshing floor (Ruth 3:9-11). Her actions are both bold and culturally respectful, demonstrating a deep trust in God's plan for her and Naomi. This moment underscores the integration of faith, strategy, and relational intelligence in her leadership, as she seeks redemption for Naomi's family while maintaining her own moral and spiritual integrity.

Naomi's role in Ruth's journey also reflects faith-based leadership, characterised by wisdom and a deep trust in divine providence. Despite her initial despair, Naomi's faith enables her to

envision a pathway for redemption through Boaz, guiding Ruth to act strategically within cultural norms (Ruth 3:1-4). Naomi's leadership emphasises the importance of mentoring and empowering others, illustrating how faith-based leadership involves fostering resilience and hope in those around us. Naomi's ability to balance her trust in God with practical actions demonstrates the dynamic nature of faith-based leadership. She does not passively wait for divine intervention but actively seeks solutions, showing how faith and action work in tandem to achieve transformative results.

#### 6.2.3.3.2 Scholarly perspectives on faith-based leadership

Scholars have long recognized the centrality of faith in leadership, particularly in contexts where systemic barriers or cultural constraints require resilience and ethical grounding. Gill (2022) examines the significance of faith as a foundational principle in leadership, a theme that is exemplified throughout the Book of Ruth. Ruth's actions marked by boldness in the face of exile, integrity in gleaning, and unwavering hope amid uncertainty reveal a profound internal compass shaped by trust in divine providence. This aligns with Gill's assertion that "spirituality is fundamental to ethical and effective leadership," providing leaders with "moral clarity, courage to face complex challenges, and a hopeful vision that inspires action" (Gill, 2022: 219). Ruth does not merely survive her circumstances; her faith empowers her to transform them. Her leadership, therefore, is not accidental it is rooted in a deep spiritual foundation that echoes Gill's broader model of spiritually conscious leadership.,

Fry (2003) presents a theory of spiritual leadership in which faith defined as "enduring belief and conviction in a transcendent vision, accompanied by a willingness to act in its direction" is a critical source of resilience, moral clarity, and hope (Fry, 2003:705). This spiritual grounding equips leaders to navigate complex challenges with purpose and integrity. In the Book of Ruth, this dynamic is vividly illustrated: Ruth's faith, expressed in her bold decision to remain with Naomi and embrace an uncertain future, becomes the bedrock of her transformative leadership. Despite her marginalized status, Ruth's unwavering trust in divine providence enables her to act with courage, uphold moral integrity in her interactions with Boaz, and pursue a vision of restoration for Naomi's household. Her journey exemplifies what Fry identifies as "hope/faith that sustains the calling and meaning necessary for intrinsic motivation and perseverance" (Fry, 2003:706). Thus, Ruth does not merely endure adversity—she leads through it, grounded in the spiritual qualities Fry deems essential for effective leadership.

Oduyoye (2001:102-104) provides a unique perspective on the role of faith in empowering women leaders within patriarchal contexts. She argues that faith serves as a source of strength and agency for women navigating systemic inequalities, allowing them to lead with confidence and purpose. Ruth's story aligns with this framework, as her faith enables her to challenge societal norms while maintaining her integrity and relational influence.

Burns (2003:45-47) highlights the role of faith in transformational leadership, particularly in inspiring followers to act with courage and vision. Ruth's leadership reflects these principles, as her faith-driven actions inspire trust and cooperation from Naomi, Boaz, and the broader community.

The principles of faith-based leadership in Ruth's narrative offer valuable perspectives for modern leaders, particularly women navigating male-dominated fields. A pivotal insight pertains to the significant function of faith in cultivating resilience. For leaders facing systemic barriers, faith provides a foundation for enduring challenges and maintaining a sense of purpose. Ruth's example shows that faith-driven decisions, rooted in ethical integrity, can inspire trust, and create pathways for success.

Another important insight is the integration of faith and strategy. Ruth and Naomi demonstrate how spiritual principles can guide practical actions, illustrating the dynamic relationship between faith and leadership. For modern-day leaders, this underscores the significance of synchronizing strategic decision-making with foundational values, thereby promoting ethical and effective leadership.

Faith-based leadership also emphasises the importance of relational intelligence, as seen in Ruth's interactions with Naomi, Boaz, and the broader community. This principle holds particular significance for leaders operating within contemporary diverse and interconnected contexts, where the capacity to foster trust and galvanize collaboration is of paramount importance.

Ultimately, Ruth's narrative emphasises the profound impact of faith in confronting societal conventions and championing justice and equity. Her leadership offers a model for women leaders who seek to navigate systemic barriers while maintaining their spiritual and moral integrity. Through the harnessing of fortitude derived from their spiritual beliefs, women possess the ability to lead with valour, tenacity, and an unwavering dedication to promoting constructive transformation.

Faith-based leadership, as illustrated in the Book of Ruth, provides a timeless framework for ethical, resilient, and transformative leadership. Ruth's reliance on faith enables her to navigate societal constraints, inspire trust, and achieve lasting change, while Naomi's faith-based guidance emphasises the importance of mentoring and empowerment. Together, their story highlights the dynamic relationship between faith, strategy, and relational intelligence in leadership.

Gill (2022), Fry (2003), Oduyoye (2001), and Burns (2003) reinforce the critical role of faith in leadership, emphasizing its relevance for both ancient narratives and contemporary contexts. These principles are particularly significant for women leaders navigating male-dominated fields, offering strategies for resilience, ethical grounding, and empowerment.

In both ancient and modern contexts, faith-based leadership serves as a powerful model for inspiring trust, fostering collaboration, and achieving sustainable success. Ruth's story reminds us that leadership grounded in faith is not only transformative but also enduring, offering timeless lessons for leaders seeking to make a lasting impact.

## 6.3 Contributions to scholarship

### 6.3.1 Advancing African hermeneutics.

This research contributes to African hermeneutics by contextualizing the Book of Ruth within African cultural and social frameworks. It demonstrates the richness of Afro-centric perspectives in reinterpreting biblical texts, emphasizing the shared values of community, resilience, and leadership. The study contributes to African hermeneutics by:

- (a) Demonstrating the relevance of Afro-centric perspectives in biblical interpretation. This research underscores the cultural resonance and community-centered values that align with African hermeneutics. Scholars such as Mburu (2019:78-80) and Oduyoye (2001:102-105) highlight how this approach enables a nuanced understanding of leadership within patriarchal societies, making biblical texts more relatable to contemporary African contexts. Mburu's hermeneutical technique integrates African oral traditions, proverbs, and community-focused paradigms, providing a deeper contextual analysis that bridges ancient and modern leadership models. This method emphasises the interconnectedness of cultural and theological values, showing how figures like Ruth exemplify resilience, mutual support, and ethical leadership in adversarial settings. Haddox (2020:140-143) connects

Afro-centric interpretations with ethical frameworks, providing insights into how cultural identity and biblical leadership intersect. For example, Haddox's analysis highlights the cultural navigation seen in Ruth's adaptation to the Israelite community, which reflects universal leadership principles such as adaptability and relational intelligence.

Masenya (2013:1) and Boesak (2005:118) expand on these themes by exploring how Afro-centric hermeneutics emphasize collaboration and community resilience. Masenya illustrates that Ruth and Naomi's partnership reflects African values of mutual care and survival, aligning with the philosophy of Ubuntu, which centres on shared humanity and interconnectedness essential for leadership dynamics. Boesak similarly describes Ubuntu as a source of resilience, noting that it "allows us to move away from the power of ethnicity" (2005:118), enabling people to endure and remain human despite systemic adversity. This perspective enriches the understanding of biblical leadership, offering insights particularly relevant for navigating challenges in marginalised and patriarchal contexts.

- (b) Highlighting the shared cultural values of community, resilience, and relational leadership. Ruth and Naomi provide practical examples of these principles. Ruth's decision to remain with Naomi (Ruth 1:16-17) and her proactive actions in seeking sustenance for their household (Ruth 2:2-3) illustrate community-centred leadership and resilience in action. Naomi's strategic guidance for Ruth's approach to Boaz (Ruth 3:1-4) showcases relational intelligence and adaptability within patriarchal constraints. Recent scholarship, such as Masenya (2013:1-51) and Miller (2009):45-46), explores the intersection of relational intelligence and cultural resilience, emphasizing how biblical figures like Ruth embody adaptive leadership. Similarly, Boesak (2005:) highlights how the African cultural lens provides deeper insights into the collaborative leadership dynamics displayed in Ruth's narrative, enriching the discourse on leadership in both ancient and contemporary contexts.
- (c) Providing a framework for reinterpreting biblical texts to resonate with African social and cultural realities. Iheanacho (2021: 3) emphasizes the importance of integrating cultural identity into biblical exegesis, noting that in sub-Saharan Africa "*religious traditions were largely codified in oral forms*", which shapes communal memory and moral instruction. He highlights how oral traditions, proverbs, and storytelling foster communal authority and resilience parallel to the relational leadership modeled in narratives like Ruth. Similarly, Miller (2009: 45-46) underscores the transformative potential of aligning scriptural interpretation with community memory and resilience. He highlights the significance of

oral tradition in shaping communal authority and leadership, drawing on Old Testament narratives like Ruth to show how culturally grounded storytelling can inspire contemporary leadership practices. Oduyoye (2001:102-105) adds that reinterpreting these texts through the lens of African feminist theology can highlight gender-specific challenges and triumphs, offering a more nuanced understanding of leadership in patriarchal societies. This combined approach enriches the interpretive process, making biblical narratives like Ruth's more applicable to contemporary African and global leadership paradigms.

### 6.3.2 Bridging theology and leadership studies

By integrating theological insights with leadership theories, this research advances interdisciplinary scholarship. The innovative use of Mburu's hermeneutical framework and Kouzes & Posner's principles illustrates how biblical narratives can inform modern leadership paradigms. This approach encourages further exploration of biblical texts for leadership studies by employing methodologies such as narrative analysis, socio-rhetorical critique, and intercultural hermeneutics.

Mburu's framework, for instance, emphasises the integration of African oral traditions and communal values to reinterpret leadership dynamics within biblical texts like Ruth. This technique bridges historical narratives with contemporary cultural applications, showing how figures like Ruth and Naomi embody leadership principles that resonate with African communal philosophies such as Ubuntu. Ubuntu, as a relational ethic, mirrors Ruth's loyalty to Naomi (Ruth 1:16-17) and her proactive collaboration in navigating societal structures (Ruth 2:2-3). Iheanacho (2021:6819) argue that such culturally grounded approaches enhance leadership studies by fostering inclusivity and adaptability.

Kouzes and Posner's (2017:78-80) focus on relational leadership principles, including enabling others to act and modelling the way, further illuminates Ruth's leadership. Her decision to glean in Boaz's field demonstrates initiative and ethical foresight, setting a standard for others to follow. Similarly, Naomi's mentorship exemplifies the principle of "Encouraging the Heart," as she nurtures Ruth's confidence and provides strategic guidance (Ruth 3:1-4).

Additionally, socio-rhetorical analysis provides another layer for understanding Ruth's leadership. Haddox (2020:140-143) highlights how Ruth's navigation of patriarchal structures offers insights into adaptive leadership strategies. By balancing cultural expectations with innovative action, Ruth exemplifies how leaders can effectively work within constraints to

create transformative outcomes. Miller (2009:45-46) further notes that storytelling within biblical texts, such as Ruth's narrative, serves as a pedagogical tool for imparting leadership perspectives across generations.

This interdisciplinary exploration highlights how ancient texts remain relevant for addressing contemporary leadership challenges. Masenya (2013:1-9) emphasises how combining theological insights with leadership theory can empower leaders to approach adversity with resilience and relational intelligence. These methodologies not only enrich theological scholarship but also provide actionable frameworks for fostering ethical and culturally responsive leadership in diverse contexts.

### 6.3.3 Implications for gender and leadership studies

This research enriches discussions on gender and leadership by:

#### (a) Challenging traditional perceptions of leadership

Ruth challenges traditional perceptions of leadership by embodying qualities such as resilience, ethical integrity, and relational intelligence, all without holding a formal title. Her actions, such as choosing to stay with Naomi (Ruth 1:16-17) and taking initiative to glean in Boaz's field (Ruth 2:2-3), demonstrate leadership through service and relational trust. Scholars such as Mburu (2019:64-66) emphasize how her communal approach aligns with African values of Ubuntu, focusing on mutual care and interconnectedness. Kouzes and Posner (2017:56-58) also provide a framework to understand her leadership, as she "Models the Way" through her proactive behaviour and "Inspires a Shared Vision" by seeking not only her welfare but also Naomi's redemption. Recent research, including Haddox (2020:133-135), highlights Ruth's ability to navigate patriarchal constraints as a testament to adaptive and transformative leadership, offering insights for both ancient and modern leadership paradigms.

#### (b) Providing a biblical framework for understanding female agency.

Providing a biblical framework for understanding female agency involves integrating interdisciplinary methodologies such as African hermeneutics, narrative analysis, and cultural anthropology. Scholars like Mburu (2019:78-80) emphasize the significance of community-centred values, illustrating how Ruth's decisions reflect agency rooted in relational leadership

and cultural resilience. Iheanacho (2021:68918) extends this perspective by highlighting the importance of interpreting Ruth's actions through African oral traditions and communal ethics, which parallel modern leadership principles. Recent research by Masenya (2013:1-9) explores how female agency in biblical texts can inform contemporary leadership models, particularly in addressing gender inequities and fostering inclusive leadership. By synthesizing these approaches, this framework offers a robust lens to reinterpret biblical narratives like Ruth's, making them relevant to modern discussions on leadership, agency, and cultural dynamics.

(c) Offering insights for empowering women leaders in patriarchal societies.

Offering insights for empowering women leaders in patriarchal societies by establishing targeted mentorship programs, creating inclusive policy frameworks, and integrating leadership development programs grounded in biblical narratives. Olson and Jackson (2009:45) advocate for mentorship models that not only provide guidance but also build strategic networks for women in leadership roles. Thelma & Ngulube (2024: 280–283) emphasize the importance of structural reform in organizations to ensure equitable opportunities for women leaders. Their recommendations include instituting transparent promotion processes, implementing targeted mentorship and sponsorship programs, and embedding gender-sensitive mechanisms within organizational policies. This approach anchored in structural justice ensures that women can access and thrive in leadership roles, even within complex institutional systems.

Miller (2022:45-46) highlights the role of storytelling and cultural narratives, such as those in Ruth's story, in fostering resilience and inspiring leadership. Collaborative workshops, as suggested by Adewale & Potokri (2023: 60–62) emphasize the importance of creating platforms for women leaders to share best practices and build supportive communities. They further advocate for interdisciplinary research initiatives bringing together theologians, sociologists, and gender studies experts to ensure that leadership development programs are both sustainable and culturally relevant across higher education and organizational contexts.

## 6.4 Practical implications

### 6.4.1 Directives for leadership training and policy

The findings inform:

- (a) *Leadership Training Curricula*: Emphasizing resilience, ethical leadership, and relational dynamics. This can be achieved through tailored programs that integrate case studies from biblical narratives like Ruth's, highlighting practical applications of her leadership traits. For instance, Ruth's adaptability and ethical integrity in gleaning responsibly (Ruth 2:2-3) can inspire modules on resilience in challenging contexts. Additionally, Naomi's relational intelligence in mentoring Ruth (Ruth 3:1-4) offers a model for mentorship dynamics. Scholars such as Iheanacho (2021:6819) and Masenya (2013:1-9) suggest incorporating cultural and spiritual dimensions into leadership training to enrich its applicability and impact.
- (b) *Policymaking*: Advocating for gender equity and inclusive leadership practices is inspired by Ruth's story. This can be achieved by incorporating policy frameworks that emphasize mentorship opportunities, equitable representation in leadership roles, and cultural sensitivity training rooted in biblical principles. For example, Ruth's commitment to ethical actions and community support (Ruth 2:2-3) provides a model for creating policies that prioritize social equity and resilience. Scholars such as Iheanacho (2021:6819) and Miller (2009:46) suggest that integrating historical and scriptural examples into modern governance structures can enhance gender equity and foster inclusive leadership cultures.

#### 6.4.2 Empowerment strategies for women leaders

These strategies include:

- (a) *Mentorship Programs*: Facilitating guidance and support for women leaders. This can be implemented by establishing structured mentorship frameworks within organizations, faith-based groups, or leadership networks. Programs can pair emerging women leaders with experienced mentors who provide career guidance, spiritual encouragement, and practical leadership advice. Boesak (2005:118-122) highlights the importance of mentorship in overcoming systemic barriers, while Masenya (2013:1-9) emphasises tailoring mentorship strategies to account for cultural and contextual needs. Additionally, virtual mentorship platforms can extend opportunities to women in remote or underserved areas, ensuring broader access to leadership development resources.
- (b) *Strategic Alliances*: Encouraging collaboration to overcome systemic challenges. This can be implemented by fostering partnerships across organizational, cultural, and faith-based platforms. For example, creating interfaith forums that promote dialogue and joint ventures

can help build trust and address shared challenges. Masenya (2013:1-9), Boesak (2005:118-143), highlight the importance of cross-sector partnerships in addressing systemic inequities. Additionally, leveraging technology to build global networks for women leaders, can amplify their impact by providing access to diverse perspectives and support systems. Collaborative leadership models rooted in shared values, as explored by Olson and Jackson (2009:50, further reinforce the effectiveness of strategic alliances in creating sustainable solutions.

- (c) *Faith and Ethics*: Promoting spiritual and moral grounding in leadership. This can be implemented by encouraging faith-based organizations to integrate leadership training into their programs, emphasizing the alignment of spiritual values with ethical decision-making. For instance, mentorship initiatives within churches can guide emerging leaders to model integrity and servant leadership, drawing on biblical narratives like Ruth's. Spiritual grounding fosters accountability and resilience, especially in high-pressure leadership roles. Kathayat (2024:29) highlights the potential for faith-driven leadership workshops to create spaces for reflection and ethical growth, making faith a cornerstone of effective leadership strategies.

## 6.5 Future research directions

### 6.5.1 Theological leadership models for women

Future studies could:

- (a) Explore other biblical narratives for female leadership models by identifying stories where women exhibit resilience, agency, and influence in complex socio-cultural contexts. For example, the narratives of Deborah (Judges 4-5), who led Israel with wisdom and courage, and Esther, whose strategic actions saved her people, provide key leadership insights. Additionally, the story of Abigail (1 Samuel 25), who used diplomacy and strategic thinking to prevent bloodshed, and Huldah (2 Kings 22:14-20), a prophetess who played a pivotal role in guiding Judah during a critical period of reform, offer diverse examples of female leadership. Masenya (2013:1-9), and Kathayat (2024:28) emphasize the importance of analysing these narratives to uncover leadership principles that resonate across cultural and historical contexts.

(b) Conduct comparative analyses across cultural and biblical contexts by identifying shared leadership principles, such as resilience and ethical integrity, in different traditions. This can involve studying leadership models from African matriarchal systems, Asian familial hierarchies, or indigenous community structures alongside biblical figures like Ruth, Deborah, and Esther. Mburu (2021: 22–24) and Gill (2022: 219) emphasize the importance of a hermeneutical approach that engages cultural narratives and their intersections with scriptural leadership themes. They advocate for contextual analysis, community involvement, and interpretive methods that honour both tradition and lived experience. Diko (2024: 5–6) complements this by encouraging the use of interdisciplinary frameworks drawing from oral traditions, literary analysis, and community-based inquiry to better understand and apply leadership lessons from biblical figures like Ruth in modern cultural contexts.

#### 6.5.2 Expanding Afro-centric hermeneutics

Further research should:

(a) Deepen the application of Afro-centric frameworks to biblical texts by employing interdisciplinary methodologies, including cultural anthropology, historical analysis, and theological hermeneutics. Scholars like Iheanacho (2021:6819), Oduyoye (2001:102-105), and Mburu (2019:78-80) suggest leveraging oral traditions, African proverbs, and communal leadership models to contextualize biblical narratives. This approach can be implemented by fostering collaborative research networks that bring together theologians, cultural historians, and sociologists to reinterpret texts through Afro-centric lenses. Additionally, workshops and seminars focused on applying these frameworks to teaching and preaching can further embed Afro-centric perspectives in academic and ecclesiastical contexts.

(b) Investigate the intersection of African culture and biblical hermeneutics by incorporating methodologies such as comparative cultural analysis, oral history research, and theological interpretation rooted in African traditions. For instance, exploring how African communal values, such as Ubuntu, align with biblical themes of community and mutual care can provide rich insights. Iheanacho (2021:6819) suggests examining African proverbs and their parallels in biblical wisdom literature, while Miller (2009:45-46) highlights the

importance of oral traditions in understanding biblical storytelling. Collaborative workshops with theologians and cultural historians can further deepen this investigation, fostering a nuanced understanding of how African cultural frameworks enrich biblical hermeneutics.

### 6.5.3 Interdisciplinary approaches

Future interdisciplinary research could:

- (a) Blend theology, gender studies, and leadership theory by adopting interdisciplinary methodologies. Scholars such as Masenya (2013:1-9) advocate for integrating theological hermeneutics with contemporary leadership theories, emphasizing the intersectionality of gender and cultural studies. For example, conducting case studies that juxtapose biblical narratives with modern leadership challenges can provide actionable insights. Workshops and collaborative research efforts between theologians, sociologists, and leadership experts, can further enrich this field by fostering innovation and diverse perspectives. Additionally, Iheanacho (2021:6819) suggests utilizing faith-based community feedback to ground theoretical models in practical application.
- (b) Explore new methodologies for analysing leadership in biblical texts by integrating tools such as narrative criticism, socio-rhetorical analysis, and intercultural hermeneutics. Using narrative criticism to uncover the relational dynamics in biblical stories is essential for interpreting deeper leadership structures in texts like Ruth. Kroesbergen (2020: 3–5) employs socio-rhetorical analysis to examine how leadership functions within both cultural and spiritual settings, particularly in framing moral authority and communal influence through the spirit world. Additionally, Kanyoro (2002: 10–12) highlights the value of intercultural hermeneutics from African contexts for connecting ancient leadership paradigms to modern realities. Practical implementation can involve interdisciplinary collaboration among theologians, sociologists, and historians to develop enriched and culturally grounded leadership models.

## 6.6 Final reflections

### 6.6.1 Leadership as a transformational journey

Ruth's narrative is a testament to the transformative power of leadership. Her journey from a marginalised widow to a figure of historical and theological significance underscores the potential of resilience, vision, and ethical decision-making. From her decision to leave Moab and pledge loyalty to Naomi and her God (Ruth 1:16-17), Ruth demonstrates an ability to reimagine her circumstances and step into a future shaped by faith and determination. By gleaning in Boaz's field (Ruth 2:2-3), she takes proactive steps to provide for herself and Naomi, embodying both humility and initiative. Furthermore, Ruth's bold approach to Boaz (Ruth 3:1-11) highlights her strategic acumen and understanding of cultural norms, ensuring a redemptive outcome for her family.

This transformational journey illustrates key leadership traits: resilience in the face of adversity, the vision to seek opportunities, and the courage to act ethically and strategically. Scholars such as Haddox (2020:142-144) emphasize that transformative leadership often emerges in contexts of vulnerability and challenge, where individuals like Ruth redefine their roles and impact through adaptive strategies. Similarly, Mburu (2019:95-97) notes that Ruth's reliance on communal and relational intelligence strengthens her leadership impact, demonstrating the importance of collaboration and trust.

The transformative nature of Ruth's leadership extends beyond her immediate circumstances. As the great-grandmother of King David, her actions shape Israel's history, illustrating how seemingly small, faithful acts of leadership can have enduring consequences. This legacy underscores the importance of ethical leadership grounded in faith and community values. Moreover, Ruth's story inspires modern applications, particularly for women leaders navigating systemic barriers. Ruth's journey serves as a model for leveraging relational networks and cultural intelligence to achieve transformative outcomes.

Leadership, as portrayed in Ruth's story, is not about dominance or authority but about service, integrity, and the ability to inspire change. Her narrative invites contemporary leaders to embrace transformational leadership as a journey of faith, vision, and resilience, offering timeless lessons for navigating complex and challenging contexts.

## 6.6.2 Legacy of Ruth for contemporary leadership

Ruth remains an enduring model of leadership, offering timeless perspectives for navigating adversity and inspiring others. Her story affirms the relevance of biblical narratives in shaping modern leadership paradigms, particularly for women.

Ruth's legacy lies in her ability to lead without a formal title—a concept I call “Dispositional Leadership.” This form of leadership emerges from character, actions, and influence rather than positional authority. Through her daily decisions, Ruth demonstrates that leadership is not confined to roles but is embedded in how one lives. From her loyalty to Naomi (Ruth 1:16-17) to her initiative in gleaning (Ruth 2:2-3) and her bold approach to Boaz (Ruth 3:1-11), Ruth exemplifies the power of dispositional leadership.

Her actions are a testament to the impact of consistency, humility, and a heart committed to serving others. Ruth's life illustrates that true leaders inspire through their behaviour, even in mundane or challenging circumstances. Her example has profoundly influenced my understanding of leadership, teaching me that one's disposition—how they treat others, their resilience in adversity, and their ability to see opportunities in hardship—defines their leadership.

Ruth's dispositional leadership also provides a framework for modern contexts. Leadership rooted in everyday actions fosters trust and community, Northouse (2021:227-229) highlights that relational transparency a leader's willingness to share core feelings, motives, and inclinations openly is essential for building long-term relational influence. By fostering trust through this kind of integrity, leaders establish a foundation that sustains follower confidence and moral authority over time. Ruth's story underscores the value of relational intelligence, showing that leaders must prioritize empathy and collaboration. Her legacy reminds us that leadership can emerge in unassuming ways and that small, faithful acts often yield the greatest impact.

Ruth's example encourages a leadership model focused on servanthood and authenticity. It challenges leaders to prioritize others' well-being and to lead through actions that align with ethical and faith-driven values. Ruth's journey has inspired what I now call “Dispositional Leadership,” a leadership approach characterised by influence through daily actions rather than formal authority.

Using Mburu's hermeneutical framework, I see Ruth as a figure who embodies communal leadership. Her decision to stay with Naomi (Ruth 1:16-17) exemplifies an unwavering

commitment to relationships, a cornerstone of dispositional leadership. This act, analysed through an Afro-centric lens, highlights the value of solidarity and mutual support in leadership. Mburu (2019:45-47) notes that such leadership fosters resilience within communities, emphasizing how relational intelligence can redefine leadership in challenging contexts.

Kouzes and Posner's leadership principles further illuminate Ruth's dispositional leadership. For instance, her choice to glean in Boaz's field (Ruth 2:2-3) demonstrates her willingness to "Model the Way" by taking initiative and working diligently to support Naomi. Ruth's strategic approach to Boaz on the threshing floor (Ruth 3:1-11) reflects the principle of "Inspiring a Shared Vision," as she seeks not only personal security but a redemptive future for Naomi's family. Kouzes and Posner (2017:56-58) emphasize that transformational leaders inspire others by aligning personal goals with broader communal values.

Ruth's legacy as a dispositional leader resonates deeply with me because it illustrates that impactful leadership is rooted in character and everyday actions. Her story reminds that leadership is not about offices or positions but about creating a positive influence through consistent integrity and service. Ruth's life demonstrates the power of ethical decision-making, humility, and strategic foresight, even in ordinary circumstances.

This understanding has profoundly shaped my view of leadership. Dispositional leadership, as modelled by Ruth, challenges traditional hierarchical perspectives. Instead, it encourages leaders to lead from wherever they are, using the resources and relationships at their disposal.

By integrating Mburu's communal values and Kouzes and Posner's principles, I have developed a leadership philosophy that prioritizes authenticity, servanthood, and adaptability. Ruth's journey inspires us to see leadership as a transformational journey one rooted in faith, resilience, and purpose. Her example challenges all of us to embrace leadership as a disposition, a way of life that transcends roles and inspires others through everyday actions.

## 6.7 Hypothesis

This research posits that an Afro-centric hermeneutical analysis of the Book of Ruth, applying Mburu's African contextual hermeneutics alongside Kouzes and Posner's exemplary leadership framework, reveals that dispositional leadership—exemplified through Ruth's character—transcends formal titles or positions. Ruth's embodiment of resilience, initiative, strategic adaptability, courage, humility, integrity, and relational intelligence empowered her

within the patriarchal context of ancient Israel, enabling her not only to navigate systemic societal constraints but also to influence her community significantly. Thus, the narrative of Ruth provides practical, ethical, and culturally resonant leadership strategies that are applicable and empowering for contemporary African women navigating leadership within similar patriarchal contexts.

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## Declaration of originality and generative AI use

This form must be completed and submitted with every assignment, project, report, or thesis.

### SECTION A: STUDENT INFORMATION AND DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

Name and Surname	<b>JOHANN LUFACE</b>
Student Number	<b>U26522846</b>
Student Signature	
Module Code	<b>PhD specialising in Old Testament Studies-06265042</b>  <b>OW980</b>
Assignment Title	<b>An Afro-centric female leadership importation from the Book of Ruth within a patriarchal context</b>

I declare that:

1. I understand what plagiarism is and am aware of the University's policy in this regard.
2. This submission is my own original work. Where the work of others has been used (from any source), it has been properly acknowledged and referenced in accordance with academic standards.
3. I have not used work previously submitted by another student or any other person as my own.
4. I have not allowed and will not allow anyone to copy my work with the intention of passing it off as their own.

### SECTION B: GENERATIVE AI USE DECLARATION

Q1. AI Declaration [tick one box]

1. Yes  I used Generative Artificial Intelligence in the current assignment
2.  I did not use any Gen AI for the current assignment

Ensure you are permitted to use generative AI by reading the instructions for your assignment or assessment or by consulting your study guide. Failure to follow the instructions regarding using generative AI for your assignment constitutes academic dishonesty. Examples of generative AI include ChatGPT, Google's Gemini, Microsoft's Copilot, Claude, and Meta's Llama 3 AI integrated into WhatsApp and Facebook. If you selected option 1 in Q1, please continue to complete the rest of the form:

## Q2. Prompts Used

Paste or summarise all prompts and indicate their purpose:

Prompt	Aspect of Assignment
Find scholarly sources.	To gather Journals and Pdf, books
Generate a summary of the journal.	To gather information on journals.
Find this topic and writers.	Verify citation details.

## Q3. Type of Gen AI Usage

Brainstorming/Idea Generation	Scispace. Elicit,
Language Editing Suggestions	Grammarly
Feedback and Revision	Ebsco, Google scholar, Elicit
Explaining Complex Concepts	ChatGPT
Writing Coach	Grammarly (Free version)
Other (please specify)	

## Q4. Ethical Use

Write a brief paragraph explaining how you ensured the usage of Gen AI was aligned with the ethical and responsibility requirements of the University of Pretoria ([link](#)). Consider examples such as repurposing and reintegrating ideas generated by Gen AI with your own thoughts, integrating Gen AI ideas with other literature, critically evaluating Gen AI outputs, maintaining

transparency about Gen AI usage, enhancing your learning and ensuring comprehension despite using Gen AI, and personal development through using Gen AI as an assistant. If you directly used text or data generated by Gen AI, ensure it was cited appropriately.

To ensure alignment with the ethical and responsibility requirements of the University of Pretoria, I used Generative AI tools as assistants, not as substitutes for my academic thinking or authorship. All AI-generated content was critically evaluated and either repurposed, restructured, or reintegrated with my own analysis and voice. I cross-checked ideas generated by ChatGPT, SciSpace, and Elicit with scholarly literature and ensured that no AI tool produced unverified or uncredited claims. Where AI tools assisted with summarisation, editing, or rephrasing, I retained full academic control and comprehension. I also used Grammarly for grammar and style refinement and Google Scholar for source verification. I have been transparent about my AI usage and ensured that any ideas directly adapted from AI tools were cited or paraphrased in accordance with academic standards. This process not only enhanced my learning but also deepened my engagement with the subject matter, especially in refining theological and cultural insights relevant to my study.

Q5. Why Did You Use Gen AI?

I used AI tools to enhance the efficiency, clarity, and depth of my research process. Specifically, I leveraged AI for refining academic language, summarising complex ideas, identifying relevant literature, and generating comparative insights across theological and leadership frameworks. These tools supported my critical thinking without replacing it, helping me organise, evaluate, and articulate my arguments more effectively—especially in managing a large volume of interdisciplinary sources. AI served as an assistant to my scholarship, enabling me to focus on analysis, reflection, and personal engagement with the material.

**Student...Signature:**



**Date: 20 July 2025**