

Prof. M. Masenya  
Department of  
Biblical and Ancient  
Studies, University of  
South Africa.  
[Masenmj@unisa.ac.za](mailto:Masenmj@unisa.ac.za)

---

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/actat.v36i1.6S>

ISSN 1015-8758 (Print)  
ISSN 2309-9089 (Online)

Acta Theologica 2016  
Suppl 24:84-96

© UV/UFS



# WHO CALLS THE SHOTS IN NAOMI'S LIFE? READING THE NAOMI- RUTH STORY WITHIN THE AFRICAN RELIGIO- CULTURAL CONTEXT

## ABSTRACT

In Africa, the whole are religious and the dead are believed to be actively involved in the daily affairs of the people. Such a worldview, in which the Sacred Other, the living and the (living) dead formed an integral whole, can also be observed at critical points in Naomi's life: when Naomi bid farewell to her daughters-in-law (Rt 1:8-9); Naomi's confession about Yahweh's faithfulness to both the living and the dead (Rt 2:20); Naomi's plan to seek security for Ruth through "levirate" marriage (Rt 3:1), and when she acted as a nurse to Mahlon's son (Rt 4:5, 16). Basing one's arguments on the apparent resemblances between the world view in which the narrative of Ruth is embedded and the African (Northern Sotho) world view, how may it be far-fetched to argue that the dead (males) called the shots in Naomi's life?

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Were the dead perceived as really dead, in Biblical Israel? Nürnbergger (2007:59) would have responded to this question in the affirmative. He argues:

... the Old Testament faith was exceptionally realistic concerning the pervasiveness of sin and the finality of death. The metaphor of *Sheol* (= the place of the dead) had mythological connotations in the Ancient Near East, but for Israel it indicated a lifeless sphere. Once there, one could no longer

enjoy life, or praise Yahweh (Job 7:7-10; Ps 6:5; Sir 17:27f). Forbearers could do nothing for their offspring and their offspring could do nothing for them. Death was the end of all relationships.

In my view, this response warrants further questions.

If the (male) dead were viewed as really dead in Biblical Israel (Nünberger 2007:59),<sup>1</sup> how may an African reader of the Hebrew Bible account for the great store set by some of the narrators' consistent reference to people of authority (read: kings) being gathered with their ancestors (fathers)?<sup>2</sup> What is one to make of the great store set by the Chronicler in the listing of male genealogies (1 Chr 1:1-42; 2; 3; 4:1-38, etc.)? Foregrounded in these lists are fathers and their sons in the genealogies. Worthy of note is the fact that women, who were the important carriers of male lineages, seldom featured in the genealogies. A reader can, however, only imply the pertinent role performed by women's reproductive capacities. Once they have given birth to male children, mothers are usually made to disappear from the scene. Ruth, one of the main characters in the book that bears her name, provides a reader with such an example (Rt 4).

If the dead in Biblical Israel were perceived as really dead, why does the word *המתים* (*hamētīm*,<sup>3</sup> translated as "the dead") keep featuring in the words (or subconscious minds?) of characters such as Naomi (cf. Rt 1:8-9; 2:20) and Boaz (Rt 4:5, 10)? If the forces of neo-colonialism and globalisation have derailed many an African person from the belief that the dead continue to live, even beyond the time of their physical absence from earth, why does it

- 
- 1 Nünberger reasons: The consistent reference to the dead by Naomi, and not excluding the institution of levirate marriage, albeit re-envisioned and/or reconstructed in the Book of Ruth, an institution which forms the central pivot around which the story revolves, does not persuade one about Nünberger's claim that in Biblical Israel, death ended all relationships. Perhaps, even though the text could have had a broader political agenda, as it appears to have been the case with the Book of Ruth, its canonical form has a lot to convey to the reader about the apparent close relationships between the Jews in post-exilic Yehud and the dead; if not concretely, at least at the levels of their subconsciousness.
  - 2 See, in particular, the numerous texts in the book of Kings as cases in point: 2 Ki 10:35; 12:21; 13:9; 14:16.
  - 3 The word comes from the root *mōt*, meaning "to die". *מות* is a verb qal participle masculine plural absolute (Bible Works). The participle form, in which the absolute verb is cast, would arrest African readers of the story. The root *mēt* can be translated literally as "being made to die" (cf. the Qal participle masculine absolute verb) as in *mēt* 'ādām (the man who is being made to die), or as in *eshet-hamēt* (the name of the man who is being made to die or who is in the state of dying).

seem that Christianity, particularly mainline Christianity, has succeeded in producing Christians who will follow Christ, as well as venerate the ancestors, whether overtly or covertly?

In this article, it is argued that in Naomi's religio-cultural world, as in the African one, the male dead seem not only to have been perceived as not dead, but also to have continued to impact on the decisions and actions of those who, although physically not dead (read: the living), patriarchy rendered 'dead' in many respects.

## 2. RE-READING *HAMĒTĪM* (THE DEAD) IN SELECTED TEXTS: A REFLECTION BY AN AFRICAN NAOMI

### 2.1 Characters acting within a religious whole: Naomi, daughters-in-law, Hamētīm and Yahweh

And Naomi said unto her two daughters in law,  
Go, return each to her mother's house: the LORD deal kindly with  
you, as ye have dealt with *the dead*, and with me (Rt 1:8, KJV).

Within a communal family setting where the whole is religious, marriage does not only cement the living (cf. Ruth and Orpah's natal and marital families), but also connects the living, the dead (or the living-dead) and the-yet-to-be-born. Is it any wonder that Mbiti (1969:130) opines that a single person was deemed less human within our African contexts?<sup>4</sup>

For African peoples, marriage is the focus of existence. It is the point where the members of a given community meet: the departed, the living and those yet to be born (Mbiti 1969:130).

Although an African Naomi would not have encouraged her daughters-in-law to divorce the grave(s),<sup>5</sup> she would have resonated with the (Biblical)

---

4 Mbiti reasons that marriage constitutes life's rhythm wherein all should participate. Otherwise, the non-participant runs the risk of being a curse in the community: "... he is a rebel and a law-breaker, he is not only abnormal but 'under-human'. According to Oduyoye (1995:68; my italics), "The language of marriage proverbs indicates that a wife only reflects the stage of the marriage and a man's competence as a husband ... *Society demands that she stays married, because a woman has no dignity outside marriage.*"

5 *Lebitla ga le hlalwe*, literally translated as "a [man's] grave cannot be divorced". At face value, the proverb might appear inclusive. Once uttered though, even if there is no specificity regarding the grave to be divorced, thus sending a false message about inclusiveness, listeners/readers who are conversant with African

Naomi's exhortation to her daughters-in-law to marry and thus immortalise male lineage. Unlike Naomi, who exhorted her daughters-in-law to seek husbands from their mothers' houses, an African Naomi would have exhorted her daughters-in-law to seek husbands from within the family of their deceased husbands. The lineage to be kept alive would have been the lineage of their deceased husbands (read: Chilion and Mahlon).

The dead who are remembered in Ruth 1:10 and in subsequent texts (cf. Rt 2:20; 4:5, 10) were not the dead in general; they were the dead in Naomi's life. The dead are not portrayed as spirits. In addition, the word *mēt*, as it appears in the preceding texts, is a verb qal participle masculine plural/singular absolute. An African Naomi may thus speculate that the *hamētīm* in the preceding texts were the "living-dead" who were in a kind of transitional state between the living and those who are believed to inhabit the spirit world. The dead in the preceding category, argues Mbiti (1969:82),

speak the language of men (*síc*), with whom they lived until 'recently'; and they speak the language of the spirits and of God, to Whom they are drawing nearer ontologically.

Trible (1978:168-169) holds a different view as she foregrounds the activities and lives of the females in the narrative:

The males die; they are non-persons; their presence in the story ceases (though their absence continues). The females live; they are persons; their presence in the story continues. Indeed, their life is the life of the story.

What, in my view, would interest an African Naomi is that, although they are depicted as dead, the males' presence (and not their absence, according to Tribble<sup>6</sup>), continues to be felt in the text, particularly from the words of Naomi and Boaz. For a reader shaped by the African religio-cultural world view, the persistence of the use of the phrase "*hamētīm*" to refer to deceased men in a predominantly female narrative, will persuade

---

cultures will know that the grave in question is a male grave (cf. Masenya (Ngwan'a Mphahlele) 2010:253-272). After his death (in case a husband predeceases his wife (cf. the case of Ruth), the widow is expected to remain with the deceased's family until her death. Her grave must ultimately be found at her marital home. In light of the tenor of the preceding proverb, for an African Naomi, Ruth's words of commitment to her mother-in-law will make perfect sense.

6 In the view of an African reader, the persistence of the use of the phrase "*hamētīm*" to refer to deceased men will persuade her/him that, though dead, men remain present in the story. Their (physical) absence seem to speak as loud as their physical presence.

her/him to argue that, although portrayed as dead, the men remain present in the story. Their (physical) absence seems to speak as loud as their physical presence. In essence, although the (physical) lives of the females are more visible in the story, the physically absent males do direct female actions in the story. The system of patriarchy ensured and continues to ensure that male persons will call the shots, even from their graves! Unlike within the African religio-cultural context, in the Book of Ruth, the age of the male *hamētîm* did not seem to count that much. In the narrative of Ruth, the dead (one) who called the shots in Naomi's life was not Elimelech, Naomi's husband, but Mahlon, her son.

The living dead are the immediate link between the living, from whom they would have departed, and the spirit world, God and the spirits. In Mbiti's (1969:82) view, they are thus bilingual because

They speak the language of men (*sic*), with whom they lived until 'recently'; and they speak the language of the spirits and of God, to Whom they are drawing nearer ontologically. These are the 'spirits' with which African peoples are most concerned; it is through the living-dead that the spirit world becomes personal to men or human beings? (*sic*). They are still part of their human families and people have personal memories of them.

Could it be that for Naomi, *מתמה* (*hamētîm*) were also very real?<sup>7</sup> Or could we attribute Naomi's frequent mention of the word *hamētîm* to grief in her life? Indeed, the persistent, haunting memories may well have been a depiction that the mother-less, husband-less Naomi was still overwhelmed by grief. Brenner (2005:115) depicts the imaginary Naomi as follows:

I didn't feel a thing. I didn't feel love toward her (Ruth), or toward anybody else living or present. *I was a bereaved wife and mother and played the part maximally* (my brackets and italics).

According to the textual context of Ruth 1:9, *hamētîm* in question were possibly her sons, Chilion and Mahlon.<sup>8</sup> However, given the corporeal

---

7 According to Mbiti (1969:82), the living dead are the immediate link between the living from whom they would have departed and the spirit world, God and the spirits. They are thus bilingual in his view: "They speak the language of men (*sic*), with whom they lived until 'recently'; and they speak the language of the spirits and of God, to Whom they are drawing nearer ontologically. These are the 'spirits' with which African peoples are most concerned; it is through the living-dead that the spirit world becomes personal to men (*sic*). They are still part of their human families and people have personal memories of them."

8 Cf. the rendering of the phrase by the Modern English Version: "deceased husbands".

nature of Biblical Israel, as well as the texture of the text, the 'ab in the *bet* 'ab who headed the household, in which all family members dwelt, was neither of the two sons. Elimelech would have been the main patriarch (Rt 1:1-5). The generic rendering "the dead" for *hamētīm* in these texts thus seems fitting.

Depending on the preferred dating of the Book of Ruth, Naomi's invoking of blessings in the name of Yahweh would later on (whether in the monarchic and/or the post-exilic settings) be the preserve of select men (read: priests) in the public sphere. Although both Yahweh and *hamētīm* are mentioned in the same textual context (cf. also in Rt 2:20), Naomi's expectation (read: invocation) of the blessing of *hesed* upon her daughters-in-law was not directed at *hamētīm*. The *hesed*, which was to be extended to Naomi's daughters-in-law, did not come from the ancestors (the living dead), as would have been the case in the African religio-cultural context. The *hesed* came from the Sacred Other, Yahweh, who would have been emulating the *hesed* of Orpah and Ruth. In the texts under our investigation, the (living) dead are portrayed neither as mediators between Naomi and Yahweh nor, as it is typical within many an African religio-cultural context, as the final authority to which peoples' concerns were to be mediated:

Ancestors are not normally requested to carry the sacrifices, prayers or petitions of their offspring upwards to higher ancestral authorities, and finally to the Supreme Being. Nor do the ancestors speak in the name of the Supreme Being when they make their intention or their displeasure known. In practical terms, they are themselves the authorities with whom one relates, the original authors of their messages, blessings and punishments and the final recipients of gifts and prayers (Nürnberg 2007:33).

In the Book of Ruth, the dead, at least with regard to their relationship with Yahweh, appear to have occupied the same place as did the living(?) human beings (read: Naomi and her daughters-in-law). In the preceding context, the order which was/is believed to have been placed by Yahweh and/or the ancestors had been disturbed not only by male deaths, but also by barrenness. Those inhabiting such a religious whole believed that, once the order became disturbed, it had to be rectified. Could it be that Elimelech's family could have somehow been cursed? The words of Brenner (from a fictitious Naomi) might have made sense to Naomi and her daughters-in-law, depending on how steeped they were in Judahite world views at the time. Embedded within such a world view was the belief that calamities could not simply have occurred; human beings' deviation from the set order would have caused such calamities; hence, the fictitious Naomi could speculate:

I was beginning to suspect that this was divine retribution for leaving our land, that our god, the god famous for interfering with women's wombs, closing them and opening them at will, was punishing us in the worst possible manner (Brenner 2005:113).

For an African Naomi, witchcraft and/or the wrath of the ancestors could have easily been cited as one of the reasons why such calamities befell Elimelech's family. Is it any wonder that the women of Bware in Kenya argued as follows:

Perhaps Naomi realized that all these deaths had come to them because they had neglected their own customs and adapted foreign customs ... It is quite clear that there was a curse on the family, since Naomi never gave birth to any other children while they were in the Moabite country. Also, their sons were married for ten years and they never left any children. Somebody in the family of Elimelech pronounced words of a curse before they left (Kanyoro 2002:41).

That the memories of *hesed* continued to haunt Naomi is evident from her bitter response to a company of women of Bethlehem. Her identity with regard to her poverty status seems to have been closely linked to her lack of men (husband and sons) in her life. Hence, the bitter and sorrowful Naomi could confess:

I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty: why then call ye me Naomi, seeing the LORD hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me? (Rt 1:21, KJV).

If Naomi's preoccupation was not with *hamētīm*, why would she have claimed to have returned to Bethlehem empty-handed, while her committed daughter-in-law was with her? Ironically, Naomi claimed to have been empty in the presence of the one whose name also meant "fullness". Lee (2012:145) argues: "And with Ruth (meaning "saturation", "refreshment", or "fullness") resolutely standing by her, she pronounces herself utterly "empty."". If her claim that she left Bethlehem full (cf. Rt 1:21) had nothing to do with her possession of men (cf. husband and sons – those who were then physically present), but everything to do with economics, why would the family have left their home country in the first instance (Rt 1:1)? The returning Naomi's identity is linked both to the physical absence of *hamētīm* and to the affliction, which she believed Yahweh inflicted on her. God Almighty is blamed for Naomi's new identity as a widow and being a childless woman. Unlike within the African religio-cultural context, *hamētīm* are not portrayed as either blessing or cursing Naomi; Yahweh is portrayed as inflicting pain on Naomi's life. Trible's (1978:166) words come to mind:

On the human level, females and males move between life and death. On the divine level, God works between blessing and curse. The human movements are open and deliberate, while the divine activity is hidden and fortuitous.

Naomi's identity as Pleasant/Sweet One is linked to the physical presence of a husband and sons in her life. In Naomi's view, her identity as one connected to the (living) dead could only bring emptiness and bitterness. *Hamētîm* were not blamed for her afflictions; Yahweh was. From an African religio-cultural lens, Naomi who once held the position of a mother would have fared better than a woman who never had children. In cultures that set great store by children, the ones in which the performance of motherhood is viewed as a sacred duty, for a woman or a man to have never mothered or fathered a child is tantamount to being cursed (cf. also Oduyoye 1999:105-120).

## 2.2 The Hesed of Yahweh among *hagoyim* and *hamētîm*

And Naomi said unto her daughter in law, Blessed be he of the LORD who have not left his kindness to the living and the dead. And Naomi said unto her, The man is near of kin unto us, one of our next of kin (Rt 2:20; KJV).

In Naomi's view, both curses and blessings came from Yahweh. Like the African ancestors, who are believed to be able to punish and reward people according to their actions, so was Yahweh. From Ruth 2:20, an African Naomi will note something that reveals the religious whole depicted by a context where *hamētîm* and *hagoyim* are portrayed as jointly experiencing Yahweh's *hesed*. In this instance, an important question must be raised: If the dead were viewed as indeed dead in Naomi's religio-cultural world, was it really necessary that, in her moment of excitement, a moment of the invocation of blessings, Naomi would also make mention of *hamētîm*? It could be suggested that the latter had to be mentioned on account of the following reasons, among others. First, *hamētîm*, as noted earlier, seemed to have formed, whether consciously or not, an integral part of Naomi's life. Not only so, *hamētîm* seemed to have impacted on her life in one way or another.

Secondly, in their patriarchal context, whatever a bright future Naomi and Ruth had, her daughter-in-law would have aspired and hoped for a future, tight with institutions, in which males, whether among *hamētîm* or *hagoyim*, would be central. Levirate marriage, in the case of Naomi, or widow inheritance, in the case of an African Naomi, was one such



institution. With the preceding in mind, we are not surprised that an encounter between Ruth, Naomi's daughter-in-law, and Boaz, Naomi's relative on the side of her deceased husband, was already casting light at the end of the proverbial tunnel.

Even before the scene at the beginning of chapter 3 (Rt 3:1), where Naomi would reveal her desire to seek security for Ruth, and in Ruth 3:9, where Ruth would propose marriage to Boaz, an African reader who is conscious of the importance of heterosexual marriage, sons as heirs (read: guarantors of male immortality<sup>9</sup>), also aware of institutions such as Levirate marriage/widow inheritance set in place to perpetuate male immortality, can already speculate that the future looked bright for both mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. When Yahweh, who had not forsaken the living and the dead, would later show Yahweh's *hesed* through the marriage union between Ruth and Boaz and the provision of the heir to *hamētīm*, the future would be secured not only for the living, that is, Naomi and Ruth, but also for *hamētīm*, in particular. Phiri (2006: 24) holds a different view: "God is seen to be on the side of the living and not the dead by making Naomi full again." She bases her argument on Ruth 4:13 when the women of Bethlehem gave the child a name proclaiming that a son is born to Naomi. Given the communal family setting depicted in the text, and the feminine space in which the child was named, such a proclamation makes perfect sense, if we locate the naming of the child in the context of the whole narrative. In addition, the words of Boaz, the kinsman's redeemer in Ruth 4:5 and 10, allow us to safely conclude that, according to Naomi, the granting of the blessing of a son was an indication that God had not forsaken the dead and the living. An African Naomi is thus persuaded that, like in the African religio-cultural world, even in the religio-cultural world of the production of the book of Ruth, males called the shots from the realm of the dead.

---

9 Mbiti (1969:130) reasons that "[b]iologically both husband and wife are reproduced in their children, thus perpetuating the chain of humanity. In some societies it is believed that the living-dead are reincarnated in part, so that aspects of their personalities or physical characteristics are 're-born' in their descendants. A person who, therefore, has no descendants in effect quenches the fire of life, and becomes forever dead, since his line of physical continuation is blocked if he does not get married and bear children."

### 2.3 Boaz, a helpful link between the *Hagoyim* and *Hamētīm*?

Then said Boaz, What day thou buyest the field of the hand of Naomi, thou must buy it also of Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of the dead, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance ... (Rt 4:5: KJV)

Moreover Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon, have I purchased to be my wife, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance, that the name of the dead be not cut off from among his brethren, and from the gate of his place: ye are witnesses this day (Rt 4:10: KJV).

At the moment of realising the institution that links *hagoyim* and *hamētīm*, it will also become clear to an African Naomi that, even in the male subconscious selves, *hamētīm* seem to have lodged. Although the African Naomi is aware that the kind of levirate union proposed and implemented, in this instance, is different from the traditional African one and the traditional Israelite one, what is clear to her is that underlying the preceding institutions is preoccupation with the perpetuation of the lineage of dead males. The latter seem to continue to call the shots, even beyond their lifetime on earth. Worth noting is the fact that Ruth, the person on account of whom the whole issue of widow inheritance was set in motion, is not referred to as the wife of Mahlon. Ruth is referred to as *eshet-hamēt* (wife of the dead: Rt 4:5). Through a levirate union, Ruth would occupy a liminal sacred space. She would simultaneously be the wife of the living (Boaz) and the wife of Mahlon, the (living?) dead. It is clear from the text that the man who stood to benefit most from the union of Ruth and Boaz, was not Boaz. No! It was *hamēt*. Boaz confirms the preceding observation by revealing the name that had to be perpetuated. The name of the dead (*shem-hamēt*: Rt 4:9) seems to have been the one that mattered most. Although Boaz acknowledges that he had purchased Ruth, the wife of *hamēt*, as his wife, he quickly shifts the reader's attention to the purpose of the union:

to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance, that the name of the dead be not cut off from among his brethren, and from the gate of his place (Rt 4:10, KJV).

It may be argued that Boaz was used as an instrument to carry out the agenda of Naomi and Ruth, the agenda which, although necessitated by the desire to secure their own holistic survival, revealed to the African Naomi that in the Judahite religio-cultural world, *hamētīm* called the shots in the world of the living.

One wonders what such patriarchally oriented institutions did to the egos of the men in question. What kind of masculinities become visible from men such as Boaz, men who would not only accept a marriage proposal from a younger Moabite widow, but would purpose to enter a marital union to ensure first and foremost, not his own immortality, but the perpetuation of the genealogy of another man. The preceding scenario is particularly puzzling when a reader observed that the narrator had made no suggestions whatsoever about Boaz' former marital life.

At the end of the narrative, the once afflicted Naomi, who could initially not be recognised by fellow Bethlehemite women, is now celebrated by the same women. Perhaps they could confidently then rename her Pleasant! The women bless Yahweh for the blessing of immortality. The grandson will do what Mahlon, the diseased son, would have done if he were still alive, that is, to restore Naomi's life and to take care of Naomi in her old age. However, as the institution, through which the grandson born by Ruth was effected in honour of *hamēt* as well as Boaz' confession that the name be kept immortal, was that of Mahlon, it can be concluded that *hamēt* was, in fact, the driving force behind the blessings that Naomi had started to enjoy.

### 3. CONCLUSION

A topic dealing with death and the dead always unsettles the living. It continues to disturb and shock those of us who happen to still be part of the living. However, the truth underlying the following Northern Sotho/Pedi proverb remains: *lehu ke ngwetši ya malapa*, literally, death is a bride to (all) families. All human beings are thus candidates for death.

If we opt for a pre-exilic dating of the Book of Ruth (cf. Nielson 1999), preoccupation with the notion of death and the dead, in a sense, preoccupation with history and the past, could make sense. Perhaps the narrator had wished to ascertain that as the Israelites would transition from a theocracy to a monarchy like all other nations, they would do well to remember their past. They would have done well to remember the demands that were made upon them as a covenant people. Informed by such a covenantal identity, also remembering the mighty acts of deliverance from Egypt, the kings were to rule God's people accordingly. Preoccupation with the past, with history, with *hamētīm*, that is, the bearers of such traditions, would have been appropriate during such a period of transition. Their political leaders would have been reminded of their covenant identity and that they, therefore, had to lead people under Yahweh's guidance.

If the post-exilic date is posited (cf. Golgingay 2015:285; LaCocque 2004:28), preoccupation with the dead, the past and history would still be of utmost importance. Having experienced exile basically on account of the failure of their ancestors to adhere to the demands of the covenant, it would have been pertinent to remind them of their history and traditions in order to learn from the past failures, among others. Their preoccupation with issues of identity and the purity of the Jewish race during that time in their history would have made sense in a context where people wished to maintain their integrity as a race with a unique identity. Such preoccupation would have made sense in a context where people wished desperately to be guided by history. In the preceding context, maintaining the traditions of the ancestors irrespective of the consequences of such to other members of the community would have been found to be in order. We may ask the following pertinent question though: If a levirate union (read: widow inheritance) was found appropriate in both the Biblical past and our African past, should it be adhered to, at all costs, even if it had proven to be death-dealing in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century Bible readers' contexts? In the words of Kanyoro (2002:33-34):

The dilemma of the double struggle that women have to wage against both maintaining the patriarchal culture and being the victims of oppression, therein scores the need of a serious consideration of a feminist critique of culture. The book of Ruth is a suitable source of such a critique because it is like a mother hen: it gathers women from different traditions, cultures and faiths worldwide under its wings.

We must critically engage with the religio-cultural patriarchal world embedded in the Book of Ruth (as well as in the African religio-cultural world), a religio-cultural world in which the male dead continue to control the lives of living women, with a view to the welfare of those who might be victimised in the name of culture.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

BRENNER, A.

2005. *I am ... Biblical women tell their own stories*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress.

KANYORO, M.R.A.

2002. *Introducing feminist cultural hermeneutics. An African perspective*. New York: Sheffield Academic Press.

LACOCQUE, A.C.

2004. *Ruth: A continental commentary*. Translated by K.C. Hanson. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress.

LEE, E.P.

2012. Ruth. In: C.A. Newsom, S.H. Ringe & J.E. Lapsley (eds), *Women's Bible commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox), pp. 142-149.

MASENYA, M.J.

1989. In the school of wisdom: An interpretation of some Old Testament proverbs in a Northern Sotho setting. Unpublished MA dissertation. Pretoria: University of South Africa.

MASENYA (NGWAN'A MPHAPHALELE), M.

2010. Is Ruth the Ēšet Hayil for real? Womanhood between African proverbs and the threshing floor (Ruth 1:1-13). *SHE XXXVI*:253-272.

MBITI, J.S.

1969. *African religions and philosophy*. London: Heinemann.

NIELSON, K.

1999. *Ruth: A commentary*. Translated by E. Broadbridge. OTL. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox.

NÜRNBERGER, K.

2007. *The living dead and the living God: Christ and the ancestors in a changing Africa*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster; CP Powell Bible Centre: Pretoria.

ODUYOYE, M.A.

1995. *Daughters of Anowa: African women and patriarchy*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis.

1999. A coming home to myself: The childless woman in the West African space. In: M.A. Farley & S. Jones (eds), *Liberating eschatology: Essays in honor of Letty M. Russell* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox), pp. 105-120.

PHIRI, I.A.

2006. Ruth. In: T. Adeyemo (ed.), *Africa Bible commentary* (Nairobi: Zondervan WordAlive Publishers), pp. 319-324.

TRIBLE, P.

1978. *God and the rhetoric of sexuality* Philadelphia, PN: Fortress.

*Keywords*

*Trefwoorde*

*Hamētīm*

*hamētīm*

The dead

Die oorledenes

Naomi

Naomi

Religio-cultural

Gosdienstig-kultureel