Intersecting Economics and Sexual Identity in the Book of Ruth and Contemporary Mozambique: Constructing Biblical Resources for Change

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DECLARATION

I Helder Luis Carlos hereby declare that this thesis is my personal work. All citations, references and borrowed ideas have been appropriately acknowledged. It is being submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa. None of the present work has been submitted previously for any degree or examination in any other university.

Signed **Date**

Helder Luis Carlos **28 February 2025**

SUPERVISOR

As the supervisor of the above-named PhD candidate, I hereby approve this thesis for submission

Signed **Date**

Prof Gerald O. West (Supervisor) **2 February 2025**

DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to my wife Naila Adelino Zandamela Carlos and to our kids Bruno da Naila Helder, Carlos da Naila Helder and Sharon da Naila Helder for the good and challenging moments we went through during this study process.

This study is also dedicated to the victims of economics and religious exclusion and/or silence practiced by the Church and society in general against them, because of their condition of sexual ambiguity or indecency in Mozambique and other similar contexts in the Southern African region. May this research add to the tools or resources of resistance in disguise against the interlocking systems that exclude or silence the economic, sexual and religious experiences of non-conforming sexualities or different gender identities.

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ABSTRACT

This research is an attempt at African biblical scholarship and engagement with critical social issues impacting on society, including non-conforming aspects of sexuality in the continent. Non-conforming sexualities in Mozambique (and other similar contexts in the region) are excluded and/or silenced by the Church and the society in general in terms of economic and religious transactions. This study uses the tri-polar approach to discern an economic, sexual, and religious ethic from the biblical book of Ruth to be applied in Mozambique within the context of economic and religious exclusion of non-conforming people.

The tripolar approach begins with an analysis of the Mozambican context to explore the interconnectedness between sexual struggles and economic struggles, which is a reality characterized by economic privilege of heterosexual men, economic dependence of (heterosexual) women, and economic silence and/or exclusion of non-conforming sexualities or different gender identities. Then the tri-polar approach moves to the biblical book of Ruth and explores the intersections between economic struggles and sexual struggles, which are evidenced by economic privilege of heterosexual men, economic dependence of (heterosexual) women, and economic exclusion and/or silence of ambiguous characters. Then the study returns to both contextual pole and textual pole to analyze the religious contexts that shape the intersections between economics and sexuality in Mozambique and in the book of Ruth. The result is that in both Mozambique and the context of Ruth, religion is used to legitimize heteropatriarchal ideologies and practice that generate economic privilege of heterosexual men, economic dependence of (heterosexual) women, and economic exclusion or silence of indecent people (non-conforming sexualities or ambiguous gender identities). Then, the tripolar approach ends with the discernment of an infrapolitical ethic of the powerless from the biblical book of Ruth which is applied within Contextual Bible Study resources for change in the context of economic and religious exclusion of different sexualities or gender identities in Mozambique (and elsewhere on the African continent).

The book of Ruth is a form of resistance in disguise against the exclusivity ideology of post-exilic context in Judah. This resistance can be captured within the praxis of the Ujamaa Centre CBS, as part of the infrapolitical ethic of the powerless, which suggests a resistance in disguise against the interlocking systems that oppress and marginalize people, including non-

conforming issues of sexuality. Resistance in disguise avoids that harm is done to indecent people (including queer or ambiguous sexualities, women, strangers, and widows).

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AATEEA	All Africa Theological Education by Extension Association
AGP	*Acordo Geral de Paz*
AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
ALFALIT	*Alfabetização e Literatura*
ANE	Ancient Near East
AR	*Assembleia da República*
BCE	Before the Common Era
CBS	Contextual Bible Studies
CDD	*Centro para Democracia e Desenvolvimento*
CE	Common Era
CIP	*Centro de Integridade Publica*
COMECOM	Council for Mutual Economic Assistance
Dt	Deuteronomy
Ematum	*Empresa Moçambicana de Atum*
Ex	Exodus
Eze	Ezequiel
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
Frelimo	*Frente de Libertação de Moçambique*
GDP	Gross Domestic Product

Gen	Genesis
HDI	Human Development Index
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
Hos	Hosea
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IMUM	*Igreja Metodista Unida em Moçambique*
Josh	Joshua
Lev	Leviticus
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender
LGBTI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex
LGBTIQA+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer, Allies and others
LNG	Liquefied Natural Gas
MAM	Mozambique Asset Management
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MPI	Multidimensional Poverty Index
MSM	Men having Sex with Men
Neh	Nehemiah
NGO	Non-government Organization
Nm	Numbers
PIDE	*Polícia Internacional de Defesa de Estado*

PIRCOM	*Programa Inter-Religioso contra a Malaria*
PRE	*Programa de Reabilitação Económica*
Renamo	*Resistência Nacional Moçambicana*
Sam	Samuel
SAP	Structural Adjustment Programs
STD	Sexual Transmitted Diseases
TEE	Theological Education by Extension
UN	United Nations
URSS	*União das Repúblicas Socialistas Soviéticas*
USD	United States Dollar
WHO	World Health Organization

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CHAPTER ONE - GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Motivation

One of the key distinctiveness of African biblical scholarship is to engage with critical social issues impacting on society, including non-conforming aspects of sexuality in the continent. In most communities in Africa, people of non-conforming gender identities or different sexualities are often regarded as taboo and sin by religion. Additionally, they are often rejected by their own families, the society and the Church, leading them to exclusion from economic and religious transactions. This reality is also observed in Mozambique, where there is a lack of healthy discussion in the area of human sexuality, and a high rate of homophobia and violence. People who are sexually different and who may want to be inclusive to sexual diversity fell unsafe for fear of attacks and condemnation, from within the communities where they belong. This is also endorsed by the Church when regarding non-conforming sexualities as sin (or indecent). While the Church and society promote the traditional and established heterosexual order, it suppresses the economic and religious participation of people with different gender identities and sexualities. This means that the preferential option for the poor in liberation theology has not been extended fully to non-conforming sexualities, a sub-category of the poor and oppressed (see Ipsen 2009:13). Non-conforming people are excluded or silenced from the economic and religious transaction in the country.

Faith perspectives on human sexuality, gender diversity, and spirituality in Mozambique have become sources of contested discussion. The experience of the researcher, as an heterosexual Church leader (or Clergy) and an ally who has done significant communitarian work with LGBTIQA+ people through Contextual Bible Studies and Theological Education by Extension, shows that the Church (and other faith-based institutions) is often a source of negative beliefs about communities of diverse sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression, that have led to destructive structural and circumstantial outcomes, ranging from exclusion, discrimination, and violence in the country. In fact, LGBTIQA+ people often report situations of exclusion and marginalization within communities where they belong, including schools, working places and churches, which lead them to experience deprivation in terms of economics and sexuality. Though the Christian Church in Mozambique has a long history of systems of oppression that have, and continue to cause harm to people of diverse sexual orientation and gender identity, it is also a key tool used by affirming faith-based allies (like us) in support of changing discourse and disrupting stereotypes. In other words, within the

oppressive structure of the Church in Mozambique there are heterosexual Pastors (including myself) who work towards construction of alternative and inclusive communities within the context of sexual diversity to combat exclusion and marginalization of LGBTIQA+ people. Accordingly, this research emerges as part of the work done by heterosexual church leaders and allies to amplify voices for advocacy and create change in Mozambique.

It has been said that indecent acts in theology "demand of us creativity to see the unseen, but also courage to denounce what does not work" (Althaus-Reid 2000:78). People could be described as decent or indecent due to their sexual orientations, and indecent people are often seen as strangers or the other, leading them to be excluded, both in terms of religion and economics. In fact, heterosexual theological order carries a sin of exclusion which requires an intellectual and theological healing. Nathan Esala (2018:81) has argued that "the bible must be engaged because it is a substantive resource for poor and marginalized communities in Africa." This has been done by a significant number of (African) scholars, but for the purposes of this research the engagement is limited to scholars reading the biblical book of Ruth, to intersect economics and sexual identity. The biblical book of Ruth may not clearly highlight the issue of non-conforming sexualities; however, it opens windows to question traditional notions of decency and indecency (see Althaus-Reid 2000:2) within the context of different sexualities and/or gender diversity in Mozambique (and the Southern Africa region). In other words, the biblical book of Ruth allows the reader to question what is decent and what is indecent in terms of economics, sexual identity and belief systems, both in the narrative and in Mozambique.

Preliminary surveys on the biblical book of Ruth as well as Mozambique has pointed to different directions taken by (African) scholars, according to their analysis. In terms of the intersection between economics and sexual identity in the book of Ruth, one category of scholars has used the book of Ruth from a gender and/or cultural perspective, paying attention to a particular aspect, or more than one aspect, of the biblical narrative of Ruth. They look at resources for people who are underprivileged due to gender and cultural elements of a certain society (Masenya 1998; Kanyoro 2009; Alfredo 2010; and Elness-Hanson 2021). Though they recognize aspects of gender and/or cultural marginalization in the book of Ruth, they tend to ignore its economic dimension. In other words, these scholars they see different struggles in terms of gender and culture, but they do not see economic struggles which are clearly apparent in the narrative of Ruth.

Another group of scholars pay attention to the economic dimensions of Ruth's narrative, looking for resources for people who are underprivileged due to the economic systems of a certain society (Siquans 2009; Masenya 2004 and 2013; Ramaribana 2013; and Mtshiselwa 2016). While these scholars recognize the economic marginalization in Ruth story, they tend not to intersect economic with sexuality. Once again, these scholars pay attention to some aspects of marginalization while ignoring other important aspects. In other words, they have failed to intersect economic struggles and sexual struggles in the narrative of Ruth. The systems that marginalize indecent people in the book of Ruth must not be dealt with as one aspect, but a combination of multiple and interlocking systems of oppression and marginalization.

There is another category of scholars who engage the book of Ruth to interrogate sexual struggles in different realities of the continent and globally (Stahlberg 2008; Krutzsch 2015, Preser 2017; West 2019 and Graybill 2021). Though these scholars recognize sexual struggles in the Ruth story, they tend not to intersect sexual struggles with economics struggles in the narrative. These scholars see in the text of Ruth people who struggle because of issues related to sex and sexuality, but they do not see people who struggle because of issues related to economics. They also fail to see sexuality and economics as interlocking systems in the book of Ruth. The struggle of people due to issues of sexuality must be viewed as part of other interconnected systems of oppression (including economic system).

Finally, there are few studies conducted by some scholars, using the book of Ruth to intersect economics and sexuality in different realities of the continent (Masenya 2013; West & Haddad 2016; and Esala 2018). Even though they recognize economic struggles based on sexual disadvantages, they do it from a heteronormative perspective, ignoring other possible types of sexualities in the narrative. These scholars have gone further to see not only the presence of economic and sexual struggles in the narrative of Ruth, but also to intersect these struggles. However, this recognition of economic struggles and sexual struggles (including their intersections) are based on the existing heteropatriarchal orientation, ignoring ambiguous sexualities from the narrative. A fair reading of issues related to sex and sexuality in the book of Ruth must be inclusive to ambiguous or indecent sexualities clearly visible in the text.

In terms of intersection between economics and sexual identity in Mozambique, the examination also has pointed to different trajectories within the literature. The first group of scholars that have been identified emphasize the high levels of poverty and economic inequalities in Mozambique due to the low economic growth of the country, trade and income

inequalities, environmental shocks, economic policies of exclusion adopted by the government, and an extractive economic system under the auspice of multinational enterprise and external dependence (Slaterry 2003; Silva 2007; Arndt 2012; Silva 2013; Uetela & Obeng-Odoom 2016 and Mairoce, Silberberger & Zweynert 2021). Though these scholars clearly describe the main factors that perpetuate poverty and economic inequalities in the country, they have failed to relate it to issues of gender identity and sexuality which are also interwoven with economic transactions. In other words, these scholars recognize the existence of economic struggles in Mozambique, but they are not saying anything about sexual struggles. They are also silent about the interconnectedness between economic struggles and sexual struggles in Mozambique. However, these struggles go hand in hand in the country. And it is important to recognize how economic struggles and sexual struggles influence each other.

A second category of literature looks at cultural sexual practices that led to infections, especially for women due to their cultural disadvantages in many parts of the country (Bagnol & Mariano 2008; Noden, Gomes & Ferreira 2010; Magorokosho 2011; Macia, Maharaj & Gresh 2011; Houweling 2016; and Lenzi et al 2019). These studies clearly deal with issues related to sex and sexuality. Though these scholars describe cultural practices that led to the vulnerability of women, they have not said much about the economic scenario that has contributed to this vulnerability. In other words, these scholars are interested with sexual vulnerability of people because of cultural aspects. This is fine, but they have ignored the fact that this sexual vulnerability is interrelated with issues of economics. In other words, issues of sexuality and economics in Mozambique must be part of one package of struggle in different realities of the country. This means that an approach that intersect the two struggles is not visible from these scholars.

There is a third category of literature that deals with non-conforming sexualities in Mozambique, raising concerns of sexual relations in the context of HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus), between partners of same sex orientation and/or those engaged in multiple genders sexual intercourse, also addressing discriminatory treatment of non-conforming sexualities by the government, religion and the society in general (Cummings et al 2018; Gamariel et al 2020; and Santos & Waites 2022). While this literature raises awareness of the high risk of infection within non-conforming sexualities as well as the need of more inclusive policies, it has not explored the question of how economic realities influence the risk of infection within this community. In other words, this category of scholars is interested with

inclusive policies in terms of health care of non-conforming sexualities, but they have failed to see how non-conforming people transact their bodies for economic sustenance.

The last scholarly direction is taken by scholars who pay attention to the low economic standard of many (young) women who are involved in sexual relationships with (old) men to secure their economic future, leading them to a high level of vulnerabilities, such as HIV infection and others (Hawkins, Price & Mussá 2009; Bandali 2011; Odimegwu, De Wet & Banda 2016; Salia et al 2020 and Ridgeway et al 2021). This is indeed a clear connection between sexual struggles and economics struggles whereby young women sell their bodies in exchange of economic benefits. However, a heteronormative orientation has been prioritized by these scholars, who tend not to pay attention to people of non-conforming sexualities, who also transact their bodies for economic benefits. In other words, these scholars see sexual transaction for economic benefits only as a problem of heterosexual people, ignoring the fact that non-heterosexual people also transact their bodies for economic benefits.

The above outlined gaps demonstrate that the preferential option for the poor in liberation theology has not been extended fully to people with non-conforming or ambiguous sexualities, a sub-category of the poor and oppressed (see Ipsen 2009:13). Putting it differently, the intersection between economics and sexual identity has not been deeply explored, neither in the book of Ruth nor in the Mozambican context of different sexualities and/or gender diversity. Thus, this research comes as a contribution alongside the few studies that have and are being done in which economics and sexuality are intersected. This topic becomes particularly important in current biblical and theological literature because it encourages the existing (but not fully accepted) debate on how to alleviate the economic and religious struggle (exclusion and silence) of non-conforming sexualities and/or different gender identities in Mozambique (and elsewhere in Southern Africa).

Accordingly, this study uses the biblical book of Ruth to explore the struggle of 'indecent' others in terms of economics, sexual identity and religion. It looks at the struggle of economic and religious integration of the indecent[1] people in Mozambique, which is also apparent in Ruth's narrative. The biblical text of Ruth is used dialogically to reclaim the economic and religious inclusion of the indecent other to build inclusive and alternative communities in the context of different sexualities and/or gender diversity in Mozambique. This research also

[1] This term is borrowed from Marcella Althaus-Reid (2000) and it is fully explained in section 1.3.3.

serves as a resource to construct potentially transformative Contextual Bible Studies (CBS) for Mozambique (and the region) in the context of different sexualities and/or gender diversity.

1.2 Research Questions

The question that this research seeks to answer is: What intersecting economic, sexual, and religious ethic can be discerned from Ruth's narrative as a resource to reclaim the economic and religious inclusion of non-conforming sexualities in Mozambique? This question is, therefore, researched based on the following sub-questions: What are the intersections between economics and sexuality in Mozambique? What are the intersections between economics and sexuality in the book of Ruth? In what ways does religion shape the intersection between economics and sexuality in Mozambique and in the book of Ruth? What life-affirming economic, sexual, and religious ethic can be discerned from Ruth's narrative for contexts of non-conforming sexualities? What CBS resources can be constructed based on the life-affirming ethic discerned from Ruth in order to appropriate within the context of different sexualities and/or gender diversity in Mozambique?

1.3 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical point of departure in this research is grounded on an African contextual hermeneutical framework, with special focus on tri-polar approach (see Draper 2002, West 2010 and West 2018). Moreover, it employs a combination of Marxian analytical concepts (see Gottwald 1993b) and the Indecent Queer Feminist theory (see Althaus-Reid 2000 and Ipsen 2009). In addition to that, the research uses the notion of intersectionality (see Crenshaw 1989), the concept of struggle (see Mosala1989) and the concept of infrapolitics (see Scott1990).

1.3.1 Tri-polar Approach

Gerald West (2018:240) argues that African biblical scholarship is "historically post-colonial, theoretically tri-polar, and ideologically a site-of-struggle." It is post-colonial because the Bible was brought to Africa as part of the missionary-colonial enterprise, and African biblical scholars do post-colonial biblical interpretation not as theory but as a way of being African (West 2018:246). African biblical scholarship has been recognized as the site-of-struggle because real struggle of African people "whether in the past, present, or future, is the terrain for the doing African biblical interpretation" (West 2018:255). In other words, African biblical

interpretation is done within contexts of struggles. African reader or interpreter of the Bible recognizes struggles in both selected biblical text and the selected African context.

A tri-polar approach theorizes further the traditional bi-polar[2] approach, in which the pole of African context and the pole of biblical text interpret each other (West 2018:247). In fact, the bi-polar approach emphasized the context of reception as the subject of interpretation (Ukpong 2000:12), but it has failed to be overt about the role of the reader "who enables the text and context to come into conversation" (West 2010:22). In other words, the biblical text and the African context cannot initiate a conversation without a reader, who allows this dialogue between them. In this dialogue there is an implicit pole that allows the interpretative process to happen, and it is called the pole of appropriation (see Draper 2002 and West 2010). Within the tri-polar approach, both the biblical text and a specific selected African context are analyzed, then the two are brought into a dialogical appropriation (West 2018:248). Therefore, the approach is called tri-polar since it has three components, being biblical text, African context and appropriation.

Following the path of tri-polar approach, the biblical text of Ruth and the Mozambican context are carefully analyzed, then brought into a dialogical appropriation. The three components of this tri-polar approach are shaped by the struggle of economic and religious exclusion, based on different sexualities and/or gender diversity in Mozambique. In other words, the tri-polar trajectory in this study is constituted by the contextual pole which analyzes the intersections between economics and sexuality in Mozambique, the textual pole that analyzes the intersections between economics and sexuality in the book of Ruth and the appropriation pole where the biblical text of Ruth and the Mozambican context of economics and sexuality are brought into a conversation or a dialogue.

1.3.2 Marxian Analytical Concepts

Marxian analytical concepts are used within a liberation ideo-theological framework to point precisely to "relationships among people in actual social formations and specify where and what to look for in the social interaction" (Gottwald 1993a:146). In fact, Liberation Theology is a process formed by dialectic between the experience of the oppressed and intellectual reflection (Frostin 1988:14). Per Frostin (1988:7) argues that liberation theologians in the third

[2] It is important to honour the work of those pioneering scholars like Justin S. Ukpong (2000) who have done extensive work on a bi-polar approach.

world contexts believe that God is on the side of the poor and oppressed, and that they should search for the true God and fight against the idols of oppression. Therefore, Marxian analytical concepts as developed by Norman Gottwald (1993b) is employed. These concepts give a perspective emerging from biblical economics that can orient contemporary analysis and reflection on economic systems (Gottwald 1993b:346).

For Gottwald (1993a:147), the key concept in Marxian analytic is "class", with a particular focus on when "some people live off the labor of others." This is an adequate model because it is broad enough to view the whole course of human history and pre-history as a social continuum shaped by class; and it is precise enough to discriminate changes and differences that have occurred over the course of human social history (Gottwald 1993b:145). Furthermore, it offers analytical concepts that disclose the basic workings of social life both in its dynamic integrity and in its changefulness (Gottwald 1993b:145). This means that the Marxian analytical concepts orient analysis and reflection on economic systems both in Ruth's narrative and in the Mozambican context of sexual and/or gender diversity. Marxian analytical concepts shed some light on how biblical economics can help reflection and analysis of modern economics systems, based on resemblances between them.

1.3.3 Indecent Queer Feminist Theory

Marcella Althaus-Reid (2000) develops an indecent Queer Feminist Theology, based on sexual experiences of the poor, using economic and political analysis while unveiling the sexual ideology of systematic theology. Althaus-Reid (2000:5) takes a step further on the work done by traditional liberationists, calling scholars to employ the hermeneutical circle of suspicion to question in depth traditional notions of liberation, for Liberation Theology itself often excluded the dimension of sexuality. Hence, she develops an indecent theology as an exercise of serious doubting, questioning those very hermeneutical principles which led liberationist to be indifferent to the intersection between sexuality and economics (Althaus-Reid 2000:5). This is because "economic desires walk hand in hand with erotic desires and theological needs" (Althaus-Reid 2000:5). In this perspective, liberation theology must take into consideration not only issues related to economics, but also issues related to sexuality and the intersection between economic struggles and sexual struggles.

Following Althaus-Reid, Avaren Ipsen (2009:3) has adopted this indecent theory to challenge interpretations that make sex-workers invisible in Feminist and Liberation Theology. This is

because current feminist and liberation readings of biblical sex-work may not be liberating to sex-workers themselves (Ipsen 2009:7). According to Ipsen (2009:13), the preferential option for the poor in liberation theology has not been extended fully to sex-workers, a sub-category of the poor and oppressed. This means that indecent theory must not only challenge traditional liberation theologians to include issues of sexuality in their claim but include indecent sexualities that are marginalized or oppressed.

Thus, the indecent theory of Althaus-Reid (2000) and Ipsen (2009) is used to orient the intersection between economics and sexual identity in this study. Paraphrasing P. S. Cheng (2011:16) it could be argued that indecent queer feminist theory is relevant in this research because it opens room to reclaim voices and sources that previously had been ignored, silenced, and discarded in Ruth's narrative as well as in the context of non-conforming sexualities in Mozambique. In other words, indecent queer feminist theory takes further the works of traditional liberationists and opens room to include issues of sexualities in their preferential option for the poor and the oppressed. And this opens room to see economic struggles and sexual struggles as part of the liberation attempt in the biblical book of Ruth and contemporary Mozambican context.

1.3.4 Intersectionality

It has been argued that the concept of intersectionality can be traced back to Black feminism in the United States, emphasizing the interconnectedness of gender, race, ethnicity, class, and sexuality (Muirhead et al 2020:465). After that, the concept was used by different scholars to intersect various systems of oppression according to their respective realities or socio-historical locations. One of the notable works on intersectionality was done by Kimberle Crenshaw (1989) in her *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics*. In this article, Crenshaw (1989:140) argues that "Black women are sometimes excluded from feminist theory and antiracist policy discourse because both are predicated on a discrete set of experiences that often does not accurately reflect the interaction of race and gender." Her point of departure is that Black women can experience discrimination in any number of ways and that the contradiction arises from the assumptions that their claims of exclusion must be unidirectional (Crenshaw 1989:149). Therefore, she suggests that Black liberationist politics and feminist theory should consider the intersectional experiences of those whom the movements claim as their respective constituents (Crenshaw 1989:166). Following Crenshaw, Anna Carastathis

(2014:304) has theorized this concept of intersectionality further, from a feminist perspective, to argue that "oppression is not a singular process or a binary political relation, but is better understood as constituted by multiple, converging, or interwoven systems." In other words, the marginalization of female bodies should not be viewed as a result of one problem, but as a result of combination of many and interrelated problems that generate their oppression.

Recently, the Ujamaa Centre,[3] through the work of Gerald West, Sithembiso Zwane and Helder Carlos (2023) has borrowed this concept of intersectionality to address interlocking systems of oppression in the book of Ruth, with special focus on issues of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and economics. West, Zwane & Carlos (2023:588) use an intersectional lens to structure the re-reading of Ruth, primarily an intersection between economics and sexuality, but taking "cognisance" too of gender and ethnicity. Following these works, the concept of intersectionality is used in this research to shed light on the interconnectedness of systems of oppression that marginalize and exclude indecent people in the book of Ruth as well as in contemporary Mozambique, with special focus on issues of economics, sexuality, and religion. Intersectionality in this research enlightens the analysis of the intersections between economic struggles and sexual struggles in the book of Ruth and contemporary Mozambique. Through intersectionality this study unveils the fact that the struggle of indecent people in Mozambique and indecent characters in the book of Ruth is not unidirectional but constituted by multiple aspects of oppression that needs an intersectional approach when addressing it.

1.3.5 The Concept of Struggle

The concept of struggle is developed by a South African and anti-apartheid Black scholar Itumeleng J. Mosala (1989). According to Mosala (1989:6) the category of struggle at all levels and through various phases of black history should be taken as the key hermeneutical factor when using the Bible as a social class resource. This is because, "the texts of the Bible are sites of struggle" (Mosala 1989:185). And "the category of struggle becomes an important hermeneutical factor not only in one's reading of his or her history and culture but also in one's understanding of the history, nature, ideology, and agenda of the biblical texts" (Mosala

[3] The Ujamaa Centre for Community Development and Research is located within the School of Religion, Philosophy, and Classics, University of KwaZulu-Natal, in South Africa. Through research and community-based work, Ujamaa unveils the interlocking systems of oppression as well as allowing marginalized communities to engage these intersecting systems of oppression, through theological and biblical resources (including contextual bible studies).

1989:9). In other words, the category of struggle enlightens the analysis of the biblical text as well as the African context.

Though Mosala is focusing on race, his analysis is class based (Carlos 2012:60). Indeed, part of his argument is that apartheid is a form of racialized capitalism (Mosala 1989:6), whereby some races are benefited from the economic transaction of the country while others are marginalized. In fact, the South African apartheid context in which Mosala's formation emerged was characterized by economic benefit of white people while most black people struggled for economic survival. And the concept of struggle became considerably relevant in African biblical scholarship when dealing with challenges of the South African apartheid.

Gerald West (2018:255), drawing on Mosala, points out that the final form of the Bible we have and use, is a form shaped by the dominant classes of particular historical periods in the Bible's formation. In fact, "individuals and social groups that were not part of this elite class are ignored or marginalized because of their illiteracy, socioeconomic class, location, and possible language barriers" (Gallarreta 2017:2). However, "remnants or fragments of marginalized voices remain," because "[d]ominant classes have through the redactional process of the Bible's composition co-opted the ideological perspectives of marginalized social sectors" (West 2018:255). In fact, it is possible to see in the final form of the biblical texts different levels of struggles, including the struggles of marginalized voices of the context in which the text was produced. Though the context of production of biblical texts tend to promote the voices of the dominant classes, the final form of the scripture presents (between lines) voices of marginalized communities which remained during the redactional process. In this particular research, the concept of struggle is borrowed to highlight different challenges faced by marginalized voices in the book of Ruth as well as in contemporary Mozambique, with special focus on issues of economics, sexuality, and religion. In other words, the concept of struggles helps to see economic, sexual and religious challenges of ambiguous and non-conforming sexualities in the biblical book of Ruth and contemporary Mozambique.

1.3.6 The Concept of Infrapolitics

Infrapolitics is a neologism developed by James C. Scott (1990:138) as a shorthand to convey the idea that we are dealing with an unobtrusive realm of political struggle. The starting point in Scott (1990:17)'s formulation is his "effort to understand the politics of resistance by poor Malay peasants to changes in rice production that systematically worked to their disadvantage."

From that perspective, Scott (1990:2) uses the term public transcript as a shorthand way of describing the interaction between subordinates and those who dominate, and hidden transcript to characterize discourse that takes place offstage, beyond direct observation by powerholders (Scott 1990:4). For Scott (1990:xii) "every subordinate group creates, out of its ordeal, a hidden transcript that represents a critique of power spoken behind the back of the dominant; and the powerful, for their part, also develop a hidden transcript representing the practices and claims of their rule that cannot be openly avowed." This means that both the dominant and the oppressed classes create their own hidden transcripts or way of being that only make sense within their respective hidden environment.

While the two transcripts are important for Scott, this research is interested with the infrapolitics of the powerless. In fact, the hidden transcript of the subordinate group is not just behind-the-scenes griping and grumbling; it is enacted in a host of down-to-earth, low-profile stratagems designed to minimize appropriation (Scott 1990:188). In other words, the language and performance of dominated groups are from bellow and covered by communitarian reality. The hidden transcript of the subordinate group is a form of resistance in which the victims minimize the problem of their marginalization without putting them in more danger. Thus, the infrapolitics of the powerless becomes relevant to this research because it sheds some lights on how to understand the book of Ruth as hidden discourse in a disguised form to minimize appropriation of the exclusivity ideology practiced by the temple community against the people of the land in post-exilic Judah. This will guide non-conforming sexualities in Mozambique to resist through Contextual Bible Study constructed from the biblical book of Ruth. These biblical resources follow under the infrapolitics of the powerless, where excluded or silenced indecent people are called to resist in disguise, towards construction of alternative and inclusive communities in terms of sexual diversity and different gender identities in Mozambique. Moreover, these biblical resources emerge within the LGBTIQA+ CBS work that has been done by the Ujamaa Centre and it is a deliberate attempt, post-PhD work to engage directly with LGBTIQA+ people in Mozambique (and the Southern African region), drawing their direct voices into this work. This means that the infrapolitics of the powerless is applied within Contextual Bible Studies for future community-based research and praxis.

1.4 Research Methodology

Methodologically this research is located within Old Testament biblical studies, and it uses a combination of tools to achieve the above outlined research questions. These tools are used in

different components of the tri-polar approach, including textual analysis, contextual analysis and appropriation analysis. The study relies mainly on literature review, using a selected range of material (books, journals, articles, thesis, and reports), with special focus on Ruth's narrative and contemporary Mozambican context of economics and sexuality. This means that the study does not have an empirical fieldwork-based component, but is literature based post-colonial research on the biblical book of Ruth in dialogue with contemporary Mozambique.

First, in terms of the textual pole, a combination of narrative and socio-historical methods is employed to explore the intersection between economics and sexual identity, as well economics, sexuality, and religion, in the book of Ruth. It has been argued that narrative is an interpretive approach in the social sciences, and it involves using storytelling methodology, whereby the story becomes an object of study, focusing on how individuals or groups make sense of events and actions in their lives (Mitchell & Egudo 2003:1). In biblical studies, the narrative approach studies "the nature, form, and functioning of narrative text" (Green 2010:74). Narratives "incorporate temporality, a social context, complicating events, and an evaluating conclusion that together make a coherent story" (McAlpine 2016:33 and Green 2010:94). The book of Ruth presents all the narrative elements, including "events, characters, and settings, and their interaction as the plot" (Malbon 1992:26-27). Therefore, narrative analysis becomes relevant in the study of this book.

Having carefully analyzed the narrative dimensions of the text, the research then turns to the socio-historical dimensions of the text. The socio-historical method "focuses on the social, economic, legal, cultural and religious factors and how they influence the understanding and meaning of specific text" (Igba & Stoker 2018:2). This method should focus "on issues that include, but are not limited to, social history, attempting to trace the social changes that took place over time, class conflicts in community and marginalized groups" (Chamburuka 2020:1). This means that the textual pole of the tri-polar approach uses a combination of narrative and socio-historical methods to analyze the intersection between economic struggles, sexual struggles and religious struggles in the biblical book of Ruth.

Second, in terms of the contextual pole, socio-economic method is adopted to analyze the intersections between economics and sexuality, as well economics, sexuality and religion, in contemporary Mozambique. This is a method borrowed from social sciences to analyze a specific selected social context, and it involves "the collection and analysis of economic data, or data which relates to human behavior, opinions, living or working condition, or social

institutions" (Huws 2002:5). Socio-economic analysis fits within both qualitative and quantitative research (Silva 2008:175), to identify and evaluate the economic development of people, families and communities. The main objective of socio-economic analysis is to access benefits and social services in a certain society (Pedroso 2018:137). Hence, this approach has enabled the research to understand the level of economic and religious struggles in Mozambique within the context of different sexualities and/or gender diversity. Through socio-economic approach, the intersection between economic struggles, sexual struggles and religious struggle is analyzed in contemporary Mozambique.

Finally, in terms of the pole of appropriation, indecent queer feminist theory (see section 1.4.3 above) is used to establish a dialogical process between Ruth's narrative and the Mozambican context of sexual diversity. It functions as the appropriative lens used to appropriate the economic, sexual, and religious ethic of Ruth's narrative in Mozambique within the context of non-conforming gender identity or different sexualities (see Althaus-Reid 2000 and Ipsen 2009). Through indecent queer feminist theory, an appropriative dialogue is established between economic, sexual and religious indecencies of Ruth and contemporary Mozambique. Additionally, the indecent queer feminist theory is employed in conversation with concepts of intersectionality, struggle and infrapolitics to discern a life-affirming economic, sexual and religious ethic from the book of Ruth as a resource for contemporary Mozambique within the context of non-conforming or different sexualities and/or gender diversity.

These concepts have enabled the research to identify different struggles in the biblical book of Ruth, see the interconnectedness of them in different settings of the text, and suggest an ethic of resistance in terms of economic, sexual and religious marginalization of indecent queer bodies or non-conforming sexualities and/or different gender identities in contemporary Mozambique (and elsewhere in Southern Africa).

1.5 Limitations

It has been said earlier (see section 1.5) that this research does not have an empirical fieldwork-based component but is literature based post-colonial research located within African biblical scholarship, with special focus on the Old Testament studies, within the context of Mozambique. It looks for resources in the book of Ruth for economic and religious inclusion within the context of different sexualities and/or gender diversity. In contemporary post-colonial Mozambique, the study looks at the intersection between economics and sexual

identity within the context of non-conforming sexualities. Though it is written from an academic perspective, it is also grounded within life experiences of communities, more specifically the Church in Mozambique (and other similar contexts in Southern Africa).

The main problem that has occurred during the research process is the lack of a safe space in the Church to discuss issues related to sexuality. The Church and society in general do not have proper language to discuss issues related to sex and sexuality because these are regarded as taboo and sin. This has limited the process of data collection and the engagement with the Church and society (including LGBTIQA+ people) during research. The Ujamaa Centre and AATEEA[4] (All Africa Theological Education by Extension Association) have been useful sites in offering safe space to attest the validity of this study during the research process. The two platforms do not form a component of the research, but they have guided the study in constructing a series of Contextual Bible Studies from this research that have the potential to be a resource in Mozambique and other African contexts. In other words, the Ujamaa Centre and AATEEA are two platforms that assisted the engagement between the academic reflection and communitarian experiences during this study process.

1.6 Structure of Thesis

This research is organized in seven chapters: chapter one introduces the research, looking at the background and motivation of the study. This includes theoretical framework and research methodology, research questions, objectives and limitations of the research.

Chapter two explores the intersections between economics and sexuality in contemporary Mozambique, focusing on aspects that unveil and intersects economic and sexual struggles in the country, within the context of sexual diversity.

Chapter three explores the intersections between economics and sexuality in the biblical book of Ruth, paying attention to interconnectedness between economic and sexual struggles within the context of exclusivity ideology of indecent characters in the narrative.

[4] The All Africa Theological Education by Extension Association is a forum for collaboration and mutual support of the Theological Education by Extension (TEE) programs in Africa, and it also engages in joint efforts in addressing key issues facing the TEE programmes, including, writing, production, editing and validation of course materials.

Chapter four analyzes the religious contexts that shape the intersections between economics and sexuality in Mozambique and in the book of Ruth. The focus in chapter is the belief systems and practices that support and legitimize oppressive heteropatriarchy that generates economic privilege of heterosexual men, economic dependence of (heterosexual) women, and economic exclusion or silence of ambiguous or non-conforming sexualities in Ruth's narrative as well as in contemporary Mozambique.

Chapter five discerns a life-affirming economic, sexual, and religious ethic from Ruth's narrative for contexts of non-conforming sexualities, suggesting an infrapolitical ethic of the powerless as a resource or tool of resistance in disguise in contexts of economic and religious exclusion of non-conforming sexualities.

Chapter six appropriates the economic, sexual, and religious ethic discerned from Ruth's narrative in Mozambique within the context of different sexualities and/or gender diversity, providing a series of potential CBS resources for future community-based research and praxis (including post-PhD work).

Chapter seven concludes the study by summarizing the findings and recommending gaps for future research, focusing on the key elements of this study and the indication of the achievement of the objectives of the research.

CHAPTER TWO – INTERSECTING ECONOMICS AND SEXUAL IDENTITY IN MOZAMBIQUE

2.0 Introduction

This thesis uses the tripolar African biblical studies approach to bring the intersection between economics and sexual identity in Mozambique into dialogue with the intersection between economics and sexuality in the biblical book of Ruth, in order to construct potentially transformative Contextual Bible Studies (CBS) for contexts of non-conforming gender identities or different sexualities. The previous chapter has done the introduction to the study, focusing on the background and motivation, research questions and objectives, theoretical framework and methodologies, as well as the scope and structure of the research. Now, the study begins with the contextual pole of the tripolar approach, intersecting economics and sexuality in Mozambique. First, this chapter analyzes the economic situation of the country as an independent state; then it looks at the situation of sexual identities in Mozambique; and finally, it intersects economic struggles and sexual struggles of the country.

2.1 The Economic Situation of Mozambique as an Independent State

The concept of economics has been differently understood in different realities, depending on the context in which it is used. This means that economists "are far from unanimous about the definition of their subject" (Medema 2009:221). Nevertheless, economics has been generally described as the science dealing with the production, distribution, and consumption of wealth (Henderson & Poole1991:4). Based on the availability of the means of production, humankind establishes a set of rules to generate its material wellbeing and how the producers and/or non-producers are benefited from it. In fact, people apply their knowledges, skills, and efforts to the gift of nature to satisfy their material wants (Stanlake 1989:1). Yet, this art of economics should trace the consequences of that policy not merely for one group but for all groups involved (Hazlitt 1979:17). In other words, the rules that determine the mechanisms of production, distribution and consumption of wealth should be equally reflected in each member of that society. If these rules do not respond to the needs of the majority of the population, then every assumption of economic growth must be suspected. It is within this assumption that the economic situation of post-colonial Mozambique is analyzed, looking specifically at the economic trajectory of the country, its economic potentialities, the situation of poverty and economic inequalities, and the factors associated with poverty and economic inequalities.

2.1.1 The Economic Trajectory in Mozambique

The analysis of benefits and social services in an historical period of the country can be done through a socio-economic approach (Pedroso 2018:137). Indeed, the socio-economic method involves "the collection and analysis of economic data, or data which relates to human behaviour, opinions, living or working condition, or social institutions" (Huws 2002:5). Socio-economic analysis fits in both qualitative and quantitative research, to identify and evaluate the economic development of people, families, and communities (Silva 2008:175). In this section, socio-economic analysis is employed to examine the main economic periods of the country: the economic instability throughout civil war; the increasing of international aid after the general peace agreement or *Acordo Geral de Paz* (AGP); and the role of international donors after the insurgence of military violence.

2.1.1.1. The Economic Instability Throughout Civil War

Mozambique is in the southeast region of Africa (see Figure 1 below), and it "borders Indian Ocean, with over 2000[5] kilometres (about 1.243 miles) of coaster line, and shares land borders with South Africa, Swaziland,[6] Zambia, Tanzania, Zimbabwe and Malawi" (Silva 2007:112).

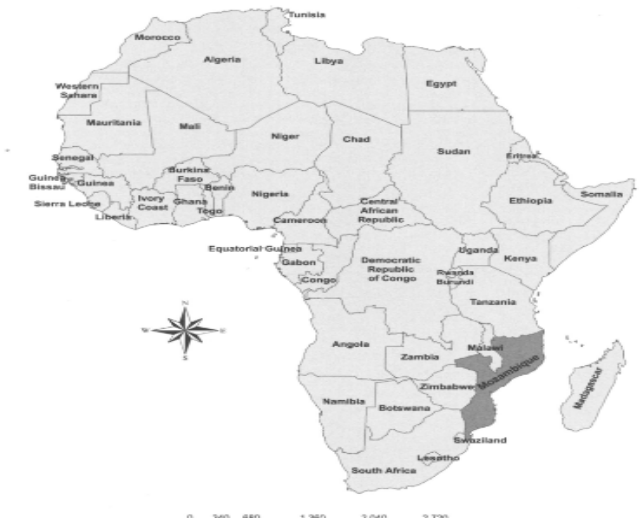

Figure 1: Location of Mozambique (Silva 2007:112)

After a long period of the Portuguese colonialization, the country got its independence in 1975 under the leadership of Frelimo (*Frente de Libertação de Moçambique* or the Mozambican

[5] Other Scholars would argue about 2470 km (see Rosario 2019:185).
[6] Now called the Kingdom of Eswatini.

Liberation Front), a liberation movement that was influenced by a rigid socialist ideology. In fact, after independence Frelimo officially declared itself "a vanguard Marxist-Leninist party" (Machava 2011:596). The African Marxist-Leninist approach adopted by Frelimo was characterized by "public ownership of the means of production and central planning" (Fenichel & Khan 1981:813). This economic orientation led the new government to nationalize land, rent property and services of law, medicine and education (Virtanen 2003:246). Further, "many businesses were abandoned (and often sabotaged as the manger left), so the state, by default, ended up with a key and unexpected role in a mixed economy" (Hanlon & Mosse 2009: 2). Therefore, Frelimo became the key economic actor of the country, controlling the means of production and the distribution of wealth. In other words, Frelimo became responsible not only for what and how to produce, but also with the decision making on how the economic production of the country could be distributed amongst its inhabitants.

The new Marxist-Leninist government was also characterized by intimidation and exclusion of other people, based on political ideology. Indeed, suspicion and intimidation of enemies/traitors, as well as an emphasis on ideology, morality, violence and punishment, constituted core ingredients of state-building in Mozambique under a revolutionary liberation front (Machava 2011:594). In urban neighbourhoods and rural villages "dynamising groups," or vigilant groups loyal to the party replaced colonial officers and *régulos* (traditional chiefs) as the local organs of state/party authority (Virtanen 2003:246). Local intellectuals who did not share the party's political line were quickly silenced, or sent to re-education camps, and others preferred to go to exile (Virtanen 2003: 248). This is also supported by Bernardo Luis Machava (2011:594) when pointing out that the accusation of treason in Mozambique played a central role in the attempt to maintain social and political authority, and this was done through an exhaustive exercise that involved defining an enemy within in the cartoon figure of *Xiconhoca.*[7] The character of *Xiconhoca* was the personification of all the social evils inherited from colonialism and all the dangers and threats to Mozambican sovereignty that should be identified, neutralized and fought by the population (Barata 2015:54). In other words, being *Xiconhoca* could lead someone to a socio-political and economic exclusion. This harshness of the Frelimo ideology gave a fertile ground for the beginning of a civil war in 1976, between

[7] From the combination of the name Chico/Francisco and *Nhoca*/Snake to mean Chico snake.

the government and Renamo (Mozambican National Resistance). This civil war only ended 16 years later with the general peace agreement of the 1992.[8]

The anti-government rebels (Renamo) were financed by the white, apartheid regimes of Rhodesia[9] and South Africa, which "sought to destabilize Mozambique's black-led government," targeting crucial infrastructures, such as roads, bridges, schools and health clinics (Silva 2007:113). The economic infrastructures of the country were destroyed through military attacks and "sabotage by infiltrated agents who destroyed factory equipment and raw materials and crippled production, who stole goods destined for the people and created agitation and discontent among the workers, and who through conscious misinterpretation of party orientations prepared the conditions for the pillage of state goods and unrestrained speculation" (Machava 2011:599). This was possible since the white minority-based governments of South Africa and Rhodesia "saw a Marxist–Leninist neighbouring country ruled by the African majority as a threat" and thus supported the anti-communist Renamo, which had its strongholds in the central regions of the country (Mairoce, Silberberger & Zweynert 2021:137). This means that the civil war between the Mozambican government and the anti-communist Renamo destroyed the economic infrastructures of the country already sabotaged by the colonizers who had left, and by local people who were not aligned with the ideology of Frelimo.

The Mozambican civil war created economic instability in the country, deteriorating financial and social conditions of people. This was also aggravated by natural calamities that had been affecting the country, such as droughts and floods that cyclically had been fustigating many regions of the country, with its impacts on food security and debt (De Matos & Madeiros 2017:283-284). The economic degradation of the country forced Frelimo to question its economic systems. Indeed, Elmer Agostinho Carlos de Matos and Rosa Maria Vieira Madeiros (2017:283) point out that the project of socialization collapsed when the application of Mozambique to be a member of COMECOM (Council for Mutual Economic Assistance) was rejected in mid-80s. This was also intensified by the fact that the Ex-URSS (*União das Repúblicas Socialistas Soviéticas* or the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) was also in crisis and could not fund the Mozambican projects of development (De Matos & Madeiros 2017:283). Hence, Frelimo began to repudiate its socialist ideology and seek entry into "the global capitalist economy since the mid-1980s under the guidance of the IMF [International

[8] The study will return to this aspect in section 2.1.1.2 below.
[9] Now Zimbabwe.

Monetary Fund] and the World Bank" (Silva 2007:113). This was a clear failure of Frelimo government in responding to the economic needs of people through its socialist-based economy during civil war. As a result, Frelimo was forced to adopt a market-based economy under the auspice of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank.

The IMF and World Bank were created in the Bretton Woods conference (in the United States of America) in 1944 to "establish the rules for regulating the international monetary and financial order after World War II with the understanding that these agreements would promote economic growth and would be helpful to avoid a global economic depression" (Cervantes 2014:78). The IMF had a responsibility to focus on the "macroeconomic policies of members governments, including: policies related to the state budget, the management of money and credit, the exchange rate, and the financial policies of governments, including the regulation and supervision of banks and other financial institutions" (Forsyth 2005:376-377), while the World Bank, operated first in Europe and then in the South, "providing loans, policy advice, technical assistance and knowledge-sharing services to low and middle income countries to reduce poverty" (Forsyth 2005:765).

When Frelimo turned to the global capitalist economy in the 1980s, the Bretton Woods institutions implemented aggressive market-based economic rules and fiscal reforms to reduce poverty and increase international trade (Silva 2007:113). Some of these policies included liberalization of economy and export-based development strategy (Silva 2013:24). Moreover, in 1987 the Economic Rehabilitation Program (PRE) was launched as part of the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP) that were in vogue at that time (Macuane 2012:14). This Structural Adjustment Programme was part of the Washington Consensus to develop and integrate the global capitalist world, promoting economic growth and overcoming poverty (Hanlon & Smart 2008:39). Moreover, the imposition of PRE has led to privatization of local financial institutions, whereby the small firms belonged to members of the FRELIMO elite and larger firms to foreign companies (Hanlon & Mosse 2009:2). So, these are some of the economic policies adopted by the Frelimo government in attempting to improve the economic performance of the country and minimize the effects of war, natural calamities and deliberate sabotage by the colonizers and Frelimo dissidents when market-based economy was introduced in the country.

Through market-based economic policies, the country achieved considerable economic growth, but the benefits of economic development were not distributed evenly, and poverty

remained endemic over those years (Silva 2007:117). This means that the new market-based economic rules also could not resolve the problems of poverty before the end of civil war. In fact, war requires a huge economic need to support its demands. Therefore, the economic production during civil war did not resolve the economic deprivation of the majority of local people. Instead, the market-based economic rules implemented in the country only contributed to the creation and promotion of certain elite groups, namely a small economic elite, civil-society policy elites, knowledge elites in the bureaucracy and technocrats in the government (Macuane 2012:11). In addition to that, the market-based economic policies created space for the exacerbation of the existent high levels of economic disparities between regions, communities, and people. In other words, the economic policies suggested by the Bretton Woods Institution in Mozambique during civil war aggravated levels of poverty and economic inequalities in the country. Having this in mind, the study will now turn and look at the increasing of international aid after AGP.

2.1.1.2 The AGP and the Increasing of International Aid

The 16 years of destructive civil war ended in 1992 when the two belligerents signed the General Peace Agreement (locally known as AGP), and a multiparty system was introduced as well as the first democratic elections in 1994. This has enabled the country to enjoy a relative stable political environment that contributed to the country's considerable economic growth. Mozambique has been presented as a success story of transition from a socialist single-party regime to modern multi-party democracy after a bitter civil war (Virtanen 2003:233); therefore, earning the praise of the World Bank and the IMF (Silva 2013:24). This has been also supported by De Matos & Madeiros (2017:291) when stating that the constitutional revolution of 1990 associated with the AGP in 1992 and the realization of the first multiparty elections in 1994 offered conditions of stability needed to attract international capital. This means that the country became one of the "aid-darlings of the Western world" (Mairoce, Silberberger & Zweynert 2021:133). Therefore, receiving considerable economic investment from international financial institutions and entities.

It could be argued that by playing by the rules of the Washington Consensus in a more stable political context has been extremely successful in attracting Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), and since the early 1990s the country has been on a steady growth path, with an upward trend beginning in 2005 and peaking in 2013 (Mairoce, Silberberger & Zweynert 2021:137). Certainly, the international capital contributed to the country's considerable growth in Gross

Domestic Product (GDP), about more than 7.4 % per annum over the last two [previous] decades, which placed it among the fastest growing economies in the world, and during which period the national poverty head count had declined from 70 % in 1996/1997 to 55 % in 2008/2009 (Walelign 2016:596). In the same way, Colin Darch (2018:9) argues that between 1994 and 2013 there was an impressive economic growth in Mozambique, with GDP growing from 185USD to 405USD during the period of fifteen years. This means that the end of civil war and the increasing of internation aid improved the economic performance of Mozambique. And this was, in fact, a moment of hope and expectations to most people in the country.

Nevertheless, FDI provided incomes to an increasingly dominant state party, Frelimo, which it could appropriate one-sidedly (Mairoce, Silberberger & Zweynert 2021:134). Indeed, the ruling party used its dominant position to extract increasing shares of inflowing FDI and to distribute them within the networks around the leading figures of the party (Mairoce, Silberberger & Zweynert 2021:142). The funds that were expected to reduce the plight of the poor were used to strengthen the supremacy of the ruling party and the economic marginalization of other groups. During this period, the country followed a strategy of centralization, entrenched Frelimo's position as the state party and restricted freedom of expression (Regalia, 2017: 12). In terms of economic policy, the links between Frelimo and business strongly intensified, and critics accused the ruling group of ruthlessly mixing its pecuniary and political interests (Mairoce, Silberberger & Zweynert 2021:138). In other words, the economic improvement of the country after the AGP did not reflect on the well-being of the majority of people, but it strengthened a minority of Frelimo leadership which ended with economic marginalization of other groups of people in the country (including other political parties, some independent intellectuals and non-government organization that do not align with dominant party ideology).

The ruling party used its strategy of dominance to intimidate and harass Renamo supporters (Vines, 2019: 28). In fact, one could observe a shift toward a "winner takes all" attitude, increasingly excluding Renamo from political and economic participation (Mairoce, Silberberger & Zweynert 2021:138). This exclusion was not limited only to Renamo supports, but also extended to all those who did not identify themselves with the ruling party. In other words, not being a Frelimo supporter, one could be seen as the indecent other and subject to suspicion as a threat to the system. Indeed, "independent institutions are being repoliticised, the patronage networks of the FRELIMO elite extended, and the rhetoric and autocratic style

of the former one-party state revived" (George & Eads 2007:7). This means that the introduction of multiparty system by the ruling party was due to international pressure and not because of a true change in its political thought (Eusébio & Magalhães 2018:353). In fact, Frelimo was forced by the national and international demands to introduce a multiparty system in the country and not because it really wanted to abandon its previous Marxist-Leninist ideology and practices.

Thus, the AGP enabled the country to attract international aid that contributed to a considerable economic growth of the country. Yet, the ruling party used this international aid to oppress its previous enemy[10] and other sectors of the society to monopolize power. This strategy seemed to be successful until Renamo, faced with the risk of becoming politically marginalized (and of losing its incomes accordingly), returned to armed conflict in 2013 (Mairoce, Silberberger & Zweynert 2021:134). This was the only option adopted by Renamo to force its previous enemy to negotiate power and the sharing of the economic outcomes of the country. This armed conflict impacted negatively on the economic situation of Mozambique already pressed by the challenges of the past (natural calamities and other conflicts).

2.1.1.3 Returning to Violence and the Role of International Donors

After two decades of relative peace, Mozambique was forced to return to another military conflict in 2013, involving the two former belligerents (Frelimo and Renamo). This was because the country did not create adequate political institutions to guarantee peaceful management of political and social differences after the AGP (Eusébio & Magalhães 2018:352). The two former protagonist of civil war failed to construct consensual rules for democratic cohabitation. In fact, Frelimo remained the state-party while Renamo remained an armed movement (Eusébio & Magalhães 2018:352). In other words, the AGP did not establish an effective reconciliation between the former protagonists of civil war. This means that the two former belligerents remained enemies even after the end of civil war and the AGP. So, the so-called story of success turned into a story of chaos and economic destruction in which people lost not only their lives (including their families) but also the economic infrastructures of the country were negatively affected.

[10] Renamo.

The return to violence was also exacerbated by the discovery of natural resources, more specifically because the country was about to sign lucrative contracts for natural gas (Darch 2018:11). In fact, "global companies increased interest in Mozambique, strengthened the Frelimo government's economy, and in turn its power" (Tikka 2019:32). Consequently, other political groups became economically marginalized, and military violence was the only way used by Renamo to force the ruling party to negotiate the sharing of power and the economic outcomes of the country. This means that economic desires also played a crucial role in forcing the country to return into a military violence. Local and international economic ambitions did not prevent the country from returning to this armed conflict. This is because armed conflict is a good opportunity for organized crime to smuggle economic resources of the country. And Mozambique was not an exception. As a result, the economic expectation of people had turned into frustration because of this violence that arose inevitably in the country.

There is no doubt that the new military conflict in Mozambique impacted negatively on the socio-economic life of people. Indeed, besides the chasing away of foreign economic investments and development, a significant number of people were killed, and the everyday life of common citizens was weakened, more particularly local peasants who were forced to abandon their residences due to uncertainty and fear created by the political-military instability (Eusébio & Magalhães 2018:368). Statistics point out that about 1 million people died in this conflict (this included military, civilians, and public figures), economic infrastructures such as roads, railways and trains were attacked and/or destroyed, and police stations were also notable targets of the conflict (Vines 2018:14-15). Apart from local dislocations, more than 10000 people fled to Malawi as refugees (Regalia 2017:10). In short, life became difficult to many people, more specifically the vulnerable children and women who had to face not only the shortage of food, but also could not have access to education and health care.

The conflict also contributed to the decreasing of Foreign Direct Investment. In fact, there was a steep decline after 2013 (down to roughly 18%) due to the renewed outbreak of violence between Frelimo and Renamo (Mairoce, Silberberger & Zweynert 2021:137). For instance, a mining company called Vale[11] "has cut back on production and investment in Mozambique and is estimated to have lost $212 million in local operations in the first half of 2016 alone," because of the insecure operating environment (Regalia 2017:11). This was clear evidence of the international donor community losing their trust in the country. It is not safe to invest in a

[11] A multinational company exploring mineral charcoal in Tete province, in Mozambique.

context in conflict. This mistrust was even deepened when the secret loans guaranteed by the government were revealed.

Colin Darch (2018:5) states that, in April 2016, the American government revealed that elements of the state security structures and the ruling party in Mozambique had negotiated massive secret loans in 2013-2014, disrespecting completely the judicial and democratic norms of the country. Indeed, European bankers, businessmen based in the middle East, politicians and senior staff of the Mozambican state conspired to organize a secret loan of USD 2 billion, but none of this money, except bribes, went to Mozambique, and no services were created to benefit the people of the country (Cortez et al. 2021:6). The question of who benefited from this fraud is still a mystery up to now, but the scheme was possible through a creation of false state security companies[12] that were then used to transact the stolen money. Though this has not been attested it could be suggested that Mozambique was deceived by organized crime. This criminal organization have their tentacles in every sector of the Mozambican society so that when the criminal voice is raised no one dare to question.

When these loans were revealed, the international reaction was extreme, and a significant number of donors and creditors reduced drastically their support. In fact, these secret loans, prompted international partners, including the IMF and the World Bank, to suspend their aid (Regalia 2017:4). In the same thought, Edson Cortez et al. (2021:9) argue that the IMF suspended its program and the donors cancelled Foreign Direct Investment and other assistances to the government (a reduction of USD 831 million in 2016 compared to the previous year). Mozambique had turned from being a donor darling to a donor suspect. As a result, the country entered a financial crisis that made it impossible for the government to pay its bills; there was a huge currency devaluation; foreign debt has become unpayable; the economy slowed down sharply; real GDP per capita fell; unemployment soared; and poverty increased (Cortez et al. 2021:6). Conflicts between communities emerge and the concept of being human disappears. People started accusing each other of the causes of misery in the country. This means that the government had to face not only the new military conflict, but also the financial crisis and the discontentment of people. Real struggle had to be faced by common citizens, already weakened by the economic shocks of the past, such as droughts that had been compromising agricultural production (Regalia 2017:4).

[12] Ematum, MAM and ProIndicus (Cortez et al. 2021:9).

It is interesting to note that while a certain group of international donors and investors punished the country because of the secret loans, others have enormous interest in the so-called 'discovery of natural gas'. In fact, the Mozambican liquefied natural gas (LNG) has been attracting more external investor interest in recent years (Uetela & Obeng-Odoom 2016:53). For instance, the French oil company Total Energy has funded about USD 16 000 million for projects of natural gas in Mozambique, one of the biggest FDI in Africa (Lusa 2020). Moreover, in 2019 the American group Anadarko Petroleum announced an investment of USD 176 million for the natural gas in Rovuma basin, in the northern part of the country (Mercado 2019). Looking at this scenario, it seems that the international economic companies are more concerned with their shares in megaprojects than the lives of people in the country. Indeed, when people cry for hunger no one comes to support them, but when a 'well' full of fuel and natural gas is discovered, they all run to the country with their dollars in the name of investment. This kind of investment promotes the enrichment of international companies and the impoverishment of local people. This is because when donors and the international financial institutions have an investment plan, they often determine the nature of assistance needed as well as choosing the consultants, normally coming from their countries (Hanlon & Smart 2008:37). If they send their own experts, then a large amount of their money returns to them as salaries for the consultants. Additionally, they choose the nature of assistance, including where and how this investment can be done. This means that local governments have no real voice regarding the investment plan; the money owner plays the central role.

While the Mozambican LNG attracts international investments, it has also contributed to the insurgence of military violence. In fact, the new conflict between Renamo and the government ended in 2015, but since 2017 the Mozambican government and its security forces have been struggling with Islamic terrorism, more concretely in the northern province of Cabo Delgado, where the major reserves of natural gas have been discovered. This Islamic insurgency is commonly referred to as *Ansar al-Sunna* or *Ahlu Sunnah Wa-Jama*, and locally known as Mozambique's Al-Shabaab (Neethling 2021:86). Besides the destruction of economic infrastructures, terrorism has been killing people while leaving others into despair. However, it has been made an agreement between the major actors in the LNG business and the government to supply military and security services for the protection of the LNG workforces (Neethling 2021:86). This means that international investment aims to extract economic benefits from local resources and not the improvement of the lives of local communities. Though this has not been attested there are local and international voices that consider terrorism

in Cabo Delgado an economic problem. If this is a fact to be taken into consideration, then it could be argued that terrorism in Cabo Delgado was invented to still the economic resources of the region (the wells of natural gas and minerals).

Accordingly, the Mozambican economy has been instable during the civil war, but the AGP has attracted major FDI that has contributed to a significant economic growth. Nevertheless, the economy decreased drastically after the new armed conflict between Renamo and the government as well as the discovery of the country's secret loans. Despite the current threat of the Islamic terrorism, the Mozambican LNG has been successful in attracting foreign investment. However, the benefits of these investments do not improve the lives of the local population. Instead, they extract local resources to benefit international companies. Having this economic trajectory of Mozambique after independence, the study will now turn to highlight the economic potentiality of the country.

2.1.2 The Economic Potentialities of Mozambique

In terms of economic resources, Mozambique is one of the countries in the world with an extensive area of fertile land and good ecological conditions for agriculture. Nelson Maria Rosario (2019:185) argues that Mozambique has a high potential for agriculture, with approximately 36 million hectares of arable land for a variety of production, due to the vast diversity of soils and climatical conditions. The soils are fertile not only because of the tropical and subtropical climate, but also because of abundant precipitation and the existence of many rivers that offer enormous potential for irrigation (Rosario 2019:188). This means that the soils in Mozambique are propitious not only for subsistence agriculture but also for agribusiness. This economic resource (the land) is sufficient to secure the well-being of all the Mozambican population if economic policies and approaches are oriented toward that goal.

Apart from arable land, the country is also rich in forest resources. Indeed, Solomon Zena Walelign (2016:596) points out that forests occupy approximately 40.1 million hectares (51 % of the total land area of Mozambique), whereby 26.9 million hectares (67 %) are suitable to produce commercially valuable timber and 13.2 million (about 33 %) hectares are protected areas to a varying degree. The Mozambican (dense, opened and savanna) flora is extremely rich in big, medium, and small animals, and of different species of precious wood, some of which highly appreciated within international market (Rosario 2019:187). The forests of the country are more than enough to provide desks in schools for all children of the country if the

economic shape of the country is oriented in that direction. In addition to that the savanna resources of the country would contribute to a significant economic outcome if that is what is needed by the economics of the country. But it seems that the economics of the country extracts all the forest resource (from animals to trees), often without control of the Mozambican state.

Mozambique is also rich in terms of water resources. Besides its long coast of the Indian Ocean, the country has an extensive area of interior waters, covering an area of approximately 13000 km^2 (Pires et al 2020:9). There are various rivers crossing the Mozambican territory, some of them coming from other countries, and a good number of lakes, offering hydroelectric capacity (Rosario 2019:187). The Mozambican waters have a high potential not only for a variety of fishing, but also for other economic activities, such as transportation, tourism, and the production of energy. These water resources of the country have the capacity to feed not only local population but also help countries in the region. For instance, the Mozambican Hydroelectric of Cahora Bassa in Zambeze river covers part of the electricity needed in countries like South Africa and Zimbabwe. And the Indian Ocean offers a richness of economic potentialities that the interland desire (sea food, harbors and transport). These and many others are possibilities offered by the water resources of the country. But for the benefit of local people always depend on the policies adopted by the economic systems of the country.

Moreover, the Mozambican soil is well known for its richness in terms of mineral resources. According to Domingos Bihale (2016:9) mineral charcoal, natural gas, heavy sands, iron, iron-vanadium, titanium, tantalite, tourmaline, bentonite, pegmatites, marbles, bauxite, graphite, diamonds, gold, phosphates, calcareous, precious and semi-precious stones, rhyolites, uranium platinoids, cobalt, chromium, nickel, copper, granite, fluor, diatomite, emeralds and apatite are the main mineral resources of the country. These resources can be found in different regions of Mozambique. For instance, gold, copper, iron, bauxite, and similar resource are mainly found in Manica Province; the camps of Pande/Temane in Inhambane Province have reserves of natural gas, in more than 5 million of tones joules; and the total reserve of charcoal is calculated in 6 billion of tones and can be found with major abundance in Tete Province (Bihale 2016:9). While these minerals are expected to improve the lives of the local population, they are also problems of conflicts in areas where they are extracted. For instance, the conflict in Cabo Delgado is part of the economic problems of the country.

Furthermore, in 2013 a supergiant gas discovery was made in the Rovuma basin (the northern part of Mozambique), that is the second largest gas find in the world (Uetela & Obeng-Odoom

2016:47). This record confirms that Mozambique could become the world's third largest exporter of liquefied natural gas (LNG) and the dominant global concern about Mozambique is that, once its gas reserves are fully developed, the nation could be positioned as one of the largest producers of LNG in Africa (Uetela & Obeng Odoom 2016:53). This means that if the Mozambican LNG is exploited properly can be a sign of hope for many people leaving below the line of poverty in the country. But the reality seems to suggest continuous moments of conflicts throughout the process of extraction of these resources.

Thus, Mozambique is a rich country in terms of economic potentiality. And this could be used to improve the lives of people and reduce economic inequalities between regions, and within communities. This can only happen if the economic policies and approaches adopted by the government are oriented toward that direction. But the reality seems different, and this will be discussed in the following section.

2.1.3 Poverty and Economic Inequalities

Measuring poverty remains a complex and contentious issue because information bases are weaker in many contexts and the underlying determinants of welfare are relatively volatile (Arndt et al. 2012:854). In other words, what is poverty in one context differs from what could be called poverty in another context. Certainly, "being poor among a population of poor people can be considered very differently from being poor in a wealthy environment" (Muller 2006:720). For instance, "the poorest citizens of the United States have income and access to health care, education, public services, and economic and social opportunities that are far superior to those available to the vast mass of people living in sub-Saharan Africa" (Acemoglu & Robinson 2013:428). This means that the concept of poverty varies from one reality to another. And people cannot claim one and universal concept of poverty.

According to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) framework, poverty is measured "by means of international poverty line of absolute income poverty set at $1.25 a day at 2008 international prices" (Lang & Lingnau 2015:402). This MDGs framework is useful in understanding global poverty, but it seems inadequate to understand poverty on local levels. Indeed, it emphasizes the monetary or financial dimension of poverty while ignoring other aspects that can prevent human beings from enjoying the fullness of life. Yet, D. Vidyasagar (2006:325) gives a more holistic understanding of poverty, when defining it as a situation that places human beings in state of hunger, sickness and powerless or with no access to food, clean

water, education, health care and other daily needs (including housing, transportation, and clothing). In the same line of though Mentz and De Beer (1990:2) argue that "not only is more attention being given to non-economic variables, but well-being (health) has began to receive greater consideration in writings on development." In other words, the definition of poverty should go beyond its global and financial dimension and consider other local aspects that can prevent people from living as full citizens. Poverty reduction must reflect on the daily life of all people, where people are equal in terms of political and economic rights, having equal freedom and security.

It has been argued that "poverty and inequality are inextricably linked" (Lang & Lingnau 2015:404). In fact, we live in a world where a small group of people concentrates and controls the wealth, while the rest of the population is lacking the indispensable conditions for living (Hernández 2019:69). Global economic policies and opportunities are established to benefit the rich minority on the expenses of the poor majority. In support to this assumption, Carlos Nuno Castelo-Branco (2022:19) argues that the actual economic structure is functional for accumulation of international capital and for reproduction of a small group of Mozambicans who accumulate wealth based on speculation in natural resources, including the land, presented as the state property. In this global economic system international companies extract resources from poor countries for their benefit while local population is left with misery. The market-oriented growth process is likely to increase the polarization of income by rewarding the small minority who possess social and physical capital (Silva 2007:117-118). Those who do not possess capital remain the workforce who sweat every day for misery at the end of the month. This means that "the more unequal a country's income distribution, the less rapidly its poverty rate falls" (Silva 2013:23). Therefore, one cannot talk about poverty without alluding to economic inequality, because the two aspects are interrelated or interconnected.

Though Mozambique is extremely rich in terms of economic resources, it has been considered one of the poorest states, not only in Sub-Saharan Africa (Uetela & Obeng-Odoom 2016:48), but also in the world (Rosario 2019:188, Salvucci & Tarp 2021:1896). Despite liberalizing its economy, Mozambique remains one of the world's poorest countries, with a GDP per capita of $1,200 and an estimated 52 percent of the people living below the poverty line (Silva 2013: 24). Moreover, in 2016, the level of poverty ranked third according to the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) with the head count percentage of 79 % and stood 185 out of the 187 countries according to the Human Development Index (HDI) (Walelign 2016:596). This

situation has not changed in recent years, whereby many people (especially in rural areas) still live on less than a dollar a day and lack basic services such as drinking water supply and access to health services and schools (Rosario 2019:188). The World Bank (2022) also has indicated that "in the period 2020-2021, poverty averaged 64 percent and it is estimated to remain at that level in 2022", further illustrating poor quality of life in the country. This means that Mozambique is one of the poorest countries in the region and the world. This leads to both national and international vulnerability of its inhabitants.

According to Vincenzo Salvucci (2016:858) child malnutrition has been recognized as being a fundamental poverty indicator. In Mozambique, chronic malnutrition is still suffered by more than 40 per cent of under-five year old children, one of the highest percentages in the world (Salvucci 2016:859). This is also supported by Tomás Zaba et al. (2021:1) when pointing out that many children, in rural Mozambique, under 5 years old have high risk of mortality due to acute malnutrition. The brutality of poverty has been forcing families to feed their children not with what is adequate for their normal growth, but with what they find around them. As a result, children are more likely to get deadly diseases such as diarrhoea, coughes, fever, and dysentery (Zaba et al. 2021:3). However, malnutrition is not only a child problem, adults also are highly affected by this problem. In fact, estimates indicate that over half of Mozambique's households are affected by food insecurity and approximately one-third by chronic food insecurity, and around 30% are considered poor in terms of the diversity of their diet and frequency of meals, and 80% are unable to obtain an adequate diet (Macassa, Salvador & Francisco 2018:2). In other words, poor people must think every day on how and with what they will feed their children and themselves. This is because it is difficult to have enough food to cover normal diet for adults and children.

Additionally, it has been said that access and availability of health services and essential medicine is one of the fundamental components of human rights (Jona-Massarongo 2016:153). But because of poverty many people in Mozambique are denied this fundamental right. Certainly, access to health care is very low in the country and it is estimated that 50% of the population lives more than 20 kilometers from the nearest health unit and 62,4% without access to health services (Jona-Massarongo 2016:156). Many people rely on uncontrolled traditional ways of healing, and others die on their ways to health units. And those who have access to health units often cannot find medicines due to their scarcity in public health system.

Further, the democratization of the education system in Mozambique after independence has contributed to an improvement in education infrastructures and the expansion of the school network (Bene & Garcia 2021:1). However, illiteracy still constitutes one of the major problems for most of the Mozambican population. Indeed, Mozambique still has a high rate of illiteracy among the population aged 15 and over, and statistics reveal that 39% of the population cannot read or write, which means that almost half of the population is excluded from written communication (Sulina & Manuel 2022:43). Those who have access to formal education often do not have books for their learning process. Besides this, there are still schools operating under trees and many schools do not have desks for students to sit conveniently (Zucula 2021:202; see also Figure 2 below). While students do not have desks to sit adequately, the Mozambican wood is transported in containers to countries like China and others. This means that illiteracy is another indicator of poverty that is threatening most people in the country, as shown in Figure 2 bellow which illustrates a typical classroom setting.

Figure 2: Poor Educational system in Mozambique (Personal archive, 2022)

Moreover, the level of poverty in Mozambique is also expressed by the way people are transported from one place to another. According to *Centro de Integridade Publica* (CIP),[13] the transport problem in Mozambique has been getting worse year after year and it is characterized by the lack of access roads and adequate infrastructures to cover the demand (Filipe & Matine 2017:2). In addition to the degradation of many roads, most of the population is still transported in overcrowded trucks, known as 'my love'.[14] And still others struggle to get on a minibus (locally known as *chapa Cem*) to reach their destinations, especially at rush hours (see Figure 3 below). In most rural areas people walk long distances because of not existence of transport infrastructures (like roads and cars). The situation gets even worst during rain

[13] A non-government organization (NGO) in Mozambique advocating for Human Rights.
[14] It is called that because they are very full and for passengers to be safe, they must hug each other as if they are lovers.

seasons since most of the roads have no asphalt and transporters (mainly private) do not want to risk their vehicles in these difficulties roads. So, most people in Mozambique are indecently transported, running the risk of having their belongings stolen as well as the risk of contracting contagious diseases as Covid-19 and other types of flu in these means of transport.

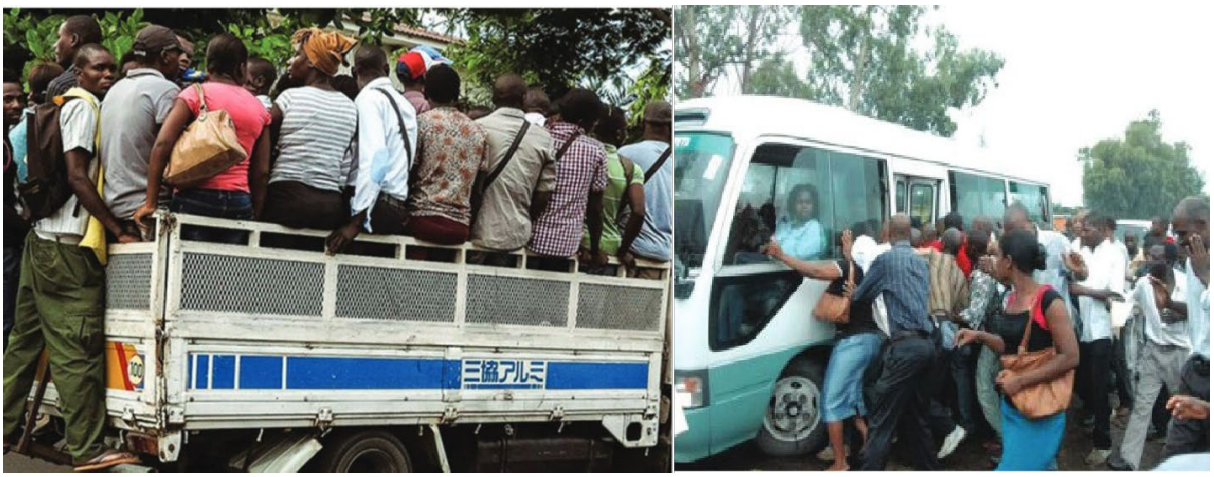

Figure 3: Example of ordinary transport in Mozambique (CDD[15] 2021:3).

Furthermore, the Ministry of Planning and Development in Mozambique (2010:9) states that housing typically represents the largest category of investments in durable goods made by individuals over the course of their lifetime. In fact, most people believe that housing is an important investment that can relive the pressure in the family or generate some income when it is used for renting. But due to poverty many people in the country are unable to acquire this valuable assert. And others acquire their houses at a very late age or after their retirement. Still others who die without owning an appropriate house for dwelling. In fact, about 70% of the country's dwellings are huts, covered with grass and walls made of sticks; about 15 % are mixed wood and zinc houses (Censo 2017). These statistics reveal that most of the Mozambican population (especially in rural areas) still live in substandard houses which are vulnerable to climate shocks and wild animals. This is, in fact, another indicator of poverty in the country.

In addition to poverty, Mozambique evidence points to a continuing rise in socio-economic disparities within the country, both between regions and within communities (Silva 2013:28). Indeed, the Southern part of the country is relatively more developed compared to the North (Silva 2007:112). According to recent information on poverty and well-being in Mozambique, the northern region of the country, rich in natural resources, has the highest percentage of poor

[15] *Centro para Democracia e Desenvolvimento* (Center for Democracy and Development).

(59,6%), in contrast to the southern region (influenced by the capital's economy and integration in the Republic of South Africa), where the percentage of poor is 36,2% (Maquenzi 2021:9). These disparities are expressed mainly in terms of quality of housing, transport infrastructures, health care and quality of education. For instance, most people in the north dwell in precarious huts, while many people in the south manage to build a *Mukhukhu*.[16] The more you go to the northern part of the country, the more you experience signs of extreme poverty. This means that the resources of the north are not benefiting local people, but international companies with their local partners are the ones benefiting from the extractive economic system of the country. As a result, many people (specially the youth) migrate from north to south in search of better living condition (employment and education), which also lead them to other types of vulnerabilities and hostility (including economic exploitation).

It is interesting to note that economic discrepancies are also evident between people of the same region or community. In fact, the members of the government and their allies (who often live in cities) are travelling in luxury cars, they are building big and very nice houses (Slattery 2003:131), while the ordinary population (often living in rural areas) are deprived in almost all poverty indicators, namely, access to water and sanitation, electricity, health, education, housing conditions and possession of durable goods (Maquenzi 2021:3). Alongside with the million-dollar houses in the capital Maputo, beach-front weekend properties and expensive cars, the elite invest in their children, sending them to the best private schools in Maputo and then to good universities abroad (Hanlon & Mosse 2009:5). This means that the pain of the poor is more terrible insofar as they are in extreme need while their neighbours next door live in extreme luxury, comparable to that in the first world countries. In other words, poor people are able to see or feel what they need for their economic sustenance but cannot access it since it is controlled, and it belongs to the rich minority who are not winning to share.

Accordingly, Mozambique is a rich country in terms of economic resources, but it has been considered one of the poorest countries in sub-Sahara Africa and in the world, with high levels of poverty and economic inequalities. While a minority of people (often living in cities) live in extreme luxury most of the population (especially in rural areas) have no access to basic service for their survival. The southern part of the country is economically better compared to the

[16] This is a local name used to describe the mixed wood and zinc house.

reality lived in the northern part of Mozambique. And the question that follows looks at the factors associated with this poverty and economic inequalities in the country.

2.1.4 Factors Associated with Poverty and Economic Inequalities

Several factors can be pointed as the causes of poverty and economic inequalities in Mozambique, but for the limitation of discussion, this study groups them into five categories, namely: the colonial economic system of stratification, military conflicts, climate shocks, the global economic system, and the domestic economic system of exclusion.

First, the Portuguese colonizers did not give equal economic opportunities to the citizens of the country. They introduced a highly extractive regime in the country, not only exploiting natural resources but also human resources, through exportation of male labour to South Africa and Rhodesia as well as recruiting forced labour for plantations and other works held by foreigners (Waterhouse & Lauriciano 2009:19). The colonial system also prioritized the development in the southern section of the country to establish stronger economic ties with South Africa by integrating local peasants into the cash economy, mainly depending on low-wage jobs in the South African and Rhodesian mining industry, while in the northern region remained largely isolated from the cash economy (Silva 2007:113). The economic ties with South Africa were used by the colonists as a quick source of income, essential to achieve the volume of investment they needed and which the metropolis could not guarantee (Farré 2009:219). This economic system of stratification was inherited after independency and still contributing to poverty and economic disparities in the country. Indeed, most local peasants in the south still rely on low-wage jobs in South Africa which allows their integration into the cash economy. This integration into the cash economy has been contributing to improve the lives of people in the southern region of the country, where some of its inhabitants are able to build a decent house, buy a vehicle, send children to school and provide better diet to the members of the family. While the south is integrated into cash economy, the north relies mostly on subsistence agriculture which often does not allow them to accumulate cash to uplift their economic situation.

Second, Mozambique has lived most of its history experiencing the terror of wars. This cycle of military violence begins with the 10 years of war for colonial liberation (1964-1974) and was followed by 16 years of civil war between Frelimo and Renamo (1976-1992). In an unexpected moment, the country also entered another (political) military conflict between the

two former belligerents of civil war (2013-2015). Since 2017 the country is struggling with the Islamic terrorism, more concretely in the northern province of Cabo Delgado. Besides increasing violence against civilians and internal displacement (Salvucci & Tarp 2021:1898), these conflicts have been compromising foreign economic investment and local efforts of development due to uncertainty and fear. The northern part of the country has been placed in a situation of economic disadvantage compared to other parts of the country. This is because the northern region has been used as the main terrain of these military conflicts. In fact, these conflicts do not allow local people to produce in order to improve their economic situation due to fear and uncertainty.

Third, Mozambique is one of the countries most affected by climate shocks in the world, generating estimated losses of 1,33% of GDP in the last 20 years (Cirkel 2022:14). It has been argued that its coastal geographical location and climate variability make the country vulnerable to extreme climate events, such as floods, cyclones, and droughts (Abdula 2005:2). Almost every year the country is devastated by cyclones. A recent terrible experience was in 2019, whereby two major cyclones hit the central region (cyclone Idai) and the northern province of Cabo Delgado (cyclone Kenneth), and the country still suffers from their consequences (Salvucci & Tarp 2021:1898). While the coastal regions are devastated by floods and cyclones, the interland has been experiencing a shortage of food because of droughts. This means that Mozambique is failing to cope with climate shocks that have been devastating the country, therefore, increasing the levels of poverty and economic discrepancies. In other words, many peasants in Mozambique work hard but most of the time they do not harvest due to natural calamities that cyclically devastate their fields and crops.

Fourth, the global economic system is another factor associated with poverty and economic inequalities in Mozambique. Silva (2013:24) argues that "domestic policies implemented to mitigate [poverty and] inequality may fail if they are undercut by stronger global forces." In fact, since the late 1980s, the Mozambican government has complied with recommendations of international financial institutions to liberalize its economy and adopt export-based development strategies (Silva 2013:24). This development strategy prioritizes investments only to small groups of people engaged in export production, while most of the population who rely in subsistence agriculture have no access to credit and modern means of production. This means that the country's economy has been driven by foreign investment and exportation, leaving the bulk of the population behind (Hanlon 2009:178). Indeed, the global economic system dictates

how the development process of the country should move, neglecting other local ways of making wealth. As a result, those engaged in export production get richer while rural peasants become poorer. Moreover, the global economic system generates economic progress, but this is concentrated only in one aspect of the economy without supporting other economic sectors (Uetela & Obeng-Odoom 2016:50). For instance, the current gas industry has been failing to invest its revenues into other key sectors such as education, infrastructure, industry, and agriculture ((Uetela & Obeng-Odoom 2016:59). This means that the global economic system is oriented toward the enrichment of international companies and their local allies while most of the local population experience extreme poverty.

And finally, the domestic economic system of exclusion also contributes to poverty and economic inequalities in Mozambique. The country's reality is that the winner of elections can manipulate political access and make the distribution of economic power unequal (see Mairoce, Silberberger & Zweynert 2021:137-138). In fact, the current ruling elites in Mozambique have been integrating themselves into powerful international networks to affirm their power and to legitimate themselves as the only group with the necessary competency and capacity to provide for the nation (Macuane 2012:15). This assumption has led to intolerance and consequent social exclusion of the others: political parties, (organized) civil society, reluctant religious confessions, academics and/or irreverent intellectuals (Cambrão 2018:73). For instance, the negotiation of more than USD 2 billion secret and illegal loans by the government attests to this economic system of exclusion, because it excluded various sectors of society, whose representativeness is expressed in the country's legal and democratic norms. This means that the economic system of the country is oriented to benefit the ruling elites, who always capture economic opportunity, having shares in corporations or creating a monopoly when local companies are privatized (Slattery 2003:133). In other words, political affiliation to the ruling political elite has been used in the country to obtain economic advantages. Those who do not identify themselves with this ruling political elite are excluded from the economic outcomes of the nation. These excluded people end up in economic misery while a minority of those in power accumulate illicitly their wealth.

Although Mozambique has a wide range of economic resources, it is considered one of the poorest countries in the world and in Sub-Saharan Africa. The country is also characterized by economic disparities between regions and within communities. The colonial economic system of stratification, military conflicts, climate shocks, global economic system, and domestic

economic system of exclusion can be considered the main factors associated with poverty and economic inequalities in Mozambique. Having done this, the study will now turn and examine how sexuality has been understood in post-colonial Mozambique.

2.2 Understanding Sexuality in Contemporary Mozambique

According to Jeffrey Weeks (2010:1) the emergence of social movements in human history concerned with sex and sexual practices has been opening space for humankind to talk more deeply about sexuality and the challenges it poses. However, "the more expert we become in talking about sexuality, the greater the difficulties we often seem to encounter in trying to understand it" (Weeks 2010:1-2). This is because people understand sexuality according to their different realities, in terms of cultural identity, educational level, political and economic status, religious affiliation, gender identity and/or sexual orientation. So far, sexuality has been generally understood as "the ways of relating to others and feeling romantic or sexual attraction for people of one gender rather than another" (Maggio et al. 2022:4). And sexuality is experienced and expressed through thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, behaviors, practices, roles, and relationships (Pontes 2011:23). This means that sexuality has an impact on the way people dress, talk with other, and in the way of thinking about and imagining things.

Sylvia Tamale (2011:11) reminds us to refer to sexuality as a plural concept to point to the diverse forms of orientation, identity, and status as well as to "conceptualise sexuality outside the normative social order and frameworks that view it through binary oppositions and simplistic labels." This is because sexuality is not limited only to heterosexual orientation. In fact, other forms of sexuality (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and others) have been attested throughout human history, and scholars often describe them as sexual minorities or non-conforming sexualities (see Liang et al. 2022, Shahwan et al. 2021 amongst others). Though the issue of sexual minority has not been fully accepted in many societies, scientific consensus agree that this is not a form of any mental illness (Blais et al. 2022:2). Therefore, the discussion about sexuality must go beyond heterosexual dimension and consider other forms of sexualities (often viewed as indecent by the traditional and established heterosexual order of the society, including the Church and other faith-based entities).

On the African continent, sexuality has been raising much controversy since sex talk is an assumed taboo (Kaoma 2016:50). Sexuality is "often wrapped in silences, taboos and privacies" (Tamale 2011:12). African people do not have a proper language to talk publicly

about sex and issues related to sexuality. Though sexual activities are practiced by most of the African population, their sexual experiences are kept silent, making it difficult to understand the contours of sexualities in Africa. Moreover, sex is believed to be an act of procreation, and one is obliged to meet this duty (Kaoma 2016:51). In other words, sexuality should lead to the lineage extension; and this is one of the main reasons for considering sexualities outside heteronormative atmosphere a sin and subject to condemnation. However, sex is increasingly believed to be an act of pleasure; this has been influenced by forces of globalization that are tremendously transforming sexuality in Africa (Kaoma 2016:62). In other words, sexuality in Africa is associated to pleasure and procreation. This means that, sexuality in Africa is a controversial issue, but the discussion of the concept should be extended beyond the procreative and heterosexual dimension. It is within this reality that sexuality in Mozambique must be explored.

It is also important to mention that the discussion about sexuality in Africa has allowed queer scholars to develop indigenous terminologies that can best relate to their sexual experiences and challenges. For instance, the concept of "Stabanisation" has been suggested by African queer scholars as a call for an embodied reclaiming of all that is life-affirming within faith landscapes, reimagining community and the engagement with the sources of faith and remembering their communal sacramental identity (Davids et al 2019:9). The concept of Stabanisation is constructed from the word *Izitabane*, which is a derogatory term used in the African context to mark LGBTIQA+ people as the "other" and "outside" the norm prescribed by heteropatriarchy (Sibisi & van der Walt 2021:67). According to Davids et al (2019:10) "Isitabane (singular) or Izitabane (plural) is the Zulu word most frequently used in communal spaces to discriminate, undermine and shame LGBTI people." Though stabanisation carries a negative connotation to LGBTIQA+ people, the term has been reclaimed and re-appropriated by African queer scholars as a signifier of proud self-identification (Davids et al 2019:11). While this concept represents a significant progress in African queer scholarship it becomes problematic in contexts like Mozambique where the languages spoken are different and the discussion about the rights of LGBTIQA+ people has not been done seriously. Therefore, the notion of non-conforming sexualities and/or different gender identities is deliberately employed throughout this research to align with the conservative reality of Mozambique and allow health discussion within religious context.

In Mozambique, the topic of sexuality remains a taboo (like many other realities of the continent), especially the sexuality concerns of those outside the heterosexual order, such as gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transgenders, and others (Chipenembe 2018:5). In fact, current understanding of most people in the country (especially the majority of black heterosexuals) is that sexual diversity is something recent, new, from outside, from the city, for foreigners, from the West, and from white people (Miguel 2021:330). In other words, some people in Mozambique consider the discussion on sexuality as something that is not part of the Mozambican reality. As a result of these prejudices and lack of information, many people in the country have been restricted in their rights of accessing education, health, employment, citizenship as well as their right to enjoy sexual pleasure free of stigma (see Chipenembe 2018:7). This is because any sexual activity that is done outside the traditional heterosexual order it is subject to condemnation and exclusion. But to have a more comprehensive reality of sexuality in contemporary Mozambique, one must look at three interrelated historical contexts of the country, namely: the 1886 Portuguese Penal Code, the inheritance of the 1886 Penal Code after independence and the Revision of Penal Code in 2014.

2.2.1 The 1886 Portuguese Penal Code in Mozambique

It has been argued that effective Portuguese control of Mozambique territories was achieved around the beginning of 20th century when Portugal considered all its African colonies as an integral part of a pluricontinental Portuguese Nation (Santos & Waites 2022:554). This period is characterized by scarce references to same-sex practices and relationships (Chipenembe 2018:26). From this perspective, it could be assumed that the country was predominantly a heterosexual community. However, the silence concerning other forms of sexual orientation and practices does not mean that they did not exist. In fact, same-sex sexual contacts probably occurred everywhere and in contexts of intra-cultural diversity and with a few recurring patterns (Chipenembe 2018:20). But the real concern and documented discourse on sexuality during colonial period begins with the 1886 Penal Code, which clearly sets the foundations of criminalization of sexual acts and practices considered to be against nature.

Based on its Christian and Western civilization project, the Portuguese colonial state invented and imposed a notion of sexuality according to the early European imagination, constructing a binary gender system which naturalized [heterosexual] sexuality (Chipenembe 2018:9). This was possible through establishment of the 1886 Portuguese Penal code which criminalized, alongside idleness, those engaged in sexual practice ‘against nature’ (Santos & Waites

2022:554). According to Santos and Waites (2022:559) the security measures of articles 70 and 71 of the 1886 Portuguese Penal Code included coerced admission in a mental hospital, imprisonment from one month to one year and the interdiction of professional practice. This is also supported by Maria Judite Mario Chipenembe (2018:11) when arguing that the security measures of the 1886 Penal Code included confinement in an insane asylum, in a workhouse or agricultural colony, probation, taking of a pledge of good conduct, and/or disqualification from the practice of a profession. This means that indecent sexual practices were a severe offence to the colonial state and the punishment of these offences was secured by the 1886 Portuguese Penal code.

It is clear from this 1886 Portuguese Penal Code that the colonial system considered same-sex relationship a serious offence, subject to a severe corrective process. Nonetheless, the criminalization implicitly recognized the existence of multiples forms of sexual intercourse in the country. Santos and Waites (2022:555) have attested to the "existence of a bubbling (although almost exclusively upper/middle class and white) lesbian and gay scene in Lourenço Marques[17] in late 1960s and beginning of 1970s." This means that the criminalization of indecent sexualities implicitly recognized their existence in the country during colonial time. These homoerotic realities happened in private spaces because of the fear of the conservative Catholic morality and the political reprehension of the Salazarism[18] and its reprehensive branch represented by PIDE[19] (Santos 2017:481). Although lesbian and gay life happened mainly within private parties and through friendship networks, there were some bars and discos, as well as transvestite shows in downtown Lourenço Marques, where their presence was widely noted (Santos & Waites 2022:555). The 1886 Portuguese Penal Code failed to end the practice of sexual 'vices against nature' in Mozambique during the colonial era, but it did establish a colonial legacy. The post-colonial debate on issues of sex and sexuality in the country is influenced by this colonial legacy and its condemnatory system.

Though the criminalization of vices against nature was imposed by the pluricontinental Portuguese Nation, in Mozambique the actual persecution of sexual minorities was not intense. Indeed, there is "no record of State persecution or systematic police harassment of homosexuals in Mozambique, as there was in Portugal" (Santos & Waites 2022:555). Gustavo Gomes da

[17] Lourenço Marques was the capital city of Mozambique during colonial period, but now is called Maputo.
[18] The Portuguese didactorial government established by Antonio de Oliveira Salazar.
[19] *Polícia Internacional de Defesa de Estado* or International Police of State Defence.

Costa Santos (2017:482) states that the Portuguese colonial and totalitarian regime did not persecute homosexuals in Mozambique, except an incident that happened within the Armed Forces, between 1971 and 73, which took place within the military universe. This means that Mozambique experienced a relatively relaxed atmosphere around sexual diversity during the colonial period, notwithstanding its public policy.

2.2.2 The Inheritance of the 1886 Penal Code After Independence

After Independence in 1975, the Mozambican state defined itself in many aspects in opposition to the prejudice views of the settlers in relation to the native, but in relation to the view of sexuality, surprisingly the country continued with the construction of the naturalization and exclusivity of heterosexuality (Manhice & Timbana 2012:9). Certainly, Mozambique inherited, from the colonial era, the punishment of those engaged on the so-called "the vices against nature", established by the Portuguese Penal Code in 1886 (Santos 2017:480). Similarly, Chipenembe (2018:10) states that the 1886 colonial Penal code was still in force after independence, and articles 70 and 71 therein provided for measures to be applied to those who committed such crimes "against nature." Despite some punctuation changes, the 1886 Portuguese Penal Code remained in force after independence (Santos & Waites 2022:558). So, the new Mozambican state was not favourable toward sexual minority rights, and conceptualized sexuality within the heteronormative, reproductive, and naturalistic order. Any form of sexuality that did not follow this orientation was subject to condemnation and punishment by the new independent Mozambican state.

It has been argued that "the relatively relaxed atmosphere around same-sex sexualities abruptly finished with the turbulent process of independence" (Santos & Waites 2022:555). Santos and Waites (2022:562) argue that homosexuality was, in the Frelimo leadership's eyes, seen as a bourgeois European decadent behaviour, in line with most Marxist-Leninist understandings of same-sex sexualities at the time. And those who did not conform with the normal order, like men with long hair or non-conforming sexual orientation were persecuted, imprisoned, or sent to re-education camps (Santos 2017:482). Besides, there was draft legislation on the re-education program, secretly distributed among Frelimo leaderships, in which individuals engaged in the so-called vices against nature figured in a long list of social ills and categories of people who should be subjected to re-education (Santos & Waites 2022:556). Although this legislation did not pass, it shows that the persecution of individuals with same-sex sexual practices was on the radar of Frelimo's leadership (Santos & Waites 2022:556). Thus, the

revolutionary process also was “embedded in a particular imaginary of gender and sexuality, oriented towards the heterosexual family and invested in the production of heteronormative masculinity” (Araujo 2021:144). This means that the revolutionary process had a tendency of silencing non-conforming sexualities in the country.

Even with this tendency of silencing sexual diversity by the Mozambican government after independence, white and black sexual minorities continued to exist and were notable in private parties and discos, where people from the periphery also participated (Miguel 2021:325). Caio Simões de Araújo (2021:146) argues that “gay subcultures persisted in the city even at the height of Frelimo’s moralist campaign, as queer people simultaneously employed strategies of in/visibility to find each other and create safe spaces, out of public eye and beyond the reach of the moralizing state.” This means that, the harshness of the new Mozambican state after independence could not end the practices of ‘vices against nature’ in the country. Non-conforming or indecent sexualities continued in the country despite the reprehensive public policy of the Frelimo government inherited from the colonial state.

2.2.3 The Revision of Penal Code in 2014

The 1990 and 2004 democratic Constitutions of the Republic of Mozambique provided room for the emergence of conscience about human rights in the country. In fact, “at the beginning of the 1990s, feminist and human rights organizations emerged with the purpose of contesting the situation of human rights violations and played a significant role in influencing the legal reforms on gender equality and in promoting this view across the entire country” (Chipenembe 2018:10). This was possible because it was in the context of the democratic movements of the countries of Southern Africa, the strengthening of civil rights for homosexuals around the world and the popularization of new communication technologies, which allowed mass communication resources to common citizens (Miguel 2021:333). This fact was also directly related to the evolution in the conceptual response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Mozambique, which was sponsored by the World Health Organization (WHO) and other international organizations concerned with global health (Chipenembe 2018:10). This emergence of conscience about human rights brought significant gains to the country. Indeed, with the increasing concern with AIDS incidence among Men having Sex with Men (MSM), in 2006, a group of Mozambicans formed the Lambda Association in Maputo, with the intention of bringing to light specific needs and demands of the LGBT population (Santos & Waites 2022:557). Moreover, in 2007 Mozambique approved a new Labour Law, which

established the principle of non-discrimination regarding sexual orientation, race or HIV/AIDS status (Santos & Waites 2022:558). These aspects allowed human right organizations and the society in general to question what the Penal Code says about issues of gender and sexuality.

It could be argued that many of the provisions of the inherited Portuguese Penal Code came to be in contradiction with the democratic principles of the 2004 Mozambican Constitution, particularly on issues of gender and sexuality (Santos & Waites 2022:558). Mozambique was forced to review its legal system, removing references to sexual practices "against the order of nature" that criminalized certain same-sex sexual acts (Santos & Waites 2022:550). It was within this context that in 2014, a group of human rights, gender, and children rights organizations presented suggestions of changes to the final version of Penal Code, which was approved in November of the same year, with the removal of articles 70 and 71, and officially decriminalizing homosexuality in Mozambique (Santos & Waites 2022:559-560). This decriminalization of homosexuality in Mozambique has laid foundations through which non-conforming aspects of sexuality can be discussed in order to construct alternative and more inclusive communities in the country.

Mozambique appears to be one of the more liberal and tolerant countries on the continent when it comes to LGBTI rights (Van Heerden 2020:15). The decriminalization of homosexuality in the country can testify this tolerance. But in practice there is much silence and discrimination (Chipenembe 2018:11). Indeed, expressions of sexuality not conforming to heterosexuality are often still subject to intense moral condemnation and political repression (Santos & Waites 2022:549). Additionally, the Mozambican Family Law, approved in 2004, still expressly prohibits the recognition of same-sex unions (Santos & Waites 2022:550). In other words, the tolerance towards non-conforming sexualities is minimal since it does not fully recognize civil and human rights of these people. This sexual intolerance in Mozambique is evidenced in different sectors of the society, including religion.[20]

The Lambda Association, which was informally established in 2007, is the only LGBT organization working in Mozambique to secure sexual minority rights (Chipenembe 2018:11). However, since 2008 it has been struggling to obtain state recognition as a civil society organization (Santos & Waites 2022:550). And this suggests the unwillingness of the Frelimo-led Mozambican state to include LGBT rights as part of its human rights agenda, which could

[20] The study will return to this religious aspect later in chapter four.

benefit a wider range of queer people including lesbian, and bisexual women, and transgender people (Santos & Waites 2022:559-560). This means that while there is no state persecution of LGBTIQA+ population in Mozambique, there is also an absence of state support in promoting the rights of sexual minorities people. In other words, the Mozambican state decriminalized same-sex sexualities as a response to local and international pressure, but its ideological orientation still not favorable to indecent sexualities.

Accordingly, three interrelated historical moments must be taken into consideration to understand the trajectory of sexuality in post-colonial Mozambique. The debate begins with the 1886 Portuguese Penal Code, characterized by criminalization of 'vices against nature', yet a relatively relaxed atmosphere around sexual diversity. This Portuguese Penal Code was inherited by the Mozambican government after independence, whereby there was a tendency of silencing sexual diversity with harshness and a lack of support for sexual minority rights, conceptualizing sexuality within the heteronormative, reproductive, and naturalistic order. Then, this Penal code was revised in 2014 to accommodate the demands of the democratic constitution of 2004, opening room for the decriminalization of non-conforming gender identities. However, moral condemnation and political repression still remain a challenge for sexual minorities. And this is endorsed by the Church (and Religion in general) through its teachings and practices. This religious realm is discussed fully in chapter four, but for now the study will turn to understand how economics and sexuality intersect in Mozambique.

2.3 The Intersection Between Economic Struggles and Sexual Struggles in Mozambique

It has been argued that the global economic system is based on inequalities in the labour force, in gender inequalities especially; it also resembles the heterosexual assumption of the naturalness of a model based on two sexes (Althaus-Reid 2000:174). This means that economics and sexuality stand at the forefront of marginalization and exclusion. However, the intersection between them has not been fully explored in Mozambique (and elsewhere in Africa), and scholars tend to focus on one aspect or the other. Therefore, this section aims to draw some lines of relationships between sexual struggles and economic struggles in contemporary Mozambique. Specifically, it will analyze gender norms that place men as superior and women as subservient within a heteronormative economic structure, and it will then look at the economic trajectory of non-conforming sexualities within this economic model.

2.3.1 Gender Norms in Mozambique: The Superiority of Men and the Subservience of Women in Heteronormative Economic Structure

According to Tamale (2011:11), "sexuality is deeply embedded in the meanings and interpretations of gender systems." Gender norms have been understood as the accepted attributes and characteristics of being a woman or a man at a particular point in time for a specific society or community, and they are internalized early in life and are used as standards and expectations to which women and men should conform, and result in gender stereotypes (Steege et al. 2020:3). These gender norms are defined based on certain characteristics, expectations and behaviour applied differently to men and women; and prevailing gender norms posit men as superior, dominant and decision-makers while women are considered subservient, passive, and obedient (Bandali 2011a:578). This means that there is a clear delineation of roles and responsibilities between genders, which serve to reinforce discourses of dominance among male sex and acquiescence among female sex; and these assigned duties often serve to widen power imbalances between men and women (Bandali 2011b:1172). Both male and female are expected by the society to observe and follow these gender roles and responsibilities that are assigned to them.

It is important to note that Mozambique is constituted by two types of society: one founded on patrilineal kinship and the other on matrilineal kinship. The patrilineal kinship is predominantly in the south and center of Mozambique while the matrilineal kinship is mainly constituted by the *Makhuwa*, *Makhonde* and *Yaawo* peoples from the northern part of the country (see Bonate 2006:139 and Arnfred 2021:222). In patrilineal societies, the man pays the bridewealth to his parents-in-law, and after marriage the wife lives in her husband's house and under his authority (Igreja, Lambranca and Richters 2008:356). This means that "the man is generally the head of the household", with the responsibility to make the main decisions concerning family problems (Igreja & Lambranca 2009:266) while the wife is expected to be subordinate, loyal, and obedient (Igreja & Lambranca 2009:283). Within this power imbalance, men tend to have greater access to opportunities and control over income, which entrenches a dependency relationship in which women rely heavily on them for financial sustenance and stability (Bandali 2011a:578). For instance, women's access to land is mediated through male relatives and women are usually viewed as subordinate to men (Bicchieri 2022:117), particularly regarding access to resources, such as income or land, or at the level of civic and community participation (Massava 2021:9). So, within these patrilineal societies men are the dominant

people who capture all the economic opportunities of the family as well as deciding on family issues, while women have to follow whatever is decided by the head of the house.

In matrilineal society the woman stays in her own village, among her own folks; upon marriage, the young man arrives as a stranger to the village of the wife (Arnfred 2021:223). This means that matrilineal cultures strengthen a woman's position in society, as the home and children remain part of a woman's family after a divorce or death (Vilanculo & Nhiuane 2021:141). Looking at this, one could expect the women to be the head of the household or with the responsibility to make the main decisions concerning family problems. In fact, women are to be found in social positions of power and esteem (Arnfred 2021:222). And they also have religious responsibilities, including responsibility for the rituals and initiation, direct women's prayer, and in charge of certain proceeding related to funerals (Arnfred 2021:230). However, having these responsibilities does not imply that they have power over the men (Bonate 2006:140). Indeed, matrilineal descent does not mean that women retain formal power, decision-making power belongs to the mother's brother (maternal uncle), who holds the right to distribute goods and resources (Vilanculo & Nhiuane 2021:141). This means that in matrilineal kinship gender norms also place the male sex as superior and the female sex as subservient in economic transactions. In other words, the power of women in matrilineal society is limited since women also rely on man (maternal uncle) for serious decisions concerning family issues (like the distribution of wealth).

It has been stated that most of the population in Mozambique lives in rural areas and depends on land and agriculture for their livelihood (Bicchieri 2022:116). The land is considered one of the most valuable economic resources for most of the population. This is because most people in the country use this economic assert (the land) to produce food for family consumption and for business. Nevertheless, an unequal gender division of labour places women in a more disadvantageous position relative to men (Arora 2015:215). Indeed, men are the 'lords' of the economic transaction while women are largely responsible for small-scale agricultural work and carry out most agricultural chores; and they are "the main food producers and are responsible for feeding their households but do not enjoy tenure security over the land they depend upon" (Bicchieri 2022:116). Though women are the ones responsible for food production, the land that they depend upon often belongs to men. Moreover, the double burden of work inside and outside the household adversely affects women's well-being and the ability

to expand their capabilities (Arora 2015:215). Hence, women are more disadvantaged than men due to the existing unequal gender structures (Sari-Aksakal 2022:51) of Mozambique.

In response to these unequal gender structure, the government has developed legal and policy frameworks to align its legislation with core human rights instruments, to promote gender equality, and to foster women's land rights (Bicchieri 2022:113). In fact, gender equality is enshrined in Mozambique's Constitution and is promoted through its participation in international conventions and treaties as well as its 2004 family law, which requires equality in property and family legislation, including the sharing of property in marriage (Bhoojedhur & Isbell 2019:1). Yet, high levels of gender inequality and discrimination persist. Indeed, many women do not fully enjoy fundamental human rights, especially in rural areas, where their land rights are frequently violated due to discriminatory customary practices (Bicchieri 2022:113). Additionally, land dispossession of widows, accusations of witchcraft, widow inheritance, cleansing rituals, and discrimination linked to the payment of bride-price are all human rights violations linked to land tenure insecurity (Bicchieri 2022:117). The aim of all these customary practices is to put women in a situation of economic disadvantage compared to men.

Furthermore, boys in Mozambique are likely to be educated while girls are trained how to be good wives to educated husbands (see Kaoma 2016:54). As a result, these educated boys become in the future the main beneficiaries of the current economic system, since they are more likely to be employed and provided with an income which gives them more power (Macia, Maharaj & Gresh 2011:1187). And women are usually assigned the sole responsibility for food production, preservation, storage, and preparation, and for fetching firewood and water, doing household maintenance, and being responsible for care provision (Arora & Rada 2017:94). As a result, the level of formal employment for men in Mozambique is higher than that of women (Uetela & Obeng-Odoom 2016:57). This indicates that women are lagging behind men in the development process of Mozambique (Gradin and Tarp 2019:187). In other words, men are the ones deciding about the economic shape of the family or community.

One of the alternatives used by some poor women in Mozambique to uplift their economic standard is the recognition of their sexuality as a commodity, selling their bodies in exchange of economic benefits. In fact, many (young) women are involved in sexual relationships with (old) men to secure their economic future (Hawkins, Price and Mussá 2009:170). This is what Gerald West and Beverley Haddad (2016:137) describe as "sugar-daddy" relationships; whereby young girls recognize their sexuality as resource and use it to gain financial resources

from older men in exchange for sexual services, often with multiple partners to maximize benefits (Hawkins, Price & Mussá 2009:170). According to Sarah Bandali (2011:575), transactional sex is used by some women as an opportunity to finish their education, gain freedom and economic independence or achieve greater social status. In other words, some desperate women in the country rely on transactional sex to improve their economic reality. However, these transactional sexual relationships are also associated with unsafe sexual behaviour and low condom use, which can increase the danger of sexual transmitted diseases (STD), including HIV/AIDS (Hawkins, Price and Mussá 2009:169). In fact, the vulnerability of women does not give them enough space to demand from men the use of condom to minimize this danger of sexual transmitted diseases.

So, the heteronormative economic system places men in a superior and women in a subservient position, and their economic struggles are different. While men struggle because of the general economic challenges of the country, women struggle because of the general economic reality of the country as well as the economic exploitation of men. In other words, poor men and poor women represent two distinctive categories of poverty. As a result, some (young) women use their sexuality as a commodity, selling their bodies to (old) men to uplift their economic standard, which puts them in danger of contracting deadly diseases like HIV/AIDS. Having this in mind, the study will now analyze (in the following section) the economic trajectory of non-conforming sexualities within this current economic order based on two sexes.

2.3.2 The Economic Struggles of Non-conforming Sexualities

Althaus-Reid (2000:32) argues that poverty is often conceived according to the restricted heterosexual model. This is because non-conforming sexuality is still seen as morally wrong in many societies (especially in Africa), and those who do not comply with social expectations of masculine and feminine gender roles still face high stigmatization and discrimination. Though same-sex relations have been decriminalized in Mozambique, the penal code does not include sexual orientation in the provision of article 243 regarding punishments in cases of discrimination and stigmatization (Santos & Waites 2022:560). In short, the Mozambican penal code does not indicate the type of punishment in case of discrimination of non-conforming sexualities, though these sexual orientations have been decriminalized. This situation places non-conforming people in a disadvantaged position and renders them vulnerable to discrimination and exclusion in different social spheres (Aantjes et al. 2020:71). Certainly, they are often victims of discrimination, physical abuse, bribery, and sexual harassment

(Chipenembe 2018:157). And this reality often happens within the family, schools and working place, within which spaces they are economically vulnerable. This situation is even aggravated by the absence of punishment measures in the Mozambican penal code.

It is important to note that stigmatization often begins at home, where people with different sexual orientations are rejected by relatives and family members for not adjusting to the heterosexual pattern of male and female. Carolien. J. Aantjes (2020:71) argues that even though the Mozambican society is characterized as tolerant, without a presence of violent acts against LGBTI people in the community, contrary to what is witnessed elsewhere in the region, this tolerance equals a passive stance in which more subtle and less overt practices of discrimination and exclusion are taking place and remain unchallenged. In fact, when an individual discloses their non-normative sexual or gender identity, families react badly and take the individual to Church or to traditional healer, because they believe the person is acting under external forces (Pimental 2017:25). Sara José Machava (2013:28) argues that non-conforming sexualities who are rejected and excluded by families build and maintain their lives outside the framework of the nuclear family, seeking emotional security and their daily lives within groups of friends. This means that rejected non-conforming sexualities find more security within groups of friends than in their respective biological families. Consequently, this exclusion and rejection destabilize their economic future to the extent that they cannot enjoy the family's economic resources and asserts (including the inheritance of the land).

Further, Mozambican schools are heteronormative spaces that rarely or never discuss issues of non-conforming gender identities, and youth are often bullied due to their sexual orientation (Pimental 2017:23). This has been also supported by Juvencio Manuel Nota (2014:139), when arguing that hostility towards non-heterosexual people, commonly called sexual discrimination, homophobia or homo-negativity, is a visible phenomenon in Mozambican schools. This means that non-conforming sexualities or different gender identities are bullied by teachers and colleagues who see this type of orientation as abnormal and immoral. For fear of attack and condemnation, non-conforming gender identities often abandon school in search of a more secure atmosphere, therefore, putting in danger their future economic stability. Indeed, non-educated boys (including non-conforming sexualities) have less chances of being integrated within formal employment, leading them to economic vulnerability in the future.

Likewise, workplaces are heteronormative spaces, and non-conforming sexualities often have hard time finding a formal job due to discrimination against their gender identity (Pimental

2017:24). Those who manage to get a job often experience humiliation and isolation at work (Pimental 2017:24). In fact, discrimination and mistreatment against non-conforming sexualities at work may lead them to quit their jobs, which will then impact on their economic survival. Felicity Daly (2022:9) argues that while exclusion limits full participation in the economy for non-conforming gender identities, it could also reduce economic output of the country more generally. This is because unemployed gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transgenders, or any other type of orientation add to the number of consumers while reducing the number of producers, henceforth affecting the general economic performance of the country. For Chipenembe (2018:163), excluded and rejected non-conforming sexualities often rely on transactional sex for their economic survival. Their sexualities also are used as a commodity, whereby they sell their bodies in exchange for money to uplift their economic wellbeing. Transactional sexual relationships within non-heteronormative community are often seen as a survival strategy used to satisfy their daily needs, like food and shelter (Lihahe 2020:3). However, this commercial sex also could become a potential risk for contracting deadly diseases, like HIV/AIDS and others, therefore, aggravating their economic vulnerability as well as that of their loved ones.

Based on what is presented above, it becomes clear that the economic trajectory of non-conforming sexuality in Mozambique is one of extreme vulnerability. This is because the heteronormative economic structure does not acknowledge the diversity of sexual behaviours existent in the country, and those considered the "indecent other" (see Althaus-Reid 2000:135), due to their non-conforming status, are often excluded from the economic benefits of the country. In fact, their economic struggle is even worse compared to the economic struggle of heterosexual women. Heterosexual women are likely to uplift their economic situation through marriage, while non-heterosexual people are likely to end in transactional sex. This means that poor people within the non-conforming community represent a third category of poverty.

Accordingly, there is a connection between economic struggles and sexual struggles in Mozambique. The heteronormative economic model creates three categories of poverty. The first category is represented by poor heterosexual men who struggle because of the general economic challenges of the country; and the second category is represented by poor heterosexual women who struggle because of both the economic challenges of the country and the economic exploitation of heterosexual men. And there is a third category which is represented by poor non-conforming sexualities who struggle because of exclusion and

discrimination within the heteronormative economic structure of the country. All the three categories of poor people are likely to be involved in transactional sex in order for them to uplift their economic situation, but this commercial sex could also become a potential risk for contracting deadly diseases, like HIV/AIDS and others. This means that there are lines of interaction between poverty (economics) and sexual identity in Mozambique.

2.4 Conclusion

In this chapter the focus has been on the intersection between economics and sexuality in Mozambique. It has looked at the economic situation of the country, the situation of sexual identity and the intersections between sexual struggles and economic struggles. It has noted that Mozambique is rich in terms of economic potentialities, but it is considered one of the poorest countries in the world and in sub-Sahara Africa and is characterized by economic disparities between regions and within communities; and the colonial economic system of stratification, military conflicts, climate shocks, global economic system, and domestic economic system of exclusion are the main issues behind this economic reality. It has also noted that little is known about the history of sexuality in Mozambique, but the debate begins with the 1886 Portuguese Penal Code (also inherited by the new Mozambican government after independence), characterized by criminalization of 'vices against nature'. This Penal Code was revised in 2014, decriminalizing non-conforming gender identities, but moral condemnation and political repression still represent a challenge for sexual minorities. Finally, it has noted that there are lines of interaction between economics and sexuality in Mozambique, whereby the heteronormative economic structure creates three categories of poverty, represented by heterosexual poor men, heterosexual poor women, and non-conforming poor people. Both heterosexual and non-conforming people are involved in commercial sex which can lead them to contract sexual transmitted diseases, including HIV and AIDS. The following chapter intersects economics and sexual identities in the biblical book of Ruth.

CHAPTER THREE: INTERSECTING ECONOMICS AND SEXUAL IDENTITY IN THE BOOK OF RUTH

3.0 Introduction

This thesis uses the tripolar African biblical studies approach, to bring the intersection between economics and sexual identity in Mozambique into dialogue with the intersection between economics and sexuality in the book of Ruth, in order to construct potentially transformative Contextual Bible Studies for contexts of non-conforming gender identities or different sexualities. The previous chapter (the contextual pole) has done the intersection between economics and sexuality in Mozambique. And it has noted that there are lines of interaction between economics and sexuality in Mozambique, whereby the heteronormative economic structure creates three categories of poverty, represented by heterosexual men, heterosexual women, and non-conforming people. Now the study turns to the textual pole, intersecting economics and sexuality in the biblical book of Ruth. For that, the study will first analyze the economic situation described in the book of Ruth, then analyze sexual dimensions of the book, and finally, intersect economic struggles and sexual struggles in the book of Ruth.

3.1 The Economic Trajectory in the Book Ruth

The book of Ruth is one of the most fascinating biblical narratives that has attracted a significant attention among biblical scholars. In fact, with its barley harvests and its rural setting, the great short story of Ruth has been described as among the best and most charming stories in the Old Testament (Southwood 2014:102). The author of the book locates Ruth's narrative in the time of Judges (Ruth 1:1); that is the pre-monarchical period (Elness-Hanson 2021:111). However, this suggestion seems not to meet the historical authenticity of some aspects mentioned in the text. The reference to David (Ruth 4:17, 22) is clear evidence to these historical inconsistences because King David does not belong to the pre-monarchical period.

Scholars like Diane Jacobson (2013:5) locates the narrative in post-exilic context, arguing that Ruth was probably written and most certainly read in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. In fact, "the nature of the theme, the literary style, the numerous Aramaic expressions in the Hebrew text, and its position in the Hebrew Bible among the writing – all of these when taken together speak strongly for an origin after the Babylonian exile" (May 1983:83). In fact, the location of the book of Ruth in the time of the judges is a latter redactional ideological insertion (see West,

Zwane & Carlos 2023:596).[21] In support to this, Beth Elness-Hanson (2021:115) argues that it is plausible to see this as a corrective to Ezra and Nehemiah's over-zealous casting off of foreign wives because of their "otherness", which was identified as the mixing of the holy seed. This means that the aim of the book of Ruth is the inclusion of non-native into Israelite society (Embry 2016:33). In other words, the book argues against the exclusivity ideology of post-exilic Judah, practiced by the returning exiles against the people of the land.

The problem of dating biblical texts is "contested and hotly debated in biblical studies, and it is very hard to rely on any kind of consensus" (Schmid 2019:101), but it could be accepted that the author of the book of Ruth may have used ancient memories to correct situations of exclusion and marginalization during the reconstruction process of the Jewish identity in post-exilic period. And this is an assumption adopted in this research to analyze this biblical literature. Though historical facts are important, the primary focus in this section is the economic dimensions of the book. In short, this section aims to analyze the rules that determine the mechanisms of production, distribution, and consumption of wealth in the book of Ruth. Therefore, it will locate Israel within the Ancient Near Eastern Economy, then present the geopolitical context of the book of Ruth, after that analyze the economic deprivation presented in Ruth, and finally present the causes of this economic deprivation.

3.1.1 Israel Within the Economics of Ancient Near East

It has been argued that "since prehistoric times, the quest for food, water, shelter, and protection has dominated the daily lives of human beings" (LaBianca 2006:4). This suggests that the mechanisms of production, distribution and consumption of wealth has been a major concern since the existence of human race. People are always concerned about how food and other daily needs are produced, consumed, and discarded (LaBianca 2006:4). However, economic issues differ according to the historical, geographical and sociological location of people. Indeed, the book of Ruth reflects the life of the people of Israel, in a specific context of the Ancient Near East (ANE). Thus, it will be analyzed, in this section, the economic shape of the ANE and how this has influenced Israel, and particularly, the economic trajectory described in the book of Ruth.

[21] The study will come back to this aspect in section 3.1.2.

Life in the ANE can be traced back long before the redaction of the biblical account of creation. According to John J. Collins (2004:25), there was a settlement at Jericho as early as eighth millennium BCE and village life developed throughout the Near East in the Neolithic period (8000-4000). With the coming of the Early Bronze age (3200-200) "the first great civilizations emerged in proximity to the great rivers of the region, the Nile in Egypt, and the Tigris and Euphrates that define Mesopotamia" (Collins 2004:25). And the land of Canaan lay between Egypt and Mesopotamia, "where Israel would carve out its territory along the southern half of the eastern shore of the Mediterranean" (Collins 2004:27). This means that the economic trajectory of Israel (and particularly that described in the book of Ruth) must be analyzed taking into consideration this geographical panorama of the ANE.

Though different theories and/or models have been developed and used by scholars (economists, historians, theologians, amongst others), to analyze Ancient Near Eastern economic systems (see Amin 1985 and Smith 2004), this study relies on the Marxist economic category of Mode of Production (see West 2011). Mode of production is a Marxist expression used to describe the manner, the form or the mode by which material goods are produced (Harnecker 2016:23). In other words, mode of production refers to how people regulate their activities to produce what they need to sustain their daily living. Ipsen (2009:31) even goes further arguing that a Marxist materialist mode of analysis focus on the particular economic experiences and viewpoints of people, which are elided in traditional methodologies." And this notion of mode of production can be used to reconstruct a geographically extensive, historically enduring, sociologically significant, and exegetically suggestive economic system within the world that produced the biblical texts (West 2011:513). In this reconstruction, it is also important to take into consideration two contending modes of production that dominated the world of the ANE (and Israel in particular): the egalitarian[22] mode of production and the tributary[23] mode of production.

3.1.1.1 Egalitarian Mode of Production

It has been argued that Israel first appeared on the historical scene of the ANE around the end of the thirteenth century BCE (Pixley 1991:233). According to Norman Gottwald (1988:273) it emerged as an ethnically and socioeconomically mixed coalition, composed of a majority of

[22] Also known as "household mode of production" (see West 2011:513).
[23] Also known as "Asiatic mode of production" (see West 2011:513).

tribally organized peasants, along with lesser numbers of pastoral nomads, mercenaries and freebooters, assorted craftsmen, and renegade priests. In fact, when iron tools were introduced in Palestine, various peasants' groups marginalized by the tributary systems fled to the hill country, where they were joined by a group of Hebrew slaves from Egypt, who brought with them a god (Yahweh) who heard the cry of slaves (Pixley1991:233-236). In this coalition, Yahweh became the socioreligious ideology and organizational framework that helped to forge into an effective revolutionary movement that expelled the tributary system and established a communitarian economic system (Gottwald 1985:273).

In this perspective, Israel must be regarded not only as a group of geographical outsiders who infiltrated the land through a combination of conquest and diplomacy, but also as socioeconomic outsiders who established an agriculturally based egalitarian society (Benz 2019:263). In fact, this was the establishment of what Roland Boer (2007:43) describes as "village commune" or an economic and kinship unit engaged in agriculture. This egalitarian mode of production in pre-monarchic Israel "was made up of a small village organized by ties of blood relationship into families, clans and tribes", and they had neither cities nor king (Pixley 1991:234). In other words, Israel was a confederation of independent entities whose concerns revolved around local affairs (Benz 2019:263).

According to Oystein S. LaBianca (2006:6), one of the predominant economic activities within this communitarian economic system was small-scale agriculture, which included available natural resources; religious beliefs relating to food; land ownership and use rights; traditions regulating the division of work; types of crops and animals; cultivation and husbandry practices; land management; use of animals for traction and transport; harvesting, storage and preservation; distribution and consumption; and waste management. In fact, pre-monarch Israel was an agrarian society and land property was considered a form of wealth (Manon 2015:10). And the individual family supplied itself with the produce obtained from their land, and surpluses could be bartered for consumer goods such as pottery wares or iron tools and jewellery (Volkmar 2011:105). This communitarian economic system characterized the Israelite society until the raise of monarchy, alongside with its centralized city-state system.

3.1.1.2 Tributary Mode of Production

It has been argued that the rise of the Philistines, alongside with corruption among the judges constituted the broader socio-economic conditions that led Israel to abandon the egalitarian

vision (West 1999:15) and adopt what Boer (2007:36) calls "temple-city complex." As for the temple-city complex, the term is self-descriptive, for it designates the way the city is unthinkable without the structuring role of the temple and indeed the palace which is an add-on to the temple (Boer 2007:36). The Philistines were posing a serious threat to the mountainous heartland of Israel due to their oligarchic form of leadership as well as their iron weaponry and mobile military, which made them effective fighters in the hill country (West 1999:15). Moreover, dishonesty among Eli's sons and Samuel's sons contributed to this erosion of the egalitarian vision (West 1999:15-16). As a result, the Israelites persuaded Samuel to change their economic system and adopt a city-state system like other nations around them (see West 1999:16 and 1Sam 8:1-22). This reality indicates that the Hebrew peasants were united against the deprived economic reality of their time. However, this would be done at a very high price, for the king would take their best fields, vineyards and olive orchards to give to his servants, and further take their children to plough his ground and to reap his harvests (Crist 1961:297). Even knowing this reality, they were determined to change and implement a more centralized economic system like other nations.

This shift from a household to a tributary economic system was inaugurated by Saul and David and consolidated by Solomon through his intense building projects (Dreher 1997:25). David instituted a census, with an eye to determining the tax burden that the people could support (Crist 1961:297). Moreover, Solomon divided the land into administrative districts where the tax collectors worked assiduously to extract the monies necessary to sustain his expensive court entourage (Crist 1961:297). This means that the tributary mode of production characterized Israel throughout its entire subsequent history. And the "deity was the one who sanctioned tribute, most notably in the notion of the temple tax or tithe, a reallocation of produce for the sake of the priests and the material structure of religion" (Boer 2007:42). This system was used to secure the luxury of the kingdom as well as to support the official army that was formed to defend the external and internal treats. Most of the rural peasants could not afford to live on and pay taxes from their agricultural surplus and so they relied on debts from the rich merchants living in cities, who then charged them high rates (West 1999:14). Kennedy Gora (2008:55) argues that in some cases people failed to pay their duties and lost their lands. This happened, for instance, in times of natural calamities or other unforeseen circumstances that could prevent them from paying tax from their agricultural surplus. Consequently, most of the rural peasants became indebted and enslaved.

However, the burden of tribute became worse when Israel was under subjugation of external colonial powers because people had to pay taxes not only for local economic demands, but also to support the needs of the Empire. And if this was refused, destruction was certain, and not merciful since Empires often used terrorist tactics effectively in convincing cities to pay tribute (Nichols 1975:244). Avraham Faust (2011:97) argues that Assyria, for instance, accomplished domination by tactics of psychological warfare; whereby demonstration of power, including unusual cruelty, was consciously directed not only toward those who suffered directly, "but also upon those who heard of it at a distance." A similar approach is attested in 587/586 BCE, when Judah (especially Jerusalem) "faced the full onslaught of Neo-Babylonian arms" (Betlyon 2005:5), after refusing to meet tributary obligations. Within this reality, the Israelite temple-city complex often functioned not only as the mediator between the "village commune" and external empires, but it also acted as a buffer (Boer 2007:38) to prevent destruction or constrain imperial control.

Accordingly, the egalitarian mode of production and the tributary mode of production are two contending economic systems of the ANE that influenced ancient Israel throughout its history, in both pre-monarchical and monarchical periods, as well as the period under external powers. The system of taxation created debt and enslavement to most of the rural peasants who could not afford to live on and pay taxes from their agricultural surplus. This general economic spectrum is important when analyzing the economic trajectory described in the book of Ruth. But for now, it is important to analyze the geopolitical context of the book of Ruth.

3.1.2 The Geopolitical Context of the Book of Ruth

The geopolitical context of the book of Ruth reflects the general reality of the Jewish community in post-exilic context. However, this cannot be fairly analyzed unless one goes back to historical events that took place before this period. The Babylonian exile must be taken as an important historical aspect and a starting point to understand the geopolitical reality behind the book of Ruth. Biblical and extra biblical evidence show that "the Babylonians gave a harsh blow to the kingdom of Judah, the hardest blow in the history of the kingdom" (Lipschits 2004:105). According to Oded Lipschits (2004:105) they destroyed Jerusalem, exiled the king and all the religious, economic, social, and political elite; and the kingdom ceased to exist. This destruction of Judah and mainly Jerusalem is also recorded in the books of 2 Kings, 2 Chronicles, Jeremiah, Lamentations and others, describing it as a traumatic event for the population of Judah (Faust 2012:1). Jill Anne Middlemas (2009:174) speaks about three

historical moments of this catastrophe (598,587,582 BCE). Indeed, "after 587 groups reportedly settled in the neighboring nations states of Ammon, Moab and Edom and, following the assassination of Gedaliah, another group fled to Egypt" (Middlemas 2009:175). So, "it is quite clear, therefore, that there were major changes and drastic demographic decline during the sixth century BCE in Judah, and it seems that the 586 BCE war, and the events which followed, are responsible for it" (Faust 2003:45).

When thinking about deportation, one can quickly assume that all the Israelites were taken to exile by the Babylonians. But conceptions of a complete break generated by the collapse of Jerusalem in 587 BCE do not find support from biblical material at the close of the sixth century (Middlemas 2009:178). In fact, "the land supposedly could not have been completely empty because the Babylonians would not have deported the entire population" (Faust and Gan 2004:170; Faust 2011:92). Moreover, we do not have any examples from other areas in the Babylonian empire for such a complete and comprehensive deportation (Lipschits 2004:105). This means that some people remained in Israel after destruction and the land could not have been empty. This continuity of life in ancient Israel can also be attested by a population in the Benjamin region during the sixth century (Middlemas 2009:177). This is also supported by Avraham Faust (2012:11) who argues that "it is only Judah that experienced destruction and abrupt changes in 586 BCE; most of the country was unaffected by the 586 events."

According to Lipschits (2004:100), the Babylonian imperial policy was to destroy the capital and deport the elite, without causing intentional destruction in all territory of the kingdom. This is because "the Babylonian interest was to preserve the rural settlements in some areas, where they could get wine, olive oil, grain, and other agricultural supplies, as well as to gain stability in the region" (Lipschits 2004:100).[24] Therefore, the deportees included most often the elite and skilled laborers; and their absence contributed to demoralization, demise of organization, famine, and insecurity (Faust 2011:99). This collapse of the administration and the lack of organization in production even further increased the problem of famine (Faust 2011:97). This means that the Babylonian destruction did not impact negatively only on those who went to exile but it also affected the lives of those who remained in Judah.

[24] This settlement pattern "also continues throughout the Persian period when, despite the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the restoration of its status as the capital of the province, there was no strengthening of urban life in this area, and the settlement in Judah remained largely based on the rural population" (Lipschits 2004:100).

However, deportation should not be considered the only factor that impoverished those who were left in Judah. Other mechanisms must be taken into consideration when analyzing the geopolitical reality around this people. Faust (2011:95) argues that most of the population who was left behind did not prosper. Therefore, in accessing this economic deprivation one should also "include death in the wars, and especially in executions following sieges, and in the epidemics and famine which inevitably occurred during the war, and followed it, as well as of people who fled to other regions" (Faust 2003:45). Similarly, Middlemas (2009:175) argues that "in addition to exile, the people were subject to a lengthy siege and military engagement that led to injury, death, starvation, sickness and sexual abuse." This means that the Babylonian exile was not the only catastrophe that threatened those who were left behind, but the beginning of innumerous problems that created their misery in the following years.

In addition to that, the bulk of the population in Judah lived on an economy of agriculture and livestock or an economy of subsistence (Gerstenberger 2012:111). Yet, "Judah was not a particularly ideal area, whether agriculturally or in craftsmanship and commercial enterprises" (Gerstenberger 2012:113). In fact, there existed "a huge variation in the annual rainfall in the Southern Levant/Israel/Palestine" (Becking 2014:232), which added struggle to the local population already affected by the effects of the Babylonian war. This means that only parts of the land could be cultivated based on rainfall, and this reality continued throughout the Persian period (including the context in which the book of Ruth was produced).

As for those who were in exile, it is reported that "several Judaeans are attested within the imperial apparatus, at various places along the hierarchy: from low-level scribes to emissaries to governors of Yehud" (Silverman 2019:6). The Bible presents the prophetic tradition encouraging the exiles to conform with their situation and continue their lives in the foreign land. In a letter sent by prophet Jeremiah, from Judah to Babylon, he instructs them to build houses, plant gardens and eat what they produce, marry and have children, find wives for their sons and give their daughters in marriage, increase in number, and seek peace and prosperity in the land they live (Jeremiah 29:5-7). This enabled them to become part of the commercial life of the city and eventually flourished there (Coogan 2011:381). Likewise, they engaged in agriculture and earned their living in any way they could (Bright 1962:326). This means that the words of prophet Jeremiah were taken seriously. In fact, some Judaeans worked the land as semi-free farmers in the land-for-service sector, others became wealthy traders and still others rose in imperial service, under the Babylonians (Silverman 2019:4). Nonetheless, some no

doubt suffered under corvée labor and as slaves, while others would have been their masters (Silverman 2019:5). So, the exiled seem to have enjoyed some sort of better economic benefits than those who remained in Judah, even though they had "lost not only their homes but also their land and a social status which was usually influential" (Farisani 2002:206).

The fall of Babylon and the rise of Persia in the fifth century BCE represent an historical moment in the ANE, and especially for the Jews who were allowed to return to their homeland and begin the reconstruction of their identity. According to Erhard S. Gerstenberger (2012:4), "around 540 BCE Cyrus, the Persian king, prepared to take over the Neo-Babylonian Empire." Jose E. Balcells Gallarreta (2017:29) also supports this historical fact, when pointing out that "in 539 BCE the armies of Cyrus II conquered Babylon, and with this event, territories that were under Babylonian control became part of the new Persian Empire." At this point, the shape of the Jewish community came about in the interplay with the major power of Persia (Gerstenberger 2012:45). In other words, they moved from the old Babylonian colonization to the new Persian subjugation.

According to biblical tradition, the imperial rule of Persia seems to have been slightly different from its predecessor, because it opened possibilities for the exiled Jews to go home and build the temple of the Lord (see Ezra 1:1-3 and Nehemiah 2:1-9). This was done through an edict issued by the Persian king and published throughout the empire, according to which the Babylonian Jews were permitted to return to Jerusalem (Gerstenberger 2012:5). The Bible speaks about 42360 people who returned to the ruins of Jerusalem to begin the reconstruction of the temple, besides their 7337 menservants and maidservants, and 200 men and women singers (see Ezra 2:64-65). Looking at these numbers presented in the Bible one can think of a mass movement of Judeans during this reconstruction process. However, this has been described as a myth since there is no archeological evidence for major change in Judah's population at this time, and it never reached this level at any point in the Persian Period (Janzen 2022:7). Though the authenticity of these numbers is subject to doubts, their presence in the biblical text attest to a significant number of the exiled who returned to Judah. And this rebuilding process must be taken as an historical fact when analyzing post-exilic literature, like the biblical book of Ruth.

The Persian empire was structured into satrapies[25] and provinces, intended especially for the purpose of securing the financing of the machinery of the state with all its branches (Gerstenberger 2012:57). This assumption is also supported by Janson Michael Silverman (2019:7) who argues that this system "facilitated the rapid dissemination of information, the movement of foodstuffs, armies, building supplies, and taxes." And Judah seems to have belonged to the province of Trans-Euphrates (see Nehemiah 2:7). Therefore, it is to be assumed, that Israel, too, understood themselves (apparently from the leadership elite to the members of the community) as part of the extensive Persian state (Gerstenberger 2012:58). In addition to that, the motif of the return to Zion added ideological weight to restore Jerusalem to its former position as the social, political and religious centre of the community (Middlemas 2009:185). However, this restoration process excluded those who had remained in Judah.

The generation of those who had returned identified themselves as loyal to the king who had chosen them alone to construct Yahweh's temple, excluding Palestinian natives from their building project through preservation of genealogical boundaries (Janzen 2022:9). According to Dalit Rom-Shiloni (2011:138), this exclusivity ideology, "which intentionally ignores the existence of other Judean communities was not an innovation of the Restoration period or an invention introduced for the first time in Yehud on the repatriates' return." But it had been inherited by the repatriates from their exiled ancestors and brought to Yehud on their return (Rom-Shiloni 2011:147). This ideology was used by the returned to prove themselves to be the purists of the time, in contrast to those who remained at home, who clearly had a different scale of values and thought and acted less rigorously (Gerstenberger 2012:16). This exclusivity ideology affected negatively different spheres of life (such as economics, sexuality and religion) amongst fellow citizens whose genealogies were placed outside the chosen community. Indeed, it is safe to assume that those who had returned had a high opinion of their status within the religious class system, the ethnic class system, and the occupational class system (Ro 2018:10). An exclusivist ideology dominated post-exilic Judah, and created economic, sexual and religious tension between the two groups. And Ruth appears, amongst other biblical literature, as an attempt to counterbalance or critique this exclusion of the indecent others in post-exilic context.

[25] This was an administrative system established by the Persian Empire to ensure a regular yield from tribute (Van Zyl et al. 1979:206).

The tension between those who had returned and those who had remained also was increased by the negative effects of drought (and other climate anomalies) which created poverty and famine (see Gooding 2023:396). In fact, some post-exilic biblical texts (like Nehemiah 5:1-5) describe an economic tension between the Jews and (possibly) the peoples of the land, whereby the later complained about economic exploitation by the former. And Bob Becking (2014:238) suggests that this tension was a result of poverty, "induced by a drought leading to crop failure, high prices and economic misery." In fact, when food is not enough or is not distributed equitably, tensions between the members of the community are inevitable. This means that drought impacted negatively on the economic life of poor communities, who could not manage to sustain themselves and pay local taxes as well as meet the demands of the Persian colonizers. Indeed, the financial need of the empire was so immense that taxes were collected mercilessly and as thoroughly as possible, and many sank into social misery (Gerstenberger 2012:58).

Accordingly, the geopolitical context that shapes the book of Ruth starts with the Babylonian exile and continue throughout the Persian period, and it is characterized by colonialism, an ideology of exclusion and economic deprivation. The misery of the majority peasant communities was a result of warfare and its effects, an exclusivist ideology adopted by those who had returned from the exile against those who were left behind, natural calamities that affected agricultural production, and the tax system instituted to feed the needs of the Persian Empire as well as local Israelite administration. This means that the economic deprivation in Ruth must be analyzed taking into consideration the geopolitical reality of post-exilic Judah, in which the book is located. In other words, the location of the book of Ruth in the time of the judges is a latter redactional ideological insertion, which cannot be considered an authentic historical fact when analyzing this narrative.

3.1.3 Economic Deprivation in Ruth

The book of Ruth is presented in a form of a narrative, with all the narrative elements, including "events, characters, and settings, and their interaction as the plot" (Malbon 1992:26-27). Hence, the narrative approach is employed in this section to understand the literary dimensions of this book. In fact, the narrative approach studies "the nature, form, and functioning of narrative text" (Green 2010:74). In addition to narrative approach, this section also employs the socio-historical method to locate literary elements of the text within their socio-historical context. A socio-historical method "focuses on the social, economic, legal, cultural and religious factors and how they influence the understanding and meaning of specific text" (Igba & Stoker

2018:2). Therefore, this section uses a combination of narrative and socio-historical approaches to analyze the elements of economic deprivation in the book of Ruth.

Economic deprivation can be described as "the lack of social and economic benefits which are considered to be basic necessities of a society or community or in a broader sense of a region" (Sarkar, Banerji & Sen 2014:272). Economic deprivation is related to "the level of lacking different goods, but also of important activities or amenities, intercepting financial stability and safety, conditions of habitation, food and spare time, that together constitute pillars for the quality of life" (Ulman 2021:783). If people in a certain society or community are excluded from the basic necessities for their normal subsistence can be considered economically deprived. The book of Ruth is one of the biblical literatures where economic deprivation is clearly highlighted in different perspectives. However, for the limitation of discussion this research will concentrate only on five aspects of this economic deprivation, namely: famine in the land of Judah (Ruth 1:1-2), the returning of Naomi to Judah for food (Ruth 1:6-7), Ruth picking up the leftover grain (Ruth 2:2-3), Ruth risking to find a home and be well provided (Ruth 3:1), and Naomi selling the piece of the land (Ruth 4:3-4).

3.1.3.1 Famine in the Land of Judah (Ruth 1:1-2)

The first indication of economic deprivation in the book of Ruth is described as a famine. The book begins with four characters of the same family (husband, wife and two sons), who fled a famine in Bethlehem and went to live in the land of Moab (Ruth 1:1). The head of the family is described as Elimelech, his wife is Naomi, and the two sons are Mahlon and Killion (Ruth 1:2). Famine is generally perceived as severe and prolonged hunger in a substantial proportion of the population of a region or a country, and it is characterized by the shortage of food (Devereux 2000:4). The book of Ruth uses the Hebrew word *raab* to describe this condition of economic deprivation, and the same word is also used in Deuteronomy 28:48 (as a curse to disobedience), in Amos 8:11 (as a famine of hearing the word of the Lord) and in Genesis 12:10 (as a severe shortage of food that made Abram and his wife to flee to Egypt). Though these texts use the same Hebrew word it is difficult to relate this famine in Ruth to other similar situations in the Old Testament. In other words, it is not easy to attest the historicity of this famine that prompted Elimelech and his family to flee to the land of Moab. But what is clear is that this shortage of food took place in the city of Bethlehem, in Judah (Ruth 1:1). In other words, Bethlehem is the location for the insider-outsider drama (Mangrum 2011:67).

There are two separate cities named Bethlehem in the Hebrew Bible, one is located in the southern territory of Judah (1 Sam 17:12) and the other *Beit Lehem ha Gelilit* (Josh 19-15-16), in the northern territory of Zebulun (Moskowitz 2015:154). Scholars like Nathan Moskowitz (2015:154) suggest that the Bethlehem mentioned in the book of Ruth is the one in the territory of Judah. In fact, Judah is mentioned as an attempt to differentiate this city with the other Bethlehem in Zebulun. Traditionally, Bethlehem of Judah has far greater historical importance and associations than Bethlehem of Zebulun (Moskowitz 2015:154). Further, Bethlehem of Judah was the famous town known primarily in Israelite history as the location for the King David's birth (Mangrum 2011:67). Bethlehem existed in the time of Jacob's return to Palestine (Gen 35:16-19), and it was originally called the Ephrath which meant fruitful (Gen 48:7) and it bears the name Bethlehem of Judah after the conquest of Canaan. Furthermore, this was a city of great importance since it was glorified as the birthplace of the dynasty of David (1 Samuel 16). Apart from what is mentioned in the book of Ruth, there is no other reference in the Bible of a famine in Bethlehem of Judah that forced migration; therefore, making it difficult to locate it within the history of Israel, and particularly in the time of Judges (as suggested by the narrator).

According to Beth Elness-Hanson (2021:112) Bethlehem, literally means a "house of bread." In fact, its root words are *beit* (dwelling) and *lehem* (bread). Moskowitz (2015:157) argues that the staff of life in ancient times, *lehem* means not only bread in particular, but food and sustenance, the warmth of hearth and home in general. This means that the name Bethlehem presupposes a desirable place, where food and other economic needs are provided to its inhabitants. Based on the historical importance of the city a severe famine would not have been expected in Bethlehem of Judah. Nonetheless, the book of Ruth presents ironically Bethlehem as a place of famine. In other words, the place that was supposed to be the house of bread has now turned into a house of economic deprivation. Since the land of *Beit-lehem* does not produce food, the family at the centre of the narrative is forced to sojourn in the country of Moab (Sutskover 2010:290). In fact, Elimelech flights from this place of historical plenty to the ominous land of Moab (Mangrum 2011:67). An interesting question would be: why Ruth's narrative ironically presents the house of bread as the house of famine? An attempt to respond to this question must consider the suggested post-exilic context of the book (see section 3.1).

Benjamin Mangrum (2011:68) seems to suggest an applausive explanation of the famine mentioned in the book of Ruth, when arguing that a "post-exilic audience would, of course,

have heard the difficulties of Elimelech's family with empathy." The post-exilic period is characterized by the returning of the remnant of those who had lived for generation in exile in Babylon (Jacobson 2013:5). But when they return to the land of Judah, their lives (as well as the lives of those who were left) were impoverished and tenuous since "the walls of the city had been destroyed, and they encountered an onslaught of social, economic, political, and religious dilemmas" (Mangrum 2011:68). Based on archaeological evidences, Gunther H. Wittenberg (1993:97) argues that after the Babylonian exile "all of the fortified towns in the heartland of Judah were razed to the ground and in most cases, they were not to [be] rebuilt for many years to come." This destruction impacted negatively on the economy of Judah (Carlos 2012:35). And people were deeply affected by a severe famine and there was no food for them to eat (2 Kings 25:3). Possibly, this might have created situations of migration of many people to other countries in order for them to find food and other economic necessities.

The economic reality of post-exilic Judah affected both the returning exiles and the peoples of the land. On one hand, the Israelites who were left in Palestine took over large estates abandoned by deported officials (Gottwald 1985:424) but most of them were the "poorest of the land" (2 Kings 25:12), less educated and less influential than those who went into exile (Farisani 2002:205). In other words, they had no sufficient skills to cope with the variation of annual rainfall and produce enough to fully cover the post-exilic economic demands. On the other hand, most of the returning exiles came from the leadership class (Farisani 2002:207) or worked on "state projects, such as irrigation, works in agriculture, or on building sites" (Wittenberg 1993:13). In other words, they had minimal skills to copy with climate anomalies and produce enough to sustain the economic needs of the nation; however, owning a productive land was not as easier as in the past when land was part of a traditional system of kinship values. This mean that the economic situation of Judah in post-exilic period was not good, and both the returning exiles and the people of the land were not able to eradicate famine and other economic adversity of the time.

It is not clear from which group (peoples of the land or returning exiles) Elimelech's family belong to, but this family represents many poor people in post-exilic Judah who could not cope with the economic deprivation of this context. And, as Masenya (2013:1) argues, "in the midst of undesirable circumstances, one, of necessity, has to leave one's comfort zone." In fact, both the people of the land and the returning exiles would have been forced to go to a foreign nation because of economic crisis that took place in their homeland (Mangrum 2011:68). This

assumption is supported by Faust (2011:99) who argues that "the devastation of cities and villages led to a process in which many of the survivors fled the region and migrated to safer and more hospitable places." These hospitable places included the land of Moab, previously known as an enemy of Israel. Though the historicity of the famine in Bethlehem is contested, its allusion in the book of Ruth demonstrates the signs of economic deprivation in the narrative. In other words, the sojourn of Elimelech's family because of famine must be understood as a personification of many Judeans who were forced to leave their country because of the economic situation in post-exilic context. The reference of Moab as the place where the Jews seek refuge seems to resonate well with the corrective assumption of Ruth towards the exclusivity ideology of post-exilic period. In short, the land that was not allowed to be associated with the Israelite community became the host or a refugee for those who could not cope with the economic hardship of Judah. The study will return to this aspect in section 3.1.3.3, but for now it is important to reflect on Naomi when returning to Judah for food.

3.1.3.2 Naomi Returns to Judah for Food (Ruth 1:6-7)

Another indicator of economic deprivation in the book of Ruth is attested by the returning of Naomi to Judah for food (Ruth 1:6-7). According to Ruth's narrative, Elimelech died after a certain period of their staying in Moab, and his sons (who had married Moabite women) also died after ten years, leaving their wives Ruth and Orpah as widows (Ruth 1:3-4). This was, indeed, the deepest tragedy imaginable in the ANE (De Villiers 2017:39). Though Naomi and her entire family went to Moab because of famine, she still enjoyed a relative economic security through the presence of her husband and children. Indeed, men in ancient Israel were the ones providing for their families, and it is assumed that Elimelech and his sons also were responsible for economic provision while they were still alive in the land of Moab. However, the death of the male characters (Elimelech, Mahlon and Killion) in the narrative, complicated the economic situation of the female characters (Naomi, Orpah, and Ruth) who could not enjoy the economic provision of their husbands and/or sons. This was a new family formed by three devastated women who had to cope with their agony, as well as face desperate situation since there were no men to take care of them (De Villiers 2017:39). This would have, indeed, been even worse to Naomi since she was in a foreign land without the support of the extended family.

It is not clear how the economic survival of widows in Moab was like, but it seems that the Ancient Near Eastern law provided some sort of protection to this social category. In fact, ancient Near Eastern societies were required to prevent the strong from oppressing the weak

and forbidden from handing over the orphan to the rich and the widow to the mighty or delivering the poor into the hands of the rich (Ephʿal-Jaruzelska 2020:198). This means that the protection of the widows (a sub-category of the weak) was an essential characteristic of the ancient Near Eastern concept of justice (Ephʿal-Jaruzelska 2020:198). Though the ancient Near Eastern concept of justice protected the widows (and the weak in general), it seems that Naomi and her daughters-in-law did not fully enjoy the economic benefits of this law. And this is evidenced by Naomi's plan to return home after hearing that "the Lord had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them" (Ruth 1:6). In other words, Naomi was empty and bitter because of her loss in Moab (Mason 2015:11), and when hearing the rumour of bread now available in the house of bread, she chooses to return with her daughters-in-law (Fewell 2015:82). This returning to Bethlehem suggests that Naomi (and her daughters-in-law) had few chances to capture economic opportunities in Moab. And going back to the land of Judah was the only option available for them in that context.

Before she departed from Moab, Naomi commanded her daughters-in-law to return to their parents and start life afresh (Ruth 1:8-13). In other words, economic concern for her two widowed daughters-in-law compels Naomi to urge them to leave and return to their mother's house so that they might find security through remarriage (Mason 2015:5). In Naomi's view, heterosexual marriage was the only option left for the two other widows (Ruth and Orpah) to secure their economic situation. However, the two widows (or Naomi's daughters-in-law) reacted differently to Naomi's view. One of them (Orpah) kissed her mother-in-law goodbye but Ruth (Mahlon's widow) refused to return and chose to go with Naomi to the land of Bethlehem (Ruth 1:14-18). This attitude of Ruth could be described as an act of loyalty not only to her mother-in-law, but also to the God of Israel. Indeed, through her choice to remain with her mother-in-law, Ruth in turn shows *hesed* (care and concern) to Naomi and to the entire family that she became part of through her choice to marry Naomi's son (Mason 2015:7). Therefore, Ruth is cited as an example of a devoted daughter-in-law "who risks her life by venturing into an uncertain future, not for the sake of her husband but because of her commitment to a widow" (Masenya 1998:82).

Though loyalty is suggested by biblical scholars it could be said that economic desires also encouraged Ruth to return with Naomi since the economic provision in Bethlehem seemed to be better compared to that of Moab. In fact, if life in Moab was better than that in Bethlehem (or Judah), possibly Ruth would not have decided to return to Judah with her mother-in-law.

Probably she would have decided to remain in Moab like Orpah and look for other economic possibilities in her homeland, as suggested by Naomi. But the reality shows that going to the house of bread was the best option for her. This means that her return not only is a show of loyalty but also a determined overstatement for the sake of her future economic stability. Hence, the returning of Naomi and her daughter-in-law to Judah for food also attests to the economic deprivation in the biblical book of Ruth. And this economic interaction between the Moabites and the Israelites also can be viewed as an attempt to correct the Israelite exclusivity ideology of the retuning exiles against the people of the land. This exclusivity ideology is discussed in chapter five. The next sub-section analyzes another indicator of economic deprivation in the biblical book of Ruth, represented by Ruth picking up leftover grain in Boaz's field to feed herself and her mother-in-law Naomi.

3.1.3.3 Ruth Picks Up the Leftover Grain (Ruth 2:2-3)

Ruth arrives in Bethlehem as a stranger and in a situation of disadvantage. Indeed, she is identified as "a Moabite, a foreigner from a land that had once been considered an enemy of Israel" (Mason 2015:8). According to Gerda de Villiers (2017:37) "Moab, for the most of its part, is regarded as a negative space in the Hebrew Bible and receives generally bad press." The land of Moab was associated with refusing to provide food and water to the Israelites on their journey from Egypt, as a result, Moabites were excluded from the assembly of the Lord (Dt 23:3-6). Besides that, the origin of this nation can be traced back to incest (Gen 19:30-37); and during the Israelites' wanderings through the desert, the Moabite king Balak overcome by fear for this awesome nation hires the soothsayer Balaam to curse them (Nm 22-23). This means that Moab was considered a national enemy like Egypt and Babylon (Jacobson 2013:6). And because of that, local people "might have felt some animosity or at least indifference toward Ruth and it is even possible that impoverished Israelites would have argued that foreigners like her were taking resources away from them" (Mason 2015:8). In other words, Israel was not a safe space for the Moabites, and this would have led Ruth to experience different types of hostilities in the land of Judah.

Ruth not only was a stranger from an enemy country, but she was also a widow. In ancient Israel, strangers and widows felt into the category of the disadvantaged people, alongside with orphans and the poor or the needy in general (Ex 22:21-23). According to Thomas M. Horner (1960:51) the Covenant Code demanded a humanitarian attitude toward the alien, the widow, the poor and the needy, because these people "fell outside of the socioeconomic system and

had to depend on charity of the community" (Mason 2015:10). The law also allowed the poor to glean the fields of the wealthier landowners, and it forbade property owners from stripping their fields clean during the harvest, they were to leave the edges, and anything accidentally missed for the poor and resident aliens who had no fields of their own to sow (Mason 2015:10). In the same line of thought, Gerda de Villiers (2017:41) states that the harvesters are instructed not to pick up sheaves that they forget or that accidentally fall out of the bundles, but to leave them on the ground for the marginalized in the society to pick up.

Though widows like Ruth did not own economic asserts (like land), the Israelite law provided some measures through which this social sector could survive in Bethlehem. Based on her deprived economic condition and the protection of the law, Ruth takes initiative and asks permission from her mother-in-law to go to the field and pick up the leftover grain behind anyone in whose eyes she finds favour (Ruth 2:2-3). In other words, Ruth (a Moabite woman) was forced to glean grain in Israel to support herself and her Israelite mother-in-law.

After being granted permission, Ruth ends up gleaning barley in a field belonging to Boaz (Ruth 2:3), who was a prosperous, land-owning farmer from Bethlehem and a relative to Naomi (Elness-Hanson 2021:113). The narrative tells us about Ruth's hard work that impressed not only Boaz but also the foreman of his harvesters (Ruth 2:7-9). Hardworking is typically a characteristic of desperate people, who have little choices in their lives. In fact, deprived people often would put every effort in whatever they do to guarantee their economic sustenance. And it seems that this is what has happened with Ruth, she worked hard the whole day so that when she goes home, she would have had at least something to minimize her condition of economic deprivation. Indeed, Boaz showed her favour and offered her his protection (Ruth 2:8-16). This means that her hard work was rewarded, and she was able to return home with a significant quantity of food for her and for her mother-in-law.

Accordingly, Ruth's initiative of picking up the leftover grain from the land of the rich also confirms the economic deprivation in the book of Ruth. Yet, this picking up of leftover grain also attests to the fact that the book of Ruth is an attempt to correct the ideology of exclusion practiced in post-exilic Judah. This aspect is exhaustively discussed in chapter five, but now the study will continue to analyze the indications of economic deprivation in the biblical book of Ruth, focusing specifically on Ruth when risking her life to find a home where she could be well provided.

3.1.3.4 Ruth Risks to Find a Home and Be Well Provided (Ruth 3:1)

Both Ruth and Naomi knew that the picking up of the leftover grain was a temporary solution for their economic deprivation. This means that they had to think for a more permanent or long-term solution to the problem. Certainly, with the end of the harvest season, tactical opportunities diminish (Fewell 2015:90). As a result, Naomi asks Ruth this rhetorical question: "My daughter, should I not try to find a home for you, where you will be well provided for?" (Ruth 3:1). This question suggests an initiative to set a plan in motion to assure that Ruth will have a home through marriage with Boaz (Mason 2015:11). Naomi's plan suggests that Ruth's body must be given to Boaz for them to have a home and be well provided[26]. In other words, Ruth's body must be used as a commodity which can be exchanged for economic benefits. This was a reality in the context of Ruth, in which poor people (especially poor women) were forced to transact their bodies to improve their living conditions.

According to Diane Jacobson (2013:6) in biblical law family issues were considered under the category of property, and the law of Israel controlled issues of sexuality, including viewing women's sexuality as the property of their fathers or husbands, to ensure protection of both family line and property. This means that there were no other credible options for women to be well provided unless they were assigned to a house whose head was a male figure. Since Ruth was a widow, and no longer living at her parent's house, the only option left for her was to become the property of a man through marriage. Naomi sees marriage between Ruth and Boaz as a path to financial security for herself and her daughter-in-law (Mason 2015:11). This is also supported by Danna Nolan Fewell (2015:90) when pointing out that seeking for Ruth, and indirectly for herself security, and knowing her own body no longer to be fertile ground, she uses Ruth's body as a down payment for economic and social stability. In other words, Naomi knew that her body would not have impressed Boaz and she used the fresh body of her daughter-in-law Ruth to seduce him.

As a starting point, Naomi persuades Ruth to wash and perfume herself, and put on her best clothes, and then go down to the threshing floor and meet Boaz after he had finished eating and drinking (Ruth 3:3). This has been pointed out as an instruction to go and seduce Boaz in his private space (De Villiers 2017:47). In fact, on the face of it, it seems that Naomi is sending

[26] According to Rhiannon Graybill (2021:322) "there are compelling reasons to consider Ruth as not just exploited, but exploited *by Naomi*. In addition to failing to return Ruth's affection while wallowing in her own bitterness, Naomi clearly uses Ruth to advance her own survival."

Ruth off to sleep with Boaz as any foreign widow with no family might do to earn some extra cash (Jacobson 2013:9). Though she is aware of the risks she might encounter, Ruth accepts whatever her mother-in-law says (Ruth 3:5). While accepting Naomi's plan, Ruth also risks numerous accusations, such as prostitution, promiscuity, entrapment, any of which can be easily tied, through allusion and stereotype, to her foreign identity (Fewell 2015:91). But it seems that Ruth has little choices due to her situation of deprivation, and she does exactly what Naomi has instructed her to do at the threshing floor (Ruth 3:7). In fact, people in situation of struggles are tempted to venture in any possibility offered for them to survive. And this was the case of Ruth and her mother-in-law, who had little options for them to improve their living standards, and they decided to venture in what was left to them, that is transactional sex with Boaz (a prosperous man in Bethlehem).

Though the book of Ruth never mentions poverty, "it is a fact that Naomi and Ruth are poor" (Siquans 2009:452). And their risky actions can be understood as a survival strategy, which confirms another indicator of economic deprivation in the book of Ruth. In other words, poverty or economic deprivation leads Ruth to risk enormous accusations (like prostitution, promiscuity or entrapment), going to the private place of Boaz at night to secure her future economic stability. In other words, an indecent Moabite woman goes to the private space of a decent Israelite man at night. Here again, the book poses a serious challenge to the exclusivity ideology of post-exilic community towards the others. In fact, Nehemiah's list of foreign woman includes Ashdodites, Ammonites, and Moabites (Rom-Shiloni 2011:135; Neh 13:23). Nevertheless, Naomi is presented persuading the indecent Ruth to transact her body with the decent Boaz for economic benefits. The study will return to this issue later in section 3.3, what follows in the next sub-section is another indicator of economic deprivation in the biblical book of Ruth, represented by Naomi selling the peace of the land.

3.1.3.5 Naomi Sells the Piece of the Land (Ruth 4:3-4)

The book of Ruth tells us about Naomi who is intending to sell the piece of the land, that belonged to her late husband (Ruth 4:3-4). Wittenberg (1991:58) states that Israel emerged as peasant community in which most of the people were agriculturalists and lived off the land. The land was given by God to the nation, and further generations inherited rights to use it (Dislers 2022:36). In fact, the land was called the inheritance of the fathers, and it was the property which was handed on from generation to generation as symbolized by the family tomb (Wittenberg 1991:58). Moreover, under the law of Israel childless widow was allowed to own

property (Mason 2015:11). And Naomi became a childless widow after the death of her husband and her two sons. Therefore, she was protected by the law to inherit the land of her late husband. However, the protection of the law did not allow Naomi to make use of this inheritance from her dead husband.

According to Denise Mason (2015:11) the property of Naomi's late husband had been out of his control at the time of his death since they had been out for many years because of famine in Bethlehem. The book of Ruth does not say anything about how Elimelech's family lost the control of their property. It is possible that Elimelech may have sold the land before he left Bethlehem, or a family member simply took possession of it while they were in the land of Moab. Nevertheless, at any rate, the property would not have been left unused for more than ten years. And under the laws of redemption, it is the duty of the nearest kinsman to buy the land that belongs to Elimelech's heir, who in this case is Naomi (Mason 2015:12). However, for Naomi to regain the control of the land she needed to have it redeemed from the person who is in possession of it (Mason 2015:10). This process would allow Naomi to regain control of the land that belonged to her late husband and use it to uplift her economic situation.

It has been said that "since land has little value unless there are laborers to work it and resources for payroll, land ownership does not guarantee self-sustainability" (Fewell 2015:92). Certainly, having land on someone's possession is a halfway for economic stability, but financial as well as human resources are indispensables conditions to make this property a valuable economic assert. In other words, for the land to be of any benefit, to truly own it, they need resources to cultivate it (Fewell 2015:93). Looking at the economic situation of Naomi, it becomes clear that she cannot afford to hire workers to cultivate it, so she needs to make arrangements to sell it (Mason 2015:11). And people like Boaz are good targets for this economic transaction. In fact, making an alliance with Boaz secures the land, the resources, and the future financial stability of Naomi and her daughter-in-law (Fewell 2015:93). So, Naomi's attempt to sell the piece of the land is another confirmation of economic deprivation in the book of Ruth. Therefore, attesting to an attempt to include marginalized voices within the economics of Israel. This attempt also confirms the critique of Ruth's narrative against the exclusivity ideology of post-exilic Judah practiced by the returning exiles against the people of the land.

Accordingly, the book of Ruth can be described as a family story in which the characters struggle for economic survival. The book highlights signs of economic deprivation which can be confirmed by the famine in the land of Judah, the returning of Naomi to Bethlehem for food,

the picking up of leftover grain by Ruth, the risking of Ruth to find a home and be well provided, and the selling of a piece of the land by Naomi. While economic deprivation is attested in the book of Ruth, an attempt to correct the exclusivity ideology practiced in post-exilic period is also apparent in the narrative. Having done this, the study will turn and look at the causes of this economic deprivation in Ruth's narrative.

3.1.4 Causes of Economic Deprivation in the Book of Ruth

The book of Ruth is a document of struggle, in which different characters experience economic deprivation. There are many issues that can be pointed out as the causes of economic deprivation in the biblical book of Ruth. However, for the limitation of discussion this research will group them into three categories, namely the masculinization of economy, the unequal distribution of land and the international economic pressure.

3.1.4.1 The Masculinization of Economy

Masculinization is a term borrowed from the field of social sciences to refer to the process of making an aspect of life into something that involves mainly men or is thought suitable for or typically of men (Brostron & Rauhut 2018:410). In other words, masculinization refers to a situation in life when man is the one deciding for the shape of a certain aspect in life, while woman is a passive agent. According to Aida Alvinius, Edward Deverell and Susanne Hede (2021:1551) masculinization is characterized by male dominating the society, men perceived as having experience and seniority to interpret social issues, and men as active critics against women's way of working and making decisions. In other words, masculinization is an oppressive and exclusivity system based on heteropatriarchal structure that make male superior and female subservient or inferior in different aspects of social life.

According to Betul Sari-Aksakal (2022:49) "in the use of labour, one of the primary production resources in economies, it can be said that there is a distribution in favour of men in many countries in terms of existing gender patterns." In fact, male figures not only claim the right of decision-makers, but also of dictating the economic shape in a society. Based on this assumption, masculinization of economy is understood, in this research, as the process of making the rules that determine the mechanisms of production, distribution and consumption of wealth into something that involves mainly men. And the book of Ruth as well as the entire Israelite community reflects this type of society, where economics is ruled by men. In other

words, men are the ones deciding about the economic shape in the biblical book of Ruth (including its context of production).

As a family story within the Israelite society, the book of Ruth is male oriented story, and female characters find themselves in a vulnerable place within the entire community because of the structure that supports the social system of heteropatriarchy and, as a result, creates female economic dependence (Mason 2015:10). Female characters must depend on male economic provision for their survival. Even characters like Naomi who appears to be a privileged woman [compared to Ruth], she remains oppressed because of the way in which the heteropatriarchal system in post-exilic Yehud did not permit her to be a legitimate owner of the productive land (Mtshiselwa 2016:3). Possibly, Naomi would have suggested another solution to the famine in Bethlehem instead of running to Moab, or her family of widows would have not suffered after the death of the male characters. But the masculinization of the rules that determine the mechanisms of production, distribution and consumption of wealth did not allow economic initiatives coming from female bodies. As a result, female bodies had to conform with the economic structure ruled by men in the narrative.

Thus, the masculinization of economy can be considered one of the main causes of economic deprivation in the book of Ruth. This masculinization excludes female bodies in leading decisions in economic transaction. And the failure of the male figure in providing economic security prompted economic deprivation of the female characters in the narrative. The following sub-section looks at the unequal distribution of land as another cause of economic deprivation in the biblical book of Ruth.

3.1.4.2 Unequal Distribution of Land

Unequal distribution of Land has been considered one of the main contributors of economic deprivation in many societies (Galli & Ronnback 2021:115). In fact, those who have access to more land are likely to gain high economic standards while those who do not own any piece of land are likely to end in economic deprivation. This has been a reality in modern as well as ancient societies, where people experience various economic disturbances such as low per capita income, stagnant growth, and other interrelated socio-economic tribulations that emerge due to the unequal distribution of land (Tiwari, Mishra and Maurya 2020:926). And these socio-economic tribulations affect mainly most of the land dispossessed people while benefiting certain minor groups who own large portions of land.

Though the book of Ruth does not mention unequal distribution of land, it reflects an economic model shaped by this reality. Indeed, the book of Ruth is all about land and land ownership and their material and other rewards, because its plots centres on harvest and harvest time, in agriculture as in the human social community (Mtshiselwa 2016:5). The harvest process in the book of Ruth reflects two categories of people: the majority of the harvesters and the minority of landowners. In other words, people like Boaz represents the minority of those who had access to more land while the majority of the reapers in Boaz's field did not possess the land (Masenya 2013:1). Looking at this reality, becomes clear that the issues of unequal distribution of land is one of the causes of economic deprivation in the book of Ruth (including its context of production). However, a clear picture of this unequal distribution of land must be traced back to the introduction of Monarchy in Israel and its centralized mode of production, which continued throughout post-exilic Judah, in which the narrative is located.

According to Matthew Philipp Whelan (2017:212) throughout the Old Testament, land as an inheritance is variously described as the possession of Israel (Dt 4:21; 15:4), of its tribes (Josh 11:23; 17:6), and of a particular house (Josh 24:28; Judges 2:6; Kings 21:3). In other words, the land was given by God as a blessing to the people, and it was not supposed to be sold permanently (Lev 25:23). This means that everyone was supposed to have a piece of land for his/her economic survival. And this could only be held in the form of patrimony which could not pass out of the family (Gora 2008:50). However, with the introduction of Monarchy everything changed. The land that was a blessing turned into an object for sale and trade, it became an object of economic relations, which had nothing to do with the concept of land given as a blessing (Dislers 2022:40). As a result, these economic changes affected negatively most of the Israelites communities who became landless people because of the tributary economic system introduced by Monarchy.

It has been said elsewhere in this research (see section 3.1.1.2) that monarchy introduced an economic system of taxation. Part of it was paid in the form of grain to the king, who was understood as a god who gives life to his people (Gora 2008:55). In other words, the economic exploitation of rural peasants was religiously sanctioned. This system was used to secure the luxury of the kingdom as well as to support the official army that was formed to defend the external and internal treats. For instance, in Solomon's reign and that of his successors, the tributary system reached its critical stage where the peasants were left with no means for survival and were forced to take out survival-loans from the wealthy moneylenders, which led

them to dependence or debt-slaves because of the high interest rates (Chaney 1993:258-259). Most of these rural peasants could not afford to live on and pay taxes from their agricultural surplus and so they relied on debts from the rich merchants living in cities, who then charged them high rates (West 1999:14).

Kennedy Gora (2008:55) argues that in some cases people failed to pay their duties and lost their lands. This happened, for instance, in times of natural calamities or other unforeseen circumstances that could prevent them from paying tax (including paying their debts from the rich merchants) from their agricultural surplus. In support to this idea, Whelan (2017:216) states that when economic disaster comes upon a household, people might hand over not only their land but also their lives because they have no other way to survive. Indeed, heavy taxation of goods and the conscription of young men for military duty impoverished many families, already pressed to the limit by seasonal drought and other threats to the harvest such as locusts, fungi, and invading armies (Crenshaw 2010:268). In other words, failing to pay their debts borrowed from the rich merchants meant that their land was taken and driven to poverty (including selling themselves into slavery).

In addition to that, with the introduction of the concept of specialization of crop production, much of the land was taken over by the state from the peasants, which used forced labour to ensure maximum production in these specialized fields (Gora 2008:55). As a result, the monarchy created a new group of people who were not affiliated to the land and they prosperous through corruption and dishonest profiteering (Dislers 2022:40). This is, in fact, a very simple and clear show of the origins of corruption in the Bible (Dieslers 2022:40). And this is vividly seen in the account of Naboth's vineyard, in which Naboth was killed by king Ahab by refusing to relinquish his ancestral inheritance in response to king Ahab's desire for it (see Whelan 2017:213 and 1 Kings 21). In other words, the warning pronounced by Samuel (see 1 Sam 8:14ff) was fulfilled in the account of Naboth's vineyard (Dislers 2022:40). The assassination of Naboth and consequently the stealing of his land (or plot?), represents many Israelites who were victimized by the tributary system of the nation.

The book of Ruth does not mention unequal distribution of land, but it reflects an economic system shaped by this reality. The introduction of monarchy (and its tributary economic system) created a situation where more and more land ended up in the hands of a powerful minority population while most of the population became landless and economically deprived. This situation also remained the same in post-exilic period, in which the book of Ruth is

located. Thus, unequal distribution of land is another factor that contributed to the economic deprivation described in the book of Ruth. The section that follows analyzes another cause of economic deprivation in Ruth, which is the international economic pressure.

3.1.4.3 International Economic Pressure

The post-exilic period has been suggested elsewhere in this research as the historical setting of the book of Ruth (see section 3.1 above). This was a period of reconstruction of the Jewish identity after the fall of Jerusalem in 587 BCE and the exile of the upper class from Judah to Babylon (Crenshaw 2010:268). When Persia conquered Babylon in 539 BCE a new religious, political, and economic era emerged in Judah (Richter 2020:554). In fact, Cyrus the Great "issued an edict allowing Hebrew exiles to return to their homeland" (Betlyon 2005:6). This was an opportunity for the descendants of the deportees to return to the land of their ancestors and rebuild their identity. For those who returned, among them priests and scribes, it remained to try to regain control of the city of Jerusalem and the temple that had been lost with the destruction caused by the Babylonians (De Moura 2020:2). Though the edict of Cyrus could be described as an act of benevolence towards the descendants of the deportees, this was also part of the imperial and colonial strategy of Persia of control and expansion. In fact, all imperial powers in the ANE "collaborated with the local elites, exploited economy, increased taxes, invaded and expanded territories, and brutally crushed any rebellions", and local leadership could either cooperate or suffer at their hands (Goh 2019:100). For instance, Persia demanded from its subject people three types of tax: a tribute tax paid annually to the Persian monarch, a toll tax which was probably paid to use roads or bridges, and a land tax which was in connection with the fields and vineyards (Farisani 2002:239). Based on this it could be argued that the edict of Cyrus was not an act of benevolence, but part of its strategy of domination and collection of taxes and tributes.

To ensure an efficient collection of these taxes and tributes, the Persian bureaucracy combined a dual organizational principle of centralization and decentralization, whereby the central government was in absolute control of the bureaucracy and the satrapal system provided adequate flexibility in the administration of provincial and district/local territories (Farazmand 2003:398). According to Gerstenberger (2020:112), the question of the distribution of property in Yehud is of general importance because all of the land, even in the conquered regions, belonged to the Persian emperor. This means that land in conquered territories and its inhabitants are owned by the Persian emperor as his property. The custom, however,

Gerstenberger (2020:112) continues, was that peasant families lived on the family property and paid taxes to the king until they possibly became financially insolvent. This imperial policy supports the assumption that the edict of Cyrus was not an act of generosity, but it was part of its imperial strategy to maximize the collection of taxes and make it more flexible.

The economic reality of peasants in post-exilic period is described as miserable because they had to pay indirect tax to and labor for the local officers who were usually identified with the traitors who devoted themselves to work for the foreign superpower (Ro 2008:604). Farazmand (2003:408-9) also attests to misery of peasants when stating that they had to pay heavy imperial price of taxation and supply of labor. These heavy taxes were used by the imperial administration to "continually finance high expenses for the court, the construction of expensive palaces and government buildings, army, navy, and warfare, traffic technology, infrastructures, and similar public tasks (Gerstenberger 2012:57). Johannes Un-Sok Ro (2008:604-605) argues that the interest of tax for the king of the Persian Empire amounted to at least 12.5 percent, and there is some evidence of more common rates in the range between forty and sixty percent through Judea. This means that, peasants had to sustain the luxury of the local leadership as well as the imperial demands. And this economic hardship was facilitated by coinage, which expedited international commerce while communicating the ideological and political identity of the empire (Richter 2020:561). In fact, the post-exilic society in Palestine created a new upper-class, whose ideal was "subservient devotion to the foreign superpower without any consideration for whether their own brothers and sisters were exploited in the colonial economic system" (Ro 2008:605).

The book of Ruth does not make a clear connection between economic deprivation and the international economic pressure. However, the historical context of the narrative suggests an economic reality shaped by Persian colonial reality. In fact, the post-exilic context era "could be construed as a period that was characterized by quickly rising prices" (Becking 2014:238). Crop failure because of drought and a network of obligations (including imperial taxes) are two reasons pointed out by Becking (2014:240) for this quickly rising prices. In other words, produce from the farmsteads and villages of Yehud was being collected, stored, and redistributed as an aspect of imperial rule (Richter 2020:559). As a result, poorer classes emptied their reserves, they had to sell their plots of land and had mortgaged their acres to pay off existing debts or meet the requirements of the taxes, and others were forced to sell themselves or their children as slaves (Becking 2014:240-241). This means that Persia added

to the existent economic struggle of peasants in post-exilic Judah through its imperial obligations (including taxes and tributes).

This economic hardship may have created a situation of starvation to most rural peasants. And people like Elimelech, who could not cope with the situation, would have been forced to leave their homeland and seek better economic opportunities in foreign countries like Moab. In fact, famine-related migrations always were vivid experiences of ancient people in the so-called Fertile Crescent, and in the Persian epoch, the economic situation in Palestine also seems to have been at times precarious (Gerstenberger 2012:113). Thus, the international economic pressure can be suggested as another factor that contributed to economic deprivation described in the book of Ruth. While some biblical texts share the euphoria of those who celebrated the Persian conquest as deliverance, others intimate that it was precisely under Persian aegis that the gap between rich and poor was wider than otherwise (Gerstenberger 2012:58). In fact, it was during this Persian period that the Jews were allowed to return home after the Babylonian deportation, but in the same period economic inequalities increased drastically in Judah.

Accordingly, the biblical book of Ruth is a family story in the Israelite community characterized by economic deprivation, which can be attested by famine in the land of Judah, the returning of Naomi to Bethlehem for food, Ruth picking up the leftover grain in Boaz's field, Ruth risking for a home and be well provided and Naomi selling the piece of the land. This economic deprivation forced some of the characters in the text to see transactional sex as a solution to their struggles. The main causes of this economic deprivation in the book can be pointed out as the masculinization of economy, unequal distribution of land and the international (Persian) economic pressure. Having done this, the following section will analyze the representations of sexualities in the biblical book of Ruth.

3.2 Sexual Representations in the Book of Ruth

The Bible says little about sexuality, but sex is one of those God-given gifts which have made or broken people through the years (Masenya 2013:7). However, the question of where or when or with whom it is supposed to happen, has been, and continues to be, the subject of discussions by religious authorities and the laity alike (Masenya 2013:7). In addition, "sexual readings of the Bible have not been done seriously outside the borders of the sexual traditions of the church" (Althaus-Reid 2000:130). And the sexual stories that we hear most are those belonging to the top (heterosexual, marital and reproductive), but other possible sexual stories receive no

attention (Althaus-Reid 2000:135). Therefore, this section aims to illustrate multiple representations of sexuality in the book of Ruth, focusing mainly on the traditional heterosexual orientation as well as the ambiguous sexualities of the book.

3.2.1 The Heterosexual Dimension in Ruth's Narrative

The book of Ruth does not mention the concept of heterosexuality, but it describes situations where this type of sexual orientation is implied. The story of Ruth begins with a fine traditional family, constituted by a father, wife and two sons (Ruth 1:1). This suggests a possible traditional heterosexual family, in which male bodies and female bodies are presupposed to be attracted to each other. Another possible heterosexual orientation can also be suggested in the marriage of Elimelech's sons (Ruth 1:4) as well as when Boaz takes Ruth as his wife (Ruth 4:13). Though multiple interpretations can be suggested, these texts point out primarily to heterosexual transactions between opposite sexes. In other words, these texts suggest that men and women possess biological and anatomical differences that complement each other in marital and sexual union (Sprinkle 2014:516). And in modern language this could be described as the heterosexual dimension of the book of Ruth.

David M. Carr (2000:3) argues that ancient Israel was largely subsistence, agricultural society; and within such a culture, women were under pressure constantly to reproduce, because they were the key agents in the replenishment of a generation within the space of the decade or so of their reproductive lives. Though sexual attractions between bodies could have been experienced in ancient Israel, the production of offspring was more valued within heterosexual relationships. In support to this idea, Brett Krutzsch (2015:552) points out that in traditional heterosexuality, marriage "functioned as a legitimate way to produce offspring." Indeed, Hebrew society only had two main roles for women; they either lived in their father's house as unmarried virgins or as faithful child-bearing wives in the homes of their husbands or their husband's family (Mason 2015:5). In other words, it was both unusual and painful for women to live isolated lives or without children in ancient Israel. This means that women were powerless if not attached to men or not having an offspring.

Though this did not happen, society would have expected children from Mahlon and Killion from their heterosexual marriages with the Moabite women. In fact, infertility or barrenness was a deep tragedy, and a life without children was life in all its emptiness (De Villiers 2017:38). Furthermore, Naomi is only applauded by other women in Bethlehem when a male

child (or the ancestor of the Davidic dynasty) was born out of the marriage between Ruth and Boaz (Ruth 4:14). Indeed, Naomi's emptiness has changed to a life of fulness when she nurses the child on her lap (De Villiers 2017:49). Though sexual attraction could be considered in traditional heterosexual marriage, the primary expectation of marriage was a production of children (or offspring). And this expectation is also apparent in the biblical book of Ruth.

In ancient Israel, children were necessary for the continuation of family (Jacobson 2013:10); not only for the expansion of one individual family unit, but for the nation in general (De Villiers 2017:49). For instance, Ruth's son (Obed) not only guarantees the continuity of his family, but he also became the ancestor of David, the great king of the nation (Ruth 4:17). Additionally, in society based on "small-scale agriculture where the family constitutes a self-sufficient economic unit each child (especially male child) is welcome as an addition to its labor strength" (Mendelsohn 1948:38). Certainly, children in ancient Israel were produced to assist with the subsistence and economic stability of the family, and a barren wife represented a seemingly insurmountable obstacle to one of the primary functions of heterosexual marriage (White 2014:18). And during the setting of the book of Ruth, heterosexual marriage was also the primary means for people to ensure some level of security and safety (Krutzsch 2015:552).

Accordingly, heterosexual relationship represents one of the possible sexual dimensions of the book of Ruth, where male and female bodies presuppose to possess biological and anatomical differences that complement each other in marital and sexual union. However, heterosexuality is not the only sexual dimension of the book of Ruth, other possible and ambiguous sexualities can be suggested from some of its characters. Therefore, the following sub-section will highlight some ambiguous sexualities portrayed by some characters in the biblical book of Ruth to suggest other possible sexual activities not accepted or silenced in ancient Israel.

3.2.2 Ambiguous Sexualities in Ruth's Narrative

According to Althaus-Reid (2000:126) "the role of sexual stories in theology has been to repeat and reinforce (hetero) sexual imaginations beyond naturalization processes by divinizing them, but also by concealing the questioning of reality and obstructing the creative imagination to find alternative ways of life" (Althaus-Reid 2000:126). This attitude is based on what Krutzsch (2015:542) calls "hetero-presumptive", referring to readings of the text that are informed by the assumption that men are attracted to women and vice versa. Consequently, other possible sexual voices in the Bible are ignored or suppressed by theologians or biblical interpreters.

However, the book of Ruth provides scholars and biblical interpreters with opportunities to argue for the presence of non-heterosexual love and commitment in the Bible (Krutzsch 2015:543). This is because the book of Ruth is full of ambiguities in terms of sexual performances and behaviours of some of its characters. In fact, the story of Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz is "a biblical example of not only same-sex love, but also relational and procreative strategies that are affirming and life-giving for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered people" (West 2019:51). For Mona West (2019:51), Ruth and Naomi's refusal to accept their fate as childless widows in a society that measured women's worth according to husbands and sons provides the Queer community with an example for refusing to accept their marginalized status as sexual minorities in a heterosexist, patriarchal society. Therefore, this section aims to analyze ambiguous sexualities in the biblical book of Ruth, focusing mainly on the failure of masculinity in Mahlon and Killion, Ruth clinging to Naomi, and unclear sexuality of Boaz.

3.2.2.1 The Failure of Masculinity in Mahlon and Killion

The concept of masculinity has enjoyed considerable attention within gender studies in modern scholarship (see Chitando & Chirongoma 2012:5). Generally, the term masculinity has been used to refer to a specific gender identity belonging to individuals who have specific experiences (feelings, thinking, and behaviour) of what it means to be a male person (Owino 2012:67). According to Susan E. Haddox (2016:5) the Hebrew Bible exhibits a range of masculinities, which at times conform to larger cultural constructions and at other times present alternative models. In other words, there is no unanimous idea about masculinity in the ancient Israelite society. Thus, the plural understanding of masculinities in the Hebrew Bible must be accepted than its singular suggestion (Chitando & Chirongoma 2012:5). However, it was commonly expected in ancient Israel that a man should marry and have children, especially sons who will continue his name (Haddox 2016:9). This means that sexual impotence or not having children could be considered a failure of one's masculinity.

The book of Ruth presents two characters (Mahlon and Killion) whose masculinity seems to be a clear failure. Indeed, Mahlon and Killion are described in the narrative as Elimelech's sons and who married two Moabite women, known as Orpah and Ruth (Ruth 1:4).[27] Marriage in ANE was normally a contractual relationship entered into at the initiative of the bride's father or the son (Crenshaw 2010:271). But in some cases, women themselves could express their

[27] Ruth was Mahlon's wife and Orpah was Killion's wife (see Ruth 4:10).

sexual desires (Crenshaw 2010:274). Though it is not clear who initiated this marriage between Elimelech's sons and the Moabite women, the society expected children from them to honour the name of the family (Haddox 2016:9). In the same line of thought, Kayla White (2014:18) argues that a childless marriage was not a full-fledged marriage. However, after ten years of marriage Mahlon and Killion died without offspring (Ruth 1:4-5). This was, indeed, a disgrace for the entire family, which could lead to questions like: why Mahlon and Killion did not have children from their marriages? Was this because they were not performing their sexual duties? If performing, was this because they were not fertile? Or because their wives were barren? These are critical questions in attempting to understand the reason behind this failure of masculinity in both Mahlon and Killion.

It is important to note that the barrenness of women in the Hebrew Bible is more pronounced than the infertility of men (White 2014:18). This is because biblical narratives are always informed by the viewpoint, agenda and ideologies of the biblical authors, usually male (De Villiers 2012:3). Moreover, ancient understandings of biology identified the woman as the receptacle and the man as the filler of the receptacle (hence the sexual imagery when Boaz fills Ruth's cloak in 3:15). Based on this patriarchal understanding, one could assume that Mahlon and Killion did not have children because their wives were barren. However, a variety of legal parameters in ANE suggests alternative options for barren wives, such as allowing the husband to take a second wife, to provide a biological heir (White 2014:18). In fact, Mahlon and Killion would have tried their second chances marrying second wives to honour their family with children, if Orpah and Ruth were not fertile. But the text is silent about this option. This means that the dishonour of the family was more likely to be a problem of Mahlon and Killion, and not their wives. And the final chapter in the narrative also attests to this assumption because a male child was born out of the marriage between Ruth and Boaz (Ruth 4:13). In other words, when Ruth found a fertile man, she was able to conceive and bear a male child. This means that Mahlon and Killion represent a failure of traditional masculinity in the book of Ruth.

The reasons of failure of masculinity in Mahlon and Killion are not clear, but this opens rooms to suggest sexual ambiguities in these characters. The argument here is not to describe Mahlon and Killion as gays or transgender characters, but to show that their sexual ambiguities in the narrative point to other possible sexualities that were not accepted in ancient Israel. In short, it is possible that Mahlon and Killion had non-heterosexual feelings or orientations, but because of the social reality around them, they were forced to enter heterosexual marriages. James L.

Crenshaw (2010:275) argues that ancient Israelite codes of law condemn same-sex practices (Lev 18:22; 20:13), bestiality (Lev 18:23; 20:15-16), and cross dressing (Dt 22:5). These and other sexual practices were condemned because they were viewed as damaging man's honour as well as defiling the land (Carr 2000:4). Therefore, it could be argued that Mahlon and Killion entered marriage with women to meet the expectation of the society and not because they were attracted to these women. Indeed, the marriages of Mahlon and Killion are not necessarily the culmination of a love story, nor does it unambiguously suggest that they are attracted to the women they acquired, much less to women in general (Krutzsch 2015:551). In other words, marriage is not, in and of itself, a signifier of sexual or physical attraction (Krutzsch 2015:550). In the same line of thought, it could be suggested that the marriages of Elimelech's sons with the Moabites women did not signify sexual or physical attraction between them, but an attempt to meet the expectation of the society. Thus, the failure of masculinity in Mahlon and Killion represents one of the ambiguous sexualities in the book of Ruth.

3.2.2.2 Ruth Clinging to Naomi

Another ambiguous sexuality in Ruth's narrative can be suggested in the relationship between Ruth and Naomi. These two characters are introduced in Ruth's narrative holding on traditional heterosexual roles. Naomi is a mother-in-law while Ruth is a daughter-in-law (Ruth 1:4-7). But the situation seems to change when Naomi decided to send back her daughters-in-law (Orpah and Ruth) to their families before her departure to Judah for food (Ruth 1:8-13). According to the narrative, Orpah understood the reasons why Naomi did not want to go with them to Bethlehem, but the attitude of Ruth shows an opposite direction. In other words, Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye while Ruth clung to her (Ruth 1:14).

The Hebrew Bible describes the attitude of Ruth towards Naomi as *dabad*, which is often translated as clinging, cleaving, or staying close. Krutzsch (2015:544) argues that since this Hebrew word is the same in Genesis 2:24 when a man leaves his parents and cling to a wife, some scholars suggest the verses underscores the bond, potentially romantic, that is forged between Ruth and Naomi. One of the notable scholars in this line of thought is Megan Warner (2017:278) who argues that the verb *dabad* or cling appears four times in the book of Ruth (1:14, 2:8, 2:21 and 2:23), and none of these instances is directly related to marriage, but "the central focus of the book is the unlikely, even scandalous, marriage union between Boaz and the Moabite woman who became the ancestor of King David." This romantic suggestion of the word *dabad* also can be supported by Ruth's response to Naomi when she was insisted to go

back to her family (Ruth 1:15). She says: “don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you; where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay; your people will be my people and your God my God; where you die I will die, and there I will be buried; and may the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me” (Ruth 1:16-17). Based on this response it could be argued that Ruth’s love for her mother-in-law Naomi reflected an extraordinary loyalty (Stahlberg 2008:464). In other words, Ruth’s response is presented in a form of declaration often used in (heterosexual) marriage ceremonies; therefore, opening space for ambiguities in terms of her sexuality.

According to Krutzsch (2015:543) Ruth’s declaration can be read as an admission of a deep romantic connection between the two female characters, or at least of love that Ruth feels for Naomi if it is not reciprocated. In addition, L. Cushing Stahlberg (2008:464) states that “these declarations are directed toward someone of the same sex” as an encouragement to some interpreters looking for models of same-sex love in the biblical text. Once again, this research is not categorically assuming a lesbian relationship between Ruth and Naomi, but the ambiguous relationship between these two characters suggests other possible sexualities not accepted or silenced in ancient Israelite. In other words, there is a possibility of non-heterosexual feelings and attraction in these two female characters (Ruth and Naomi). In fact, “if Ruth had declared such unwavering loyalty to Boaz, which she never does, the language of those verses could easily be used as evidence of love and devotion between the male and female protagonists” (Krutzsch 2015:543).

It has been argued that in ancient Israel the prohibition of same-sex practices focused exclusively on male-male intercourse, and other forms of same-sex sexualities are not mentioned (Carr 2000:4). And the death penalty for homosexuality, specifically stated only with reference to men, and the punishment is more severe than elsewhere in the ANE (Crenshaw 2010:275). The absence of a death penalty for lesbians has been understood as a result of the lack of penetration, but it seems more likely that the law covering homosexuality was inclusive (Crenshaw 2010:276). This means that the prohibition of same-sex practices in Israel was more concerned about penetration and not necessarily a romantic attraction between different bodies. Consequently, the law does not say much about lesbians or other sexual practices that did not involve penetration.

Thus, the heterosexual marriages of Ruth (and possibly Naomi too) were driven by the socio-legal and economic demands of the context and not their sexual attraction with male characters.

In other words, Ruth's marriage to Naomi's son and then Boaz is not necessarily evidence of sexual attraction to men, but the only viable option available in ancient Israel for women to secure some modicum of financial security (Krutzsch 2015:543). Thus, Ruth clinging to Naomi represents another ambiguous sexuality in the book of Ruth that was not accepted or encouraged in ancient Israel (including the context of the book of Ruth).

3.2.2.3 Unclear Sexuality of Boaz

The last ambiguous character that this research has identified in the book of Ruth is Boaz. This character (Boaz) is introduced in the narrative as a man of standing and from the clan of Elimelech (Ruth 1-2:3). When readers first encounter Boaz, he appears to be a landowner with some degree of wealth but no known marital or conjugal relationships with women (Krutzsch 2015:541). As a man (an adult) of good standing in the Israelite society and with some degree of economic stability the reader would have expected from Boaz some signs of conjugal relationship with women before he marries the Moabite woman. But the text does not mention any other marital relationship of Boaz before he takes Ruth as his wife. Hence, becoming unclear if Boaz was a widow or a lifelong bachelor or a polygamist before his encounter with the Moabite woman. And this uncertainty in the narrative makes Boaz an ambiguous character in terms of his sexuality. This ambiguity of Boaz in terms of his sexuality suggests non-heterosexual feelings or attractions condemned in ancient Israel.

It is interesting to note that Boaz does not take Ruth as his wife so that he can be with the person he loves (Krutzsch 2015:550) but to maintain the name of the dead with his property (Ruth 4:5). Though Ruth was a woman of noble character (Ruth 3:11), Boaz does not express any sign of love or sexual attraction towards her. This could suggest that economic desires (more productive land) may have forced Boaz to take Ruth as his wife. This attitude attests to his ambiguity in terms of his sexuality, which falls into the category of queer or a zone of possibilities, always inflected by a sense of potentiality that it cannot yet articulated (Althaus-Reid 2000:64). In other words, Boaz represents what is transgressive or opposed to societal norms, particularly with respect to sexuality and gender identity (Cheng 2011:5). In fact, to describe Boaz as a queer figure is to underscore that he could be primarily attracted to men, attracted to men and women, largely without sexual desires for anyone, or experience any number of other sexual desires and possibilities (Krutzsch 2015:542). The text does not provide evidence that Boaz has sexual or loving relationships with men, but his unclear sexuality suggests other types of sexual activities forbidden in ancient Israel.

This sexual ambiguity of Boaz also can be confirmed by his attitude in the threshing floor episode. This episode uses a sexually suggestive vocabulary, such as the setting of a bed at night, the characters of male and female, a bachelor and a widow, which prepares the readers to think of sexual activities taking place at that space (Benítez 2016:36-37). However, the text remains unclear if any sexual activity took place at that night between Boaz and Ruth. Even if sex occurred, "Ruth is the active sexual agent in the story, not Boaz" (Krutzsch 2015:548). Indeed, Ruth is the one who uncovers Boaz's leg[28] and wait for his reaction (Fischer-Yinon 2002:686). And the reaction of Boaz is unexpected. The text tells us that the man got startled and probably jumped (Benítez 2016:37). In other words, if Ruth went into the threshing floor to seduce Boaz her plans seem to have not stimulated Boaz's sexual feelings. Moreover, Ruth is the one asking the kinsman Boaz to spread the corner of his garment over her (Ruth 3:9). And this has been viewed as implying a sexual proposal between Ruth and the kinsman-redeemer (De Villiers 2017:48). Nevertheless, Ruth is the one proposing this sexual relationship, not Boaz. While Ruth is the active character, Boaz is the passive sexual agent in this episode. Even if Boaz felt some sexual attraction with Ruth to this moment "he has not taken any steps to move their relationship to the next level" (Neely 2014:57). Therefore, making Boaz unclear or queer character in terms of his sexuality.

After the threshing floor episode, the narrative moves Boaz to the town-gate scenario, where he negotiated both the land and the marriage with Ruth (Ruth 4:1-12). And finally, a male child was born out of their marriage (Ruth 4:13). However, the fact that Boaz eventually marries Ruth and produces progeny with her does not unequivocally reveal anything about his sexuality (Krutzsch 2015:545). His sexuality remains ambiguous, and this can be used to suggest other sexual preferences in the book of Ruth. Moreover, this reminds us that even in the midst of hostile environments, ambiguous sexualities are able to create communities that affirm their relationships, provide protection, and sustain them (West 2019:51). In short, Boaz's unclear sexuality suggests other possible sexualities not accepted in ancient Israel.

Accordingly, the book of Ruth is primarily shaped by the dominant heterosexual relationship, where male and female presuppose to possess biological and anatomical differences that complement each other in marital and sexual union, to produce offspring for the continuity of the family and for its economic security. However, the narrative also suggests non-heterosexual relationships not accepted in ancient Israel. And this can be attested by the failure of

[28] The euphemism of male sexual organ in the Bible (Ex 4:25, Jdg 3:24, 1Sa 24:3, Eze 16:25).

masculinity of Mahlon and Killion, Ruth clinging to Naomi, and the unclear sexuality of Boaz. The ambiguity of these characters suggests a queer description in terms of their sexualities and can be used to argue for the presence of non-heterosexual love and commitment in the Bible. The next section will understand how economics and sexuality intersect in the book of Ruth.

3.3 The Intersections Between Economic Struggles and Sexual Struggles in Ruth

Economics and sexuality are two different concepts usually explored separately in the book of Ruth. The intersection between them has not been explored fully by biblical scholars. On one hand, biblical scholars pay attention to the economic dimension of the narrative while ignoring its sexual dimension (Siquans 2009; Masenya 2004 and 2013; Ramaribana 2013; and Mtshiselwa 2016). On the other hand, scholars interrogate sexual dimensions of the book while paying little attention to its economic dimensions (Stahlberg 2008; Krutzsch 2015). In other words, scholars tend to pay attention on one aspect while ignoring the other. Therefore, this section aims to analyze three moments in the narrative of Ruth where these intersections can be explored: in Moab when Ruth and Naomi were preparing to go to Judah, in Bethlehem at the threshing floor when Ruth visited Boaz in his private space, and in the town gate when Boaz negotiated the redemption of the land and the marriage with Ruth.

3.3.1 Moab: On the Road to Judah

One of the spaces where economics and sexuality intersect in Ruth's narrative is Moab, specifically on the road when Naomi and Ruth were preparing to go to Judah, after hearing the rumour of bread now available in Bethlehem (Ruth 1:6). At this point Naomi persuades her daughters-in-law (Orpah and Ruth) to return home and find rest in the home of another husband (Ruth 1:9). For Naomi, Orpah and Ruth should give their bodies to men for them to secure their economic stability. Naomi's suggestion reflects a context controlled by a dominant heteronormative economic structure, where the economic shape is male oriented. In fact, all the family members in the ANE were subordinate to the paterfamilias, to whom belonged the decision-making authority in all matters (Volkmar 2011:107). This means that women were persons having inferior rights and receiving protection and sustenance only by their familial affiliation (Volkmar 2011:107). Based on this heteronormative economic structure Naomi sees heterosexual marriage as the only option available for Orpah and Ruth to secure their economic situation after the death of Mahlon and Killion.

According to Ilona Rashkow (2022:151) biblical law rests upon a strict patrilineal principle of inheritance that prevents the transfer of land via the daughter to the clan of her husband. In the same line of thought, V. Ndikhokele Mtshiselwa (2016:2) points out that "the need to transfer continuity and ownership of productive land to a husband or son enables the view that the legitimate authority and access to land was exclusive to men." This means that women in Israel were often excluded from the inheritance of the land. The only inheritance rights given to women in the Bible are when there are no sons (Rashkow 2022:151). And women "solely benefited from the ownership and use of productive land through their relationship with a male figure" (Mtshiselwa 2016:2). This male figure could be a husband or a father. This means that there were little options for those women who were not attached to a male figure. Thus, Naomi sees marriage as the only viable option to secure the economic stability of Orpah and Ruth.

Marriage in ancient Israel was also a form of economic arrangement, where the father or eldest brother of the groom usually approached the bride's parents or guardians to negotiate the details, which included a bride-price provided by the groom's family and a dowry provided by the bride's parents or guardians (Rashkow 2022:144). And among the various factors considered in the negotiations were economic advantages and the expansion of the kinship network (Rashkow 2022:144). This means that the participants of these arrangements should have at least approximate economic standard or some communitarian connections. Based on this heteronormative economic structure, it could be said that some female bodies were forced to transact their bodies for economic survival, and not necessarily because they were sexually attracted to men. Therefore, Naomi's suggestion in Ruth's narrative reflects how economics and sexuality intersect in the setting of the book. In other words, marriage was not just for sexual pleasure, but also a mean for economic stability, especially for women.

The heteronormative marriage suggested by Naomi legitimates the economic privilege of male bodies and the economic dependence of female bodies. Therefore, suggesting two levels of economic deprivation in this episode. In fact, men could be poor because of the general economic constrains of the nation while women could be deprived due to both the general economic problems of Israel and the economic dependence on men. Moreover, Naomi's suggestion also indicates economic silence of ambiguous bodies who could not conform with heterosexual marriage. This third level of economic deprivation had little opportunities to benefit from the economic outcomes of the land since they were viewed by patriarchy [and heterosexuality] as distinctly others and distinctly secondary (Mollenkott 2000:19).

3.3.2 The Threshing Floor: Ruth and Boaz in a Private Space

The threshing-floor episode is another indicator of the intersection between economics and sexuality in the book of Ruth. This episode introduces Naomi looking for a home where Ruth should be well provided for (Ruth 3:1). In this episode Naomi could be depicted as a poor parent who sells her daughter into a well-to-do man to ensure her future economic security (Rashkow 2022:145). In fact, Naomi is encouraged by the success of Ruth's first step in Boaz's field, and she directs her on how to steer her relationship with Boaz towards a long-term resolution of their economic deprivation, through marriage and offspring (Fischer-Yinon 2002:686). In other words, Ruth's work in Boaz's field was viewed as a temporary solution and Naomi had to transact the body of Ruth for their long-term economic stability.

Ruth recognizes her economic imperative and accepts Naomi's instruction to invade Boaz's private space. This space is invested with patriarchy and proposes that women can only be fulfilled by means of a heterosexual marriage and progeny (De Villiers 2021:5). Moreover, in a patriarchal culture it was not reliable way for the women to provide for themselves (Mason 2015:10). And women may have to use their bodies, if necessary, to achieve this goal, especially if they are poor and desperate. As a result, Ruth takes the risk of invading a private space, controlled by men in terms of sexuality and economics. At this point, Ruth uncovers Boaz's feet and lay down (Ruth 3:7). It is not clear from the text what exactly happened during that night, but the words used in this episode are highly suggestive (Schrock 2013:25). In fact, uncover is word often used to speak of sexual nakedness (Lev 18:6, Eze 16:37, 23:10), feet can sometimes refer to exposing oneself (Ex 4:25, Jdg 3:24, 1Sa 24:3, Eze 16:25), and lie down was a euphemism for sexual intercourse (Gen 19:34, Dt 22:25). Collectively, these words have a staggering effect on the reader who is forced to wonder what exactly happened in this episode (Schrock 2013:25). And this may suggest some forms of sexual activities taking place at the threshing-floor, between Ruth and Boaz.

Though the text is not clear about what happened at the threshing floor, Boaz gradually notices Ruth and shows unexpected care for her (Fischer-Yinon 2022:686). Even if Ruth and Boaz did not have a penetrative sex, their sharing of private space, sleeping together, sharing same garments, and touching each other may suggest other possible types of sexual activities. In addition to that, Ruth returned home not only with food, but also with a promise of redemption (Ruth 3:10-15). Indeed, Ruth emerged "in the early light with both a promise of redemption and a load of highly symbolic seed, representing both food and future progeny, not simply for

herself, but to fill the emptiness of Naomi" (Fewell 2015:92). In other words, the threshing floor episode functioned as a type of business agreement and arrangement where land can be procured and an heir ensured, and not as the genesis of a great romance or erotic affair (Krutzsch 2015:549). Therefore, attesting to the intersection between economics and sexuality in Ruth's narrative. While the threshing floor episode attests to the intersection between economics and sexuality in the book of Ruth, it also legitimates the economic privilege of men, the economic dependence of women and the economic silence of ambiguous characters.

3.3.3 The Town Gate: Redemption of the Land and Levirate Marriage

The last space identified in this research where the book of Ruth intersects economics and sexuality is the town gate, in Bethlehem (Ruth 4:1-13). This episode starts by telling the reader how questions of civil law could be addressed at the gate by the elders and the heads of families (an ancient legal institution), even under new circumstances of imperial rule (Gerstenberger 2012:106). The elders and judge were responsible of dealing with different situations of legal dispute (including murder or homicide), presiding over the proceedings, including sentencing the culprit, executing the punishment, or, in the case of an unknown perpetrator, engaging in the necessary expiatory acts (Gerstenberger 2012:106). Within this legal structure dominated by men, Boaz contends for his own economic purposes. All female characters are silent in this episode though the matters to be discussed involves them. In fact, Boaz is the one inviting other male protagonists to discuss the redemption of the land (Ruth 4:1-4). Besides that, Boaz is the one determining that the one buying the land should also take the dead man's widow as his wife (Ruth 4:5). Though these matters involved female characters (Naomi and Ruth), they are not given space to suggest at the town gate. This is because in ancient world, women were not only socially inferior to men, but ancient medicine categorized females as biologically inferior (Ryan 2013:14). And the idea has prevailed that the main task of women is family (Sari-Aksakal 2022:49). Therefore, the male characters at the town gate had the right to decide about the redemption of the land and the marriage of Ruth. This means that, Ruth falls into the same category of property like the land.

It is important to note that the town gate episode brings an unusual coalition between redemption of the land and levirate marriage in the book of Ruth. The biblical law acknowledges the redemption of the land as an act of keeping property in the family (Jacobson 2013:8). This is also attested by Denise Mason (2015:12) when stating that the redemption laws were legal obligation, whereby the nearest kin was assigned the role of redeemer in the

family legal affairs and the purpose was to keep family property under family control. In other words, if someone in the family becomes poor and sells some of his property, his nearest relative is to come and redeem what his countryman has sold (Lev 25:25). Yet, in the book of Ruth this law of redemption goes hand in hand with the law of levirate. According to levirate custom, "living sons marry the widows of the dead brothers so that they might beget children to continue the family lineage" (Jacobson 2013:7). This system of levirate is described in the book of Deuteronomy and it speaks of brothers residing together, and specifies that when one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the decease shall not be married outside the family to a stranger; her husband's brother shall go into her, taking her in marriage, and performing the duty of a husband's brother to her (Dt 25:5-10). In other words, the town gate episode suggests that the redeemer of the land (economics) should also perform the levirate marriage (sexuality). Therefore, attesting to the intersection between economics and sexuality in the book of Ruth.

Biblical scholars and interpreters have been puzzled by the redeeming of both land and women in this one act, because the biblical law acknowledge only the redemption of the land and quite separately from the commandment to marry the wife of a dead brother (Sutskover 2010:292). The law of levirate marriage in the town gate serves as the basis for Boaz marrying his dead kinsman's wife, but it does not include buying land and women in the same transaction. Nevertheless, Boaz uses his influence, as a man of wealth and good standing, to manipulate the law in other to obtain more productive land (one of the most important economic asserts in Israel). In fact, by taking Ruth as his wife, Boaz has the right to buy from Naomi not only Elimelech's land but also inherit the property of his sons Mahlon and Killion (Ruth 3:9). Though this unusual coalition between redemption of the land and levirate marriages invites the reader to intersect economic struggles and sexual struggles in Ruth's narrative, this is done from a heterosexual perspective. Indeed, this transaction promotes, naturalizes, and sanctifies a particular obligatory social relationship between man and women (Stone 2000:59). As a result, it also legitimizes the economic privilege of male characters, the economic dependence of heterosexual women and the economic silence of ambiguous characters.

Accordingly, there is a connection between economic struggles and sexual struggles in the biblical book of Ruth. The heteronormative economic structure of the book suggests three levels of economic deprivation. The first level is represented by deprived men who struggle because of the general economic constrains of Israel; and the second level is represented by deprived women who struggle because of the economic constrains of Israel as well as the

economic dependence on men. And there is a third level which is represented by ambiguous characters who are economically silenced by the heterosexual economic structure of the book.

3.4 Conclusion

In this chapter the focus was on the intersection between economics and sexuality in the biblical book of Ruth. It has looked at the economic situation described in the book, the dimensions of sexuality, and the intersections between economic and sexual struggles. It has noted that the book of Ruth presents signs of economic deprivation, attested by the famine in the land of Bethlehem, the returning of Naomi to Judah for food when hearing rumour of bread available in the land of Judah, Ruth picking up the leftover grain in Boaz's field, and Naomi selling the piece of land. The masculinization of economy, unequal distribution of land and the international economic pressure were pointed as the main causes of this economic deprivation. It was also noted that Ruth is primarily shaped by the dominant heterosexual relationship, where male and female presuppose to possess biological and anatomical differences that complement each other in marital and sexual union, to produce offspring for the continuity of the family and for its economic security. But other possible sexualities not accepted in ancient Israel can also be suggested from the ambiguous characters of the narrative, and this is attested by the failure of masculinity of Mahlon and Killion, Ruth clinging to Naomi, and the unclear sexuality of Boaz. Finally, it was noted that there are spaces in the narrative where economics and sexuality intersect, in which the heteropatriarchal economic structure creates three levels of economic status, characterized by economic privilege of men, economic dependence of women and economic silence and/or exclusion of ambiguous characters. This chapter also has noted that both heterosexual and ambiguous characters in the narrative are involved in transactional sex for economic benefits, which is also a potential risk for contracting deadly diseases like HIV and/or Aids. The following chapter will focus on the religious contexts that shape the intersection between economics and sexuality in contemporary Mozambique as well as in the biblical book of Ruth.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE RELIGIOUS CONTEXTS THAT SHAPE THE INTERSECTIONS BETWEEN ECONOMICS AND SEXUALITY IN MOZAMBIQUE AND IN THE BOOK OF RUTH

4.0 Introduction

This thesis uses the tripolar African biblical studies approach, to bring the intersection between economics and sexual identity in Mozambique into dialogue with the intersection between economics and sexuality in the book of Ruth, in order to construct potentially transformative Contextual Bible Studies for contexts of non-conforming gender identities or different sexualities. After introducing the study (in chapter one), chapter two (the contextual pole) analyzed the intersection between economics and sexuality in Mozambique. And it has concluded that there are lines of interaction between economics and sexuality in the country, whereby the heteronormative economic structure creates three categories of poverty, represented by heterosexual men, heterosexual women, and non-conforming people. Chapter three (the textual pole) analyzed the intersection between economics and sexuality in Ruth. And it has concluded that there are spaces in the narrative where economics and sexuality intersect, creating three levels of economic status, characterized by economic privilege of men, economic dependence of women and economic silence of ambiguous characters.

Now the study returns to both contextual and textual poles, to analyze the religious contexts that shape the intersections between economics and sexual identity in Mozambique and in the biblical book of Ruth. For that, the study will first analyze the ways in which religion shapes the intersection between economics and sexuality in Mozambique and then analyze the ways in which it shapes the intersection between economics and sexuality in the biblical book Ruth.

4.1 Religion, Economics and Sexual identity in Mozambique

Religion is a broad concept, and it has been defined differently according to the context in which is used. Indeed, a sociologist would look through a sociological lens at religion, whereas a psychologist would give a definition based on a different (psychological) perspective; a Westerner would provide a definition influenced by European thought and an African would formulate the answer according to African philosophy (Beyers 2010:2). This means that there is no consensual understanding of religion. The concept is expressed contextually according to local culture, and it is understood differently according to different thought patterns (Beyers

2010:7). However, it could be accepted that all religions are human interpretations of the manifestations of the transcendent absolute (Danz 2020:104). These interpretations include beliefs in spiritual realm (God or gods), practices, prayers, rituals, scriptures and/or religious laws. Further, the interpreters are gifted with being able to see and interact with the spiritual realm, and in some instances claim direct communication with the absolute. This means that religion must be defined "in a way that does not place it as an isolated box representing activities that do not affect the rest of a person's daily life" (Gallarreta 2017:12). The purpose of this section is not to offer a precise definition of religion, but to analyze the way in which it shapes the intersection between economics and sexuality in Mozambique. Therefore, it will first present the general religious background of Mozambique and then analyze the influence of religion in shaping the intersection between economics and sexuality in the country.

4.1.1 The Religious Background of Mozambique

The constitution of the Republic of Mozambique, in its article 12, defends the country as a secular state, in the sense that there is a separation between the state and religious confessions (AR[29] 2004:4). However, religious confessions are free to operate in the public sphere in order to promote an environment of tolerance, understanding and peace, and to reinforce national unity, the spiritual and material well-being of the citizens, and economic and social development (AR 2004:4). In other words, religious confessions are free in their organization and in the exercise of their functions and worship, but must comply with the laws of the state.

Though the country is officially a secular state and does not observe many religious holidays, one quickly discovers how important religion is (Butselaar 2014:222). Indeed, a significant number of religious confessions and/or organizations can be noted all over the country, often functioning as key elements of civil society, the role of which is to "counterbalance the state" (Gifford 1998:20). These religious organizations include Christianity (Roman Catholic, Protestant and others), Islamism, Hinduism, African Traditional beliefs and other no less important religious manifestations.

Victor Agadjanian and Natalie A. Jansen (2018:1459) point out that Mozambique is a very religious country, like the rest of the subcontinent, and eighty-seven percent of the population consider religion very important in their lives, and most report attending religious services at

[29] *Assembleia da República*/Assembly of the Republic.

least weekly and praying daily. This religious reality can be traced far back before the expansion of Islamism and Christianity into the country. In fact, Mozambique's earliest inhabitants are believed to have been nomadic hunter-gatherers, possibly related to the Khoisan speaking San of South Africa and Namibia (Sicard 2008:474). According to S. von Sicard (2008:474) "from 1000 BCE Bantu speaking peoples from Niger Delta region in West Africa began migrating slowly through the Congo basin, reaching Southern Africa sometime after the first century BCE." These groups developed agricultural skills and knowledge of iron-working techniques, and lived in small, loosely affiliated chiefdoms, and some developed commercial networks across the country (Sicard 2008:474).

As in many other African realities, these groups of people had religion at the centre of their lives. This reality is attested by Pedro João P. Lopes (2015:17) when pointing out that, these peoples, in addition to linguistic manifestations, maintained a base of beliefs, rites and customs, with traditional African religion being an important and specific aspect that cannot be forgotten. This means that the notion of God in Mozambique is as old as the origin of its people. However, the complexity of religion in Mozambique starts with the arrival of Muslim travellers and traders, who brought and introduced Islam in the coastal region of the country.

According to historical records, Islamism began to arrive in Mozambique with traders from Arabia (and the Swahili) in the latter half of the first millennium CE, and their presence was limited to coastal settlements such as Sofala, Mozambique island, Angoche, the Querimba island and few settlements along the Zambezi (Sicard 2008:474). During this period Islamism was implanted by building up a web of alliances with local people, through conquest and kingship relations all over the coastal region (Bonate 2006:142). This allowed many local people to embrace Islam through conversion, and it became an accepted religion in other different parts of the country.

However, during the Portuguese colonial period, Muslims suffered constant persecution, and, in some places, many were slaughtered as they were suspected of poisoning water supply causing the death[30] of Portuguese (Sicard 2008:475-476). And in some cases, they were prohibited from converting locals to Islam or trade in baptized slaves (Sicard 2008:476). As a result, Roman Catholicism became the colony's quasi-official religion (Agadjanian 2013:261). This is also supported by Carolien Jacobs & Linda van de Kamp (2014:197) when arguing that

[30] But the reality is that these people were dying because of malaria (Sicard 2008:476).

the Catholic Church was the main Christian group during the Portuguese colonial period in Mozambique. While Roman Catholicism was favoured by the Portuguese colonizers, this era also saw considerable growth of mission-initiated Protestant denominations such as Presbyterian, Anglican, and Methodist (Agadjanian 2013:261). This means that during this colonial era many local people were converted into Christianity, some because of their personal interests while others because of the colonial demands. This was a moment of a relative Christian tolerance and hostility towards Islamism by the colonial state in Mozambique, which ended with the independence of the country.

It has been argued that directly after independence in 1975, all religious groups suffered from the anti-religious stance of the Marxist-Leninist Frelimo government, Church ministers (and other religious leaders in general) were imprisoned, and it became hard to organize activities (Jacobs & Van de Kamp 2014:197). The Catholic Church was assaulted with particular fervour and lost much of its earlier political clout and a large share of its membership to Pentecostal and Charismatic churches (Agadjanian 2013:261). This socialist era ended in the late 1980s with the democratization and liberation of the economic and political domains and included a relaxing of regulations concerning religious expression (Jacobs & Van de Kamp 2014:197). Consequently, Christianity has boomed, and different religious manifestation can be attested in different parts of the country. Moreover, Islam is now moving to the South and approximately half of the population adheres to traditional religion (Butselaar 2014:223). Furthermore, there has been a remarkable explosive growth of Pentecostal-type denominations, especially of the churches popularly known as *Zione* (or African initiated churches), some of them imported from South Africa, often by returning or retiring Mozambican labour migrants (Agadjanian 2013:261). Recent official data (2017 Census) suggests that about 32.6% of the Mozambican population are Protestants, 27.2% Catholics, 18.9 % Islam, and other religions (Hinduism, African initiated churches, African Traditional religion, etc) constitute 21.2% (*Instituto Nacional de Estatística* 2017).

Accordingly, it is generally accepted that there are many religious systems in Mozambique, and it is impossible to talk of one type of religion as being uniquely Mozambican (see Beyers 2010:2). This means that Mozambique can be considered a pluralistic context in terms of religion, where people from different religious manifestation live side by side with non-religious people, and it makes no sense for people to claim one particular religious confession

to be true. Therefore, the section that follows analyses the ways in which this religious complexity shapes the intersection between economics and sexuality in Mozambique.

4.1.2 The Ways in Which Religion Shapes the Intersection Between Economics and Sexuality in Mozambique

It has been noted elsewhere in this research (see chapter two) that there are lines of interaction between economics and sexuality in Mozambique, whereby the heteronormative economic structure creates three categories of poverty: the poor heterosexual men who struggle because of the general economic challenges of the country, the poor heterosexual women who struggle because of the economic challenges of the country and the economic exploitation of heterosexual men, and the poor non-conforming sexualities who struggle because of exclusion and discrimination within the heteronormative economic structure of the country. There are many factors shaping these lines of interaction between economics and sexuality in the country, but the focus in this section is the religious factor. Though this research recognizes the plurality of religion in Mozambique, the analysis here is shaped by Christian understanding of religion. This is a deliberate choice to limit the discussion and meet the religious background of the researcher.[31] Nevertheless, other religious confessions will be brought into a comparative discussion when necessary.

According to Victoria Chifeche and Yolanda Dreyer (2019:3), the process of development in Mozambique includes the participation of faith communities and Church institutions because they have direct access to people of all walks of life. In fact, religious confessions can be found almost everywhere in the country, and they reach even in remote areas where the government structure has no full control. Therefore, religious manifestations have played a significant role on the economic life of people who attend their religious institutions, and the community in general. And this is done through their involvement in education, health service, entrepreneurship and services of charity.

As part of the civil society organizations, religion has been contributing to improve the educational system of the country, by creating educational infrastructures in rural as well as in urban areas, in providing material resources and teacher training in private institutions, and the establishment of professional schools and religious Universities and/or Institutes (Barreto

[31] The researcher is a Christian and a minister in the United Methodist church.

2013:6). Though education services have been provided by secular state for decades, churches in Mozambique have retained considerable connections with the public education sector (Agadjanian & Jansen 2018:1460). For instance, the United Methodist Church in Mozambique (IMUM), my own Church, has a considerable number of educational establishments throughout the country, and through a program called ALFALIT (*Alfabetização e Literatura*/Alphabetization and Literature) it provides basic reading and writing skills in different rural areas of the country (Mahumane 2004:38). Additionally, Mozambique is a country where formal education is scarce, and the Christian community serves as an informal school of life, whereby religious community people can subscribe to courses or join study groups (Butselaar 2014:227). This means that religious confessions in Mozambique shape the economic development of the country through formal and informal education.

The government in Mozambique also allows all religious groups to provide health care (Zahorik 2020:316). Therefore, faith organizations have been working diligently to improve health services in the country through prevention and cure. Through an inter-religious program called PIRCOM (*Programa Inter-Religioso contra a Malaria*/Interreligious Program against Malaria) faith organizations have been using social networks to mobilize and create a positive impact on communities in the fight against malaria[32] and other diseases through prevention and treatment (PIRCOM 2023). In addition to building hospitals and health posts, religious denominations have helped the government in the allocation of medicines, medical personnel and promotion of campaigns with a view to minimize the effects of endemic diseases in the country, such as HIV, cholera, tuberculosis, cancer and others (Mahumane 2004:38). Moreover, religious confessions offer prayers and provide psychological healing when their believers are in a situation of depression due to economic deprivation, marital and family problems, and/or domestic violence (Jacobs & Van de Kamp 2014:201).

Domingos Carlos Batone (2022:586) argues that although Mozambique has a considerable religious diversity, some of them, such as Christianity, Islam and Hinduism, are conducive to promoting entrepreneurship, based on the fulfilment of the sacred scriptures (Bible, Quran and Bhagavad-Gita),[33] where the form of relationship with customers, employees, investors and suppliers must be based on in the word of God. Some religious denominations (like Pentecostal churches) underline how a combative faith brings happiness, health and prosperity in all aspects

[32] One of the deadly diseases in the country.
[33] Quran is the sacred text of Muslims and Bhagavad-Gita is the Hindu religious text.

of life and are characterized by an entrepreneurial style of operation, including their own institutional way of intervening in the media and politics, and the use of modern marketing strategies (Jacobs & Van de Kamp 2014:199). Even though entrepreneurship is used by some religious denominations to extort economic asserts from their believers, it has been used by believers as an opportunity to question and address their situation of poverty.

According to Paulo Albino Mahumane (2003:45), different local churches in Mozambique organize themselves to deliver works of solidarity, building houses for the victims of natural calamities (floods, cyclones, and droughts), opening water holes and building dams to supply drinking water to disadvantaged people in different regions of the country. In addition, religious denominations help the most deprived people with clothes, shoes, hygiene products, food and other non-perishable products (Borges 2020). Though religious denominations do not directly challenge the structures that created economic deprivation in the country, they minimize the plight of the poor and the needy through deliverance of services of charity and solidarity.

Based on what is presented above, it becomes clear that religion in Mozambique plays an important role to minimize the economic deprivation of local citizens. However, this is done based on the existing heteronormative economic structure. Indeed, religious norms typically promote patriarchal values and women's subordination to men (Agadjanian 2015:466). In other words, religious practices influence social and economic roles, making women vulnerable to male economic exploitation (Chifeche & Dreyer 2019:4). These social teachings concerning gender roles and women's virtues do not vary greatly across different churches, yet the Catholic and mainline Protestants churches are typically more flexible in the enforcement of such teachings and are generally more ideologically open than the more conservative Apostolic, Zionists, and Pentecostals (Agadjanian 2015:465). This means that women with religious affiliation have the lowest levels of economic autonomy, given that they are subject to pressures and restrictions resulting from gendered religious teachings and structures. While religion promotes patriarchal values, it also reinforces the existing heteronormative economic structure that creates economic privilege of men and economic dependence of women.

Moreover, religious intervention on economics matters of the country does not take into consideration people with different gender identities or non-conforming sexualities. This is because people of non-conforming gender identities or different sexualities are often regarded as taboo and sin by religion and the Church (see Ward 2002:82; Bongmba 2015:75; Sida 2014:2; Gunda 2017:22). In fact, pastors often organize Church services around how to find a

faithful husband and how to build a successful [heterosexual] marriage and family (Jacobs & van de Kamp 2014:209), but never discuss family issues outside the traditional heteronormative structure. In some situations, non-conforming people are subjected to healing rituals carried out by traditional healers and religious officials, since they think these people are sick or possessed by evil spirits (Chipenembe 2018:212). The Church also endorses forms of economic exclusion in regarding non-conforming sexualities as sin (Aantjes et al 2020:35). Moreover, the Bible is "frequently and pervasively used as a tool to exclude *Izitabane* [or queer] believers from the church as a community of care, celebration and support" (van der Walt & Davids 2022:47). As a result, the Church and other religious confessions promote the traditional and established heterosexual order and suppress the economic participation of people with different [sexual and] gender identities (Ferreira, Garcia & Lacerda 2021:387). This means that the preferential option for the poor in contemporary Mozambique has not been extended fully to non-conforming sexualities and/or different gender identities, a sub-category of the poor and oppressed (see Ipsen 2009:13).

Accordingly, Mozambique is a pluralistic context in terms of religion, where religious confessions play a significant role in the economic development of the country. As part of the civil society, religious organizations in Mozambique have been contributing to minimize the economic deprivation of local citizens through education, health services, entrepreneurship and services of charity. Yet, this is done based on the traditional and established heteronormative economic structure that promotes the economic privilege of men, economic dependence of women and economic exclusion of non-conforming people. This means that religion in Mozambique promotes and reinforces the existing heteronormative economic structure of the country through its teaching and practices based on patriarchal values. Having this in mind, the section that follows will analyze the ways in which religion shapes the intersection between economics and sexual identity in the biblical book of Ruth.

4.2 Religion, Economics, and Sexuality in the Book of Ruth

Johane Un-Sok Ro (2018:4) argues that "applying the term Religion to ancient society is itself quite anachronistic because the concept of religion, which can be distinguished from other areas of human life such as economics, politics, and morals was absent in ancient society." Hence, he adopts the term 'Religionness', which suggests that "there was a nexus of core values and meanings that was an essential part of the religious world of Judean society in the Persian and Hellenistic periods" (Ro 2018:4). Religionness, Ro (2018:4) continues, is intended to

connote a network of beliefs and values shared by various ancient Israelites, in particular Judean communities in the Persian and Hellenistic periods. While Ro refuses to use the concept of religion to ancient society, he acknowledges the existence of belief systems in this ancient world. Neither 'religion' or 'religionness' appear in the book of Ruth; however, the narrative highlights signs of human interpretations of the manifestations of the transcendent absolute. And this research (unlike Ro) understands these manifestations as religion.

The manifestation of the transcendent absolute (what is called religion in this study) can be attested by the existence of beliefs in a spiritual realm, religious practices, prayers, rituals, citations of scriptures and/or religious laws in the narrative of Ruth. Hence, this section aims to highlight the ways in which this interpretation of the manifestation of the transcendent absolute shapes the intersections between economics and sexual identity in the biblical book of Ruth. Hence, it looks at the religious background of the book and then analyze the role of this religious context in shaping the lines of interaction between economics and sexual identity in the narrative of Ruth.

4.2.1 The Religious Background of Ruth

The religious background of Ruth must be analyzed taking into consideration the general religious trajectory of the Hebrew people. According to biblical tradition, Israel became a nation after liberation from Egypt, with Yahweh being the architect of this deliverance, through Moses, after hearing the cry and misery of these people (Ex 3:7-10). These former slaves were then joined by various peasants' groups marginalized by the tributary systems in Palestine and who had fled to the hill country (Pixley 1991: 233-236). Though the worship of Yahweh was not originally peculiar[34] to Israel (Alt 1989:7), the two struggling groups all united in the worship of this god who hears the cry of the oppressed (Alt 1989:3). Therefore, it could be stated that the need for socio-political and economic liberation as well as freedom from sin and renewed relationship with God united the two marginalized groups (Waltke 2007:390). In other words, the birth of Israel established the foundations of connection between theological vision and sociological organization of the nation (Brueggemann 1983:311).

It is important to note that the worship of Yahweh had moral obligations to those who accepted this god. And these moral obligations were ruled by legal ordinances, allegedly revealed by

[34] There are indications that the worship of Yahweh was located at a mountain sanctuary in the desert, visited and used- perhaps exclusively at first-by other tribes besides the Israelites (Alt 1989:7).

Yahweh. In fact, every legal ordinance observed in Israel was laid down by the divine will of Yahweh and had been (supposedly) revealed by him in the last generation before the tribes came out of the desert to settle in Palestine, at the moment when they united as one people under the guidance of Yahweh in the covenant delivered through Moses (Alt 1989:81). According to Niels Peter Lemche (1988:220) Israel had to worship one single God (Yahweh), who guaranteed a single people (the Israelite society) possessing a single country (the land of Israel), on condition that that society kept the covenant which it had made with Yahweh, and which was based on a series of laws which had to be observed. The laws of this covenant were in part a teaching, describing correct behaviour with respect to one's own people and with respect to foreigners as well as regulating behaviour towards the only God and towards foreign idols (Lemche 1988:221). For Yahweh, honesty, truth and justice were more important than the mechanical performance of religious rites (Drane 1987:52). This means that the worship of Yahweh implied social ethic as well as liturgical prescriptions. This religious structure characterized the nation of Israel throughout its historical trajectory.

According to John Bright (1962:132), Israel's religion was based on the memory of historical experience, interpreted and responded to in faith. However, different socio-historical realities shaped the way in which the Israelites responded to the socio-religious contract (or covenant) between them and Yahweh. In other words, the ways in which the Israelites interpreted the moral obligations of their faith had different meanings in different historical moments of the country. In the pre-monarchical period, Israel was "profoundly religious in its commitment to the God of exodus and dangerously political in its rejection of the status quo with its oppressive consciousness and practice" (Brueggemann 1983:312).

In addition to the cult of foreign gods, however, the introduction of monarchy, with its sacred economic system, hijacked the worship of Yahweh to legitimate the allocation of more land to the tyrants and their associates and less to others, as well as the establishment and sanctioning of the collection of tribute (tithe) in the temple (Boer 2007:34). In fact, the temple stood side by side with the palace, and the kings controlled the priesthood of the temple (West 2011:524). This religious attitude was strongly challenged by the prophetic tradition, since the moral obligation of the cult of Yahweh defended a community of fraternity and prohibited the oppression of the weak. The great prophets of the monarchical period (Samuel, Elijah, Amos, Hosea and Isaiah) could then be seen as those who recalled the kings and the people back to known justice standards of the past from which they had fallen away, either through ignorance

or through deliberate wickedness or folly (Coggins 199:143). For instance, prophets like Amos have insisted that Israel should let justice roll on like a river and righteousness like a never-failing stream (Amos 5:24). Nevertheless, this religious manipulation in Israel remained unchanged throughout the entire monarchical period, and this has been pointed out as the main cause of the exile (Sicre 1984:2).

The Babylonian exile had a tremendous impact both upon the population left behind and upon those in exile (Brettler 1999:434). This subjugation lasted less than sixty years, but its impact on Judean cultural imagination was staggering (Sharp 2011:364); and it did not affect only the socio-political and cultural structure of the nation but also the religious identity of people. In fact, the house of the Lord was destroyed, and the high clerical leadership was deported. Those who were in exile introduced a dominant ideology, which considered themselves as the 'true' Judah, a remnant that alone will be the seed for God's future work of replanting; while those Judeans back in Judah and who fled to Egypt from Babylon's predations are, in the perspective of this ideology, despicable sinners whom God will exterminate (Sharp 2011:368). Scholars like Rom-Shiloni (2011:139) presents prophet Ezekiel (also exiled in Babylon) as the architect of this ideology. Indeed, he considers the exiles to be Israel, the house of Israel and the children of Israel (Eze 3:1-4 and 2:3). In contrast, those who remained in Jerusalem hardly ever appear as Israel, and the prophet describes them as the inhabitants of Jerusalem, those who live in these ruins of the land of Israel, or the sinful city and the adulterous wife (Rom-Shiloni 2011:139-140). This ideology was introduced to set in social designations to legitimize the status of those who were in exile and delegitimize the status of those who remained. And this lays the foundations of the exclusivity ideology that dominated Judah in post-exilic period.

The religious context of post-exilic Judah was significantly different from any other era of ancient Israel. Indeed, the returned introduced a new moral obligation to the worship of Yahweh, in which "the question of ethnic purity was of decisive importance for their hopes of restoration" (Lemche 1988:222), and this was done at the exclusion of other groups and persons (Becking 1999:270). Some post-exilic literatures (like Ezra and Nehemiah) condemn the intermarriage of Israelites, priests and Levites with women from other nations, with the outcome that the holy seed has become mixed with the people of the land (Ezra 9:1-2 and Neh 9:1-2). Now, the idea of divine election is thus reformulated in biological categories (Becking 1999:270). The worship of Yahweh is now entangled with an ideo-theology of exclusion, characterized by a narrowed concept of Israel as a "holy seed", the supremacy of the returned

exiles and their hostility towards the inhabitants of the land and to intermarriage (Japhet 1999:43). This local form of legitimacy and control was incorporated, adapted and superseded within Persian imperial system of domination and exploitation (Silverman 2019:15).

According to Gerstenberger (2012:59) the Persian rulers "distance themselves from all attempts at making the official religion of the State mandatory for all the provinces." Looking at this religious policy one can assume that the Israelites enjoyed religious freedom in post-exilic period. However, Gallarreta (2017:142) seems to bring a contrasting idea when arguing that "Persian influence of ritual or religious practices may be present in political rites that took place in, or around, monuments." This means that the imperial ideology claimed that "the God of creation has made them kings, and that they act according to divine will to the benefit of all the people they rule" (Janzen 2022:79). Therefore, temple officials were not elected by the Judeans themselves, but they were appointed by the Persian government and were responsible not to the people of Judah, but to him (Fried 2015:393). This is partly because the building project of this Judahite temple was funded by the Persian authorities as part of their imperial control. In other words, the Judahite temple (like many others throughout the Empire) had become the private property of the king, not of the god, whose books could be audited and whose capital taxed (Fried 2015:396). While the Persian rules did not make the religion of the State mandatory for all the provinces, colonized people (including the Jews) did not have freedom to decide on the religious shape of their nations (including religious leadership).

From a narrative point of view, it is not clear which religious context is related to the book of Ruth, but from a socio-historical perspective the narrative reflects the religiosity of post-exilic Judah. And it is shaped by the general religious trajectory of Israel, which begins with the acceptance and worship of Yahweh by the newly formed Israelite nation after liberation from Egypt. This worship included honesty, truth and justice as moral obligation of the covenant between Yahweh and Israel. With the introduction of monarchy, the worship of Yahweh was captured by the city-temple complex to legitimize the economic exploitation of peasants. Though this religious attitude was strongly challenged by the prophetic tradition, it remained unchanged throughout the subsequent history. During the Babylonian period, the exiled developed an exclusivity religious ideology to legitimize their status and delegitimize the status of those who remained. After exile, the idea of divine election is reformulated in biological categories to avoid intermarriages between the holy seed and the people of the land. If the post-exilic context is assumed as the historical location of Ruth, then becomes suggestive that the

narrative argues against this exclusivist religious ideology, by reminding the Israelites that God's loving kindness also extends to non-Israelite foreigners (De Villiers 2021:5). In other words, the book of Ruth suggests that the love of God is not limited to the chosen people (the Israelites). The research will come back to this aspect in chapter five, but for now it moves to analyze the ways in which religion shapes the intersection between economics and sexuality in the biblical book Ruth.

4.2.2 The Ways in Which Religion Shapes the Intersection Between Economics and Sexual Identity in Ruth's Narrative

It has been said elsewhere in this study (see chapter three) that there are spaces in the book of Ruth where economics and sexual identity intersect, in which the heterosexual and patriarchal economic structure creates three levels of economic deprivation, characterized by economic privilege of men, economic dependence of women and economic silence or exclusion of ambiguous or indecent characters. The heteronormative economic structure of the biblical book of Ruth can be shaped by different aspects, but for the purpose of this section, the analysis will be limited to the religious factor (specifically from the post-exilic context in which the book is located). In other words, this section looks at the ways in which religion shapes the intersection between economics and sexuality in the biblical book of Ruth.

According to Charles P. Baylis (2004:419), Yahweh is often described as a gracious God to the helpless, who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who shows his love for the alien by giving them food and clothing. In most biblical narrative, "God is an active agent, very much on the scene, intervening with vengeance" (Ostriker 2002:350) when the rights of the needy are violated. A clear example of this is the deliverance of the Hebrew slaves from the Egyptian bondage. Based on this assumption one would expect from Yahweh a more vehement reaction against the heteronormative economic system of the book of Ruth. However, Yahweh seems to be silent in the narrative, and the course of events develop as if God is absent. This is also supported by Denise Mason (2015:13), when arguing that God is virtually absent from the book of Ruth, and all the narrative outcomes are a result of good choices made by righteous people. The only direct action of God is to allow Ruth to conceive at the end of the narrative. In fact, the consummation might be a human act, but for the narrator Ruth only conceived through the grace of God (Mason 2015:13). In other words, Yahweh grants her to become pregnant and a son is born (De Villiers 2017:49).

Though God seems to be absent throughout the narrative, Yahweh is continually invoked (Ostriker 2002:351). There are many spaces where God is invoked in the narrative of Ruth, but for the limitation of discussion, this research analyzes only three selected moments, namely: in Moab when Ruth and Naomi were preparing to go to Judah after hearing that God has given bread to Israel, in Bethlehem at the threshing floor when Ruth visited Boaz in his private space, and in the town gate when Boaz negotiated the redemption of the land and the marriage with Ruth. These moments not only reflect the invocation of Yahweh, but also the intersection between economics and sexuality.

First, when Naomi was in Moab (but on the road to Judah), she sees marriage as the only viable option to secure the economic stability of Orpah and Ruth. Naomi is incapable of providing her daughters-in-law with husbands to replace those that they have lost (Freedman 2003:29). Therefore, giving their bodies to another man was the only available possibility for them to uplift their economic standard. In order to convince them, Naomi invokes the Lord to deal kindly with them as they have dealt with the dead and with her (Ruth 1:8). Here Naomi invokes the name of Yahweh as a source of blessing for the young women (Freedman 2003:29). In Naomi's understanding, the economic stability of Ruth and Orpah should be secured through heterosexual marriage, with the blessing of Yahweh. Naomi is unable to recognize the same-sex economic possibilities of her marriage-like (in Ruth's language) relationship with Ruth. Naomi pushes Ruth away, towards Boaz, and this is done with the blessing from Yahweh. This understanding of God suggests that religion is invoked to legitimize and reinforce the existing heteronormative structure, which promotes and naturalizes the economic privilege of heterosexual man, economic dependence of heterosexual women and economic silence or exclusion of ambiguous characters.

Second, Yahweh is invoked by Boaz to support the business agreement and arrangement at the threshing-floor, where land was procured, and an heir was ensured. Indeed, when surprised by Ruth, Boaz exclaims "The Lord blesses you, my daughter" (Ruth 3:10), and he ends his speech by swearing in God's name to find Ruth a redeemer or become that person himself (Ostriker 2002:352). Here again, the name of Yahweh is invoked to reinforce the idea that the economic stability of Ruth can only be assured through heterosexual marriage with a male redeemer. According to Boaz's speech, God is benevolent and the source of all what is happening at the threshing-floor. This means that religion in the threshing-floor episode also is invoked to shape the intersection between economics and sexual identity, reinforcing the heteronormative

economic structure in which men have economic advantage, (heterosexual) women are economically dependent and those who do not fit in this heteronormative economic structure are deliberately silenced or excluded.

Third, in the town gate episode Boaz determines that the one buying the land should also take the dead man's widow as his wife in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property (Ruth 4:5). When Boaz publicly announces his intention to marry Ruth, the elders and all the people at the city gate declare their hope that the Lord will make her fruitful (Ostriker 2002:352). In other words, the name of God is invoked to support the coalition between redemption of the land and levirate marriage, which was negotiated at the town gate. This means that the town gate episode also attests to the fact that religion in the biblical book of Ruth functions as a protector of the traditional and established heteronormative economic structure. The culmination of the story with the birth of Obed can also attest to this shape of religion towards the intersection between economics and sexual identity in the book of Ruth. In fact, this child "affirms the blessings of Yahweh upon the family, and pregnancy anticipation of Yahweh upon the Davidic reign" (Elness-Hanson 2021:122). To make this even clearer, the women of Bethlehem also invoke the blessings from the Lord, who has not left Naomi without a redeemer (Freedman 2003:35). Here becomes clear that the narrator or the author of Ruth consider Yahweh the source of all what is going on. If God is the source of all what is happening in this episode, then God legitimizes the heteronormative economic structure that guarantee the economic privilege of male characters, the economic dependence of female characters and the economic silence or exclusion of ambiguous or indecent characters in the narrative.

Accordingly, the biblical book of Ruth reflects a context shaped by the general religious trajectory of Israel, but it is specifically located within the post-exilic context, in which an ideo-theology of exclusion towards the people of the land was introduced as moral obligation in the worship of Yahweh to avoid the mixture of the holy seed with the people of the land. Though the book argues against this ideo-theology of exclusion, the name of Yahweh is invoked to normalize the fact that women can only uplift their economic standard through heterosexual marriage, and those who do not conform with this structure are silenced or excluded in the narrative. This means that religion in the biblical book of Ruth is used to legitimize and reinforce the established heteronormative economic structure, which normalizes the economic privileged of men, economic dependence of (heterosexual) women and economic silence and exclusion of ambiguous characters.

4.3 Conclusion

In this chapter the focus was on the religious contexts that shape the intersections between economics and sexual identity in contemporary Mozambique and in the biblical book of Ruth. It has looked at the ways in which religion shapes the intersection between economics and sexual identity in Mozambique and in the biblical book of Ruth. It has noted that Mozambique is a pluralistic context in terms of religion, where people from different religions live side by side with non-religious people, and it makes no sense for people to claim one particular religion to be true. These religious confessions have been contributing to minimize the economic deprivation of the country through education, health services, entrepreneurship and services of charity, but this is done based on the traditional and established heteronormative economic structure that promotes the economic privilege of men, economic dependence of women and economic exclusion of indecent or non-conforming people. It has also noted that the biblical book of Ruth reflects a religious trajectory shaped by the post-exilic context, with its ideo-theological vision of exclusion towards the people of the land. And this exclusion is practiced by the returning exiles who see themselves as true Israel. Though the book of Ruth argues against this ideo-theology of exclusion, religion in the narrative is used to legitimize and reinforce the established heteronormative economic structure, which normalizes the economic privilege of heterosexual men, economic dependence of (heterosexual) women and economic silence or exclusion of ambiguous or indecent characters. Thus, God is invoked to legitimize economic, sexual and religious exclusion and/or silence, both in contemporary Mozambique and in the biblical book of Ruth. This lays foundations to discern (in the following chapter) a life-affirming economic, sexual and religious ethic from Ruth's narrative for contexts of non-conforming sexualities in Mozambique (and elsewhere in Southern Africa).

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCERNING A LIFE-AFIRMING ECONOMIC, SEXUAL, AND RELIGIOUS ETHIC FROM RUTH'S NARRATIVE

5.0 Introduction

This thesis uses the tripolar African biblical studies approach to bring the intersection between economics and sexual identity in Mozambique into dialogue with the intersection between economics and sexuality in the book of Ruth, in order to construct potentially transformative Contextual Bible Studies for contexts of non-conforming gender identities or different sexualities. After introducing the study in chapter one, chapter two (the contextual pole) analyzed the intersection between economics and sexual identity in Mozambique. And it has noted that there are lines of interaction between economics and sexuality in the country, whereby the heteronormative economic structure creates three categories of poverty, represented by poor heterosexual men, poor heterosexual women, and poor queer or indecent people. Chapter three (the textual pole) analyzed the intersection between economics and sexuality in the biblical book of Ruth. And it has concluded that there are spaces in the narrative where economics and sexuality intersect, creating three levels of economic status, characterized by economic privilege of men, economic dependence of (heterosexual) women and economic silence and/or exclusion of ambiguous or indecent characters.

In chapter four the study has returned to both, contextual and textual poles of the tripolar approach, to analyze the religious contexts that shape the intersections between economics and sexuality in contemporary Mozambique and in the biblical book of Ruth. On one hand, it has concluded that religious confessions in Mozambique have been contributing to minimize the economic deprivation of the country through education, health services, entrepreneurship, and services of charity, but this is done based on the traditional and established heteronormative economic structure that promotes the economic privilege of men, economic dependence of women and economic exclusion of queer or non-conforming bodies. On the other hand, it has concluded that the biblical book of Ruth argues against the post-exilic ideo-theology of exclusion, but religion in the narrative is invoked to legitimize and reinforce the established heteronormative economic structure of the book, which normalizes the economic privilege of men, economic dependence of (heterosexual) women and economic silence and/or exclusion of ambiguous characters. Now, the study moves to the pole of appropriation to discern a life-affirming economic, sexual, and religious ethic from Ruth for contexts of non-conforming sexualities. Thus, it will first establish a dialogical appropriation between Ruth and

Mozambique, then suggest a life-affirming economic, sexual, and religious ethic from Ruth's narrative for Mozambique (and other similar realities in the Southern African region) within the context of non-conforming sexualities and/or different gender identities.

5.1 A Dialogical Appropriation Between Ruth's Narrative and Mozambique

The tripolar African biblical studies approach has allowed (in chapters two, three and four), the economic, sexual and religious contexts of Ruth as well as the Mozambican context of economics, sexuality and religion to be carefully analyzed. Hence, this stage of the tri-polar approach, deals specifically with the pole of appropriation. In fact, appropriation is the hermeneutical moment where the interpreter or the reader establishes a dialogue between the biblical text and the selected African context, using particular forms of ideo-theological orientation, which can be inculturation, liberation, feminist or postcolonial (West 2010:21). The appropriation process in this research is done through an indecent queer feminist theory (see Althaus-Reid 2000 and Ipsen 2009) to establish a dialogical process between Ruth's narrative and the contemporary Mozambican context of non-conforming sexualities. This indecent queer feminist theory is found within liberation ideo-theological orientation.

An indecent theory is based on sexual experiences of the poor, using economic and political analysis while unveiling the sexual ideology of theology (Althaus-Reid 2000:i). Althaus-Reid (2000:1) uses a metaphor of a lemon vendor, sitting in the streets of Buenos Aires (in Argentina) without underwear. In this analogy, the musky smell of a lemon vendor may be confused with that of her basket of lemons, in a metaphor that brings together sexuality and economics (Althaus-Reid 2000:1). This lemon vendor metaphor of Althaus-Reid is an attempt to cover an aspect neglected in traditional liberation theology, which is the intersection between economics and sexual identity. Indecent theory will also allow us to extend fully the preferential option for the poor in liberation theology to non-conforming sexualities and/or different gender identities, a sub-category of the poor and oppressed (see Ipsen 2009:13). This ideo-theological orientation of indecency, functions as the appropriative lens used to appropriate the economic, sexual, and religious ethic of Ruth's narrative in Mozambique within the context of non-conforming gender identity or different sexualities. This dialogical process will be done based on three aspects: privilege of men and dependence of women in heteronormative economic structure, economic silence of ambiguous or non-conforming sexualities, and religious legitimation of heteronormative economic structure.

5.1.1 Economic Privilege of Heterosexual Men and Economic Dependence of Heterosexual Women

The biblical book of Ruth and contemporary Mozambique represent two different socio-historical contexts. And the rules that determine the mechanisms of production, distribution and consumption of wealth are also different. On one hand, the current Mozambican economic system is influenced by the contemporary global capitalist system in a post-colonial period, characterized by the impoverishment of the majority and the illicit enrichment of the minority. This new global economy in contemporary Mozambique depends on "private ownership and the accumulation of capital in the hands of a relatively few individuals" (Draper 2003:95). On the other hand, the economic reality of the biblical book of Ruth is shaped by the post-exilic tributary system and its centralized mode of production, characterized by economic deprivation of most of the rural peasants and economic prosperity of the powerful minority population, through corruption and dishonest profiteering. This means that the ethical forces of Ruth on issues of economics will have to be perspectival and motivational rather than prescriptive because there are economic challenges in contemporary Mozambique that the book of Ruth throws no light upon (see Gottwald 1993b:344). In other words, to engage a biblical text in the light of contemporary struggle for economic liberation is to take sides in and connect with kindred struggles that were being waged in very ancient communities (Mosala 1989:8). Therefore, the appropriation process should consider the affinity of economic challenges between the biblical book of Ruth and contemporary Mozambique.

Though the contexts of Mozambique and Ruth represent two different realities, they portray some resemblances between them. Indeed, the two contexts reflect high signs of economic deprivation (including economic inequalities). On one hand, current Mozambique not only has fertile land for agriculture, but is also rich in diverse economic resources, sufficient to guarantee a stable life for the local population. Even so, it has very low development rates and most of the population lives below the poverty line. This means that most of the local population is becoming poorer each passing day, while a minority has become richer. This economic reality in Mozambique is the result of climate anomalies, poor internal policies adopted by the government and external policies directed by the global economic system. In other words, local and (modern) imperial economic constrains constitute the fundamental reasons for poverty and economic inequalities in contemporary Mozambique.

On the other hand, we find in the biblical book of Ruth a nation with enough land, with a capacity to produce food for everyone. However, more than half of a century after the release of the exiles, the Judeans are said to be doing very poorly (Gerstenberger 2012:18). And the book of Ruth reflects this post-exilic context in which "all goods, objects of art and general use, precious metals, and monetary payments went into the king's treasury and from there were fed into the economic cycle (Gerstenberger 2012:57). This means that the production of the Judean peasants had to exceed their personal use in order to pay imperial as well as temple taxes. That is how imperialism operates in promoting its criminal activities of expansion, possession, and control (Althaus-Reid 2000:24). Therefore, leading most of the colonized people in a situation of misery while a group of few become rich. This means that the economic system in Mozambique as well as in Ruth creates two classes of people (the poor and the rich), who are linked relationally, and the relationship is one of oppression (see West 1999:14-15). In other words, in both contexts the rich are rich because they steal from the poor. And this economic resemblance creates an affinity between the two contexts in dialogue.

Additionally, both Mozambique and the context of Ruth are dominated by heteronormative and patriarchal principles and practices, in which some people are economically beneficial while others are economically disadvantaged. Heterosexual desires and patriarchal principles represent a power structure that promotes, naturalizes, and sanctifies a particular obligatory relationship between man and women (see Stone 2000:59). Though penetrative sex is not a necessary relationship, patriarchy is linked to penetrative sex (Althaus-Reid 2000:76). The honour and dignity of an adult man is directly linked to his right to penetrate others, including women and slaves (Morrison 1997:61). Those who are not willing to penetrate others or be penetrated do not find room in this structure. This power structure is socially constructed as a system that operates by "creating privileges and oppression" (Neuenfeldt 2015:20). In fact, they form part of "the sexual organization of the public and private spaces of society" (Althaus-Reid 2000:1). Within this power structure, women are the ones who suffer violence, at home and in public, in conflicts and in war; they are the ones who carry the burden of an economic system that creates poverty (Neuenfeldt 2015:20) and indecency. The male sex is often privileged while the female sex experience oppression and marginalization. This means that women fall into the category of "the others or indecent" and who belong to a socially subordinate category (Althaus-Reid 2000:2).

The book of Ruth reveals "the experience of patriarchy that perpetrated landlessness and poverty of women in post-exilic Yehud" (Mtshiselwa 2016:4). This assumption is also supported by Irmtraud Fischer (2007:147) when pointing out that the book of Ruth is a story about women's battle for survival. A similar experience also can be noted in contemporary Mozambique, where patriarchy puts male sex as superior and female sex as subservient. In fact, the home, the inner sanctum, is seen as the natural realm for woman; her status is connected to her ability to fulfil her role as good wife and the economic power is concentrated in the hands of the patriarch who normally carries out all business and represents the family in the public domain (Morrison 1997:61). Therefore, it could be argued that the book of Ruth and the current Mozambican context portray some resemblances whereby their cultural norms perpetuate patriarchy which places women on the margin of the economic development (Mthiselwa 2016:2) as well as submitting women to the [sex?] agenda of males (Masenya 1998:82). In other words, current Mozambique and Ruth's narrative present a similar economic structure, characterized by economic privilege of male sex and economic dependence of female sex. Mozambique and Ruth put women into the category of indecent other while men fall into the category of decent and privileged in terms of economics and sexuality. This is another resemblance that marks an affinity between the contexts of Ruth and Mozambique.

It is also important to note that sexuality and economics stand at the forefront of power imbalance within heterosexual and patriarchal ideologies and practices. In fact, heterosexual desires and patriarchal ideologies socialize and school women on how to please their male sexual partners so as to ensure they remain married to them (Masenya 2013:4). This is an ideological construction in which power, be it political power or male sexual power, is about possession, penetration, and control (Keefe 2016:159). In such contexts, "the plight of single women particularly that of poor younger widows could apparently only be solved through marriage"; and such a norm appears to ignore the situation of older widows and same gender-loving women, amongst others (Masenya 2013:4). This is because the heterosexual desire on the part of the women is portrayed as a consequence of (or even a punishment for) women's misdeeds rather than an original component of her nature (Stone 2000:63).

Moreover, women's domestic labour is not regarded as productive, they contribute to the development process solely from home; they are involved in economic activities using their domestic labour, which includes jobs carried out not in return for wages, such as childcare, cooking, laundry, and house cleaning (Sari-Aksakal 2022:52). Access to and use of land and

other social economic resources is also governed by these cultural constructions of power imbalance that privilege men (Neuenfeldt 2015:19). This means that women's role in society derives from that of her husband (Hyman 1984:190) or father. Paraphrasing Althaus-Reid (2000:16) it could be said that the sexual construction of current Mozambique functions in a frame of property, similar to the scriptural (specifically the biblical book of Ruth) commandment of men's sexual rights over women. In both contexts, those who do not conform with this sexual construction fall into de category of indecency with the outcome of losing economic benefits. Thus, confirming another affinity between the two contexts in conversation.

Norman Gottwald (1993:346) argues that communitarian biblical economics can provide a general principle that economic organization should be developed in such a way as to benefit all members of the society and that this goal is attainable only by involving large numbers of people, representing all sectors of society, in economic decision-making. Unfortunately, the economics in the biblical book of Ruth as well as in contemporary Mozambique seems to ignore this fact. Indeed, the art of economics in both contexts consists in tracing the consequences of economic policies only for a particular group while neglecting other groups (see also Hazlitt 1979:17). This represents a modality of masculinity which is much more than a feature of individual psychology; it is an ideological construction of power in which male mastery over women serves as the root model and metaphor for the constitution and legitimation of political and economic power (Keefe 2016:158). In other words, women's oppression remains as part of an economic exchange (Althaus-Reid 2000:16) in current Mozambique as well as in Ruth's narrative.

Nevertheless, the involvement of all sectors of society in economics would have allowed a rapid and inclusive development process in contemporary Mozambique as well as in the context of Ruth. The UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has argued that giving women the same access as men to modern seeds, fertilizer and tools could increase production on women's farms in developing countries by 20 to 30 percent - enough to feed up to 150 million more of the world's hungry people (Neuenfeldt 2015:19). In other words, women's economic empowerment in developing countries like Mozambique would contribute to accelerated development in order to relieve the economic burden of the country and beyond. Likewise, if women in the biblical book of Ruth had been economically empowered this would have given alternative solutions to the famine in Bethlehem or minimized the economic vulnerability of widows in Moab and Israel. But the heteronormative economic structure does

not allow this “elementary truth” (Hazlitt 1979:16) to be applied in contemporary Mozambique as well as in the context of Ruth. Unfortunately, this is another negative affinity between the two contexts in dialogue.

While women are generally considered the main victims of oppression in heteropatriarchal societies, men are also victims of the same system. In other words, heterosexual desires and patriarchal ideologies not only oppress women but also do not liberate men. Indeed, men are taught that they are the providers of the family, and they are the ones who must guarantee the well-being of their children and wives; consequently, they try harder than normal to feed their male pride. Even with limitations, they try to do the impossible to appear strong and capable of overcoming any obstacle. Moreover, male pride does not allow them to share their frustrations with others, which often leads them to depression, involvement in alcohol and drugs, as well as addiction to multiple sexual partners. As a result, they die faster because of stress, lack of adequate nutrition and sexually transmitted diseases (like HIV and AIDS). And when men die, they worsen the economic situation of their families, who spent the entire life without economic means, hoping that the man of the house would provide for them the whole life. One way or the other, this reality can be attested to the context of Ruth’s narrative as well as the context of contemporary Mozambique. In other words, in both contexts the heteronormative economic structures not only oppress women, but it also enslaves men. This means that economic involvement of women (and many other indecent people) would also free men from the yoke and bonds of heteropatriarchal system.

Accordingly, the context of Ruth’s narrative and contemporary Mozambique represent two different socio-historical contexts. However, the two contexts share some resemblances based on their rules that determine the mechanisms of production, distribution, and consumption of wealth. The two contexts highlight high levels of economic deprivation due to internal and external ineffective economic policies. Though men also suffer from the heteronormative structure in both contexts, women are the main victims of this economic system. The heteronormative economic structure in both contexts creates economic privilege of men and economic dependence of women. While men fall into the category of decent, women are categorized as the indecent others in terms of economics and sexuality. This is an affinity to be taken into consideration when appropriating the ethical force of the biblical book of Ruth in contemporary Mozambique. With this in mind, the following section will continue a dialogue between current Mozambique and the biblical book of Ruth, but now looking at the place of

ambiguous and/or non-conforming sexualities within the heteropatriarchal ideologies and practices of both contexts (Mozambique and Ruth).

5.1.2 Economic Silence and Exclusion of Ambiguous and/or Non-conforming Sexualities

Althaus-Reid (2000:27) argues that the system of decency rules and regulates how women [and people in general] should dress, speak, and perform their sexual activities. Those who do not conform with this system of decency fall into the category of "the other" or are intentionally situated outside the society (Magied 2020:8). The other is often perceived by the group as not belonging, as being different in some fundamental way or a stranger. The concept of otherness indicates a negative effect to the subject being (Magied 2020:8), who is regarded as indecent (Althaus-Reid 2000:2) and subject to stigmatization, negation of identity and discrimination. The indecent other is generally labelled or defined as someone who belongs to a socially subordinate category or who does not fit the norm of the social group. Though different categories of indecency can be attested in current Mozambique and in Ruth's context, the focus in this section is sexual indecency within the two heteronormative economic structures.

The heteronormative economic structure in current Mozambique as well as in the biblical book of Ruth are ruled and guided by the heteropatriarchal principles and practices of decency that put queer people as "distinctly other and distinctly secondary, forced to compete uphill on a slanted playing field" (Mollenkott 2000:19). In fact, the two contexts operate under heteropatriarchal assumptions that silence, marginalize, or distort queer [economic] experiences (Mollenkott 2000:15). This is because heteropatriarchal structure has difficulties in understanding sexuality outside biological and reproductive discourse (Althaus-Reid 2000:72). As a result, non-conforming people or different gender identities are economically silenced and excluded in the biblical book of Ruth as well as in contemporary Mozambique.

On one hand, the biblical book of Ruth does not clearly mention non-conforming sexual identities, but sexual ambiguities of some of its characters suggest this type of sexual relationships. Indeed, "sexual relations with members of the opposite sex were not always understood to be exclusive of same-sex contact in the ancient world" (Stone 2000:60), including the context of Ruth. On the other hand, the conscience about human rights in the world has allowed an open discussion about non-conforming sexual identities in Mozambique. In fact, advocacy campaigns have been launched in order to promote non-discriminatory policies for those with different sexualities or gender identities in the country (Chipenembe

2018:12). This means that both the ambiguous characters in the biblical book of Ruth and the queer people or non-conforming sexualities in contemporary Mozambique fall into the category of indecency or the others, who are silenced and excluded from the heteronormative economic structure. And this resemblance of sexual struggle brings a negative affinity between the context of Ruth and the Mozambican context.

The rules that determine the mechanisms of production, distribution, and consumption of wealth in contemporary Mozambique and in Ruth's context are governed by heterosexual principles of decency. The moral order of the two contexts is based on a heterosexual construction of reality, which organizes not only categories of approved social and divine interactions but of economic ones too (Althaus-Reid 2000:2). On one hand, current Mozambican labour law protects individuals based on sexual orientation in the workplace, with the result that transgender individuals often bear the brunt of discrimination, especially when attempting to find employment (Pimental 2007:9). In other words, queer or indecent people are theoretically protected by the labour law as long as their gender identities, gender expressions, and biological sex apparently all align in the eyes of hetero-patriarchal ideology. As a result, many indecent people work for justice from within the closet to try to survive in order to work yet another day while preserving the loving values they believe in (Mollenkott 2000:19). Those who publicly confront this system of decency experience bullying and marginalization which often force them to quit their employment. In addition, Mozambican schools are also places where bullying of indecent queer people is experienced, and the victims often abandon education at a very early age. Therefore, worsening their future economic vulnerability. The economic exclusion of LGBTIQA+ people is even aggravated by the lack of support from families, who categorize them as indecent while excluding them from the economic structure of the family (like the inheritance of the land).

On the other hand, the law in the context of Ruth seems to present a different reality concerning issues of sexuality and economics. Indeed, the biblical book of Ruth is under the whole legal material of the Hebrew Bible which periodically discuses "who can and cannot sleep with whom to keep from defiling the land" (Schneider 2016:190). This reflects a typical heterosexual system of decency in which sexual intercourse is meant to produce heirs capable of assisting with the subsistence and economic stability of the family (White 2014:18). This has been supported by Amelia D. Freedman (2003:31) who points out that the labor- intensive nature of farming in Israel undoubtedly led to the society wide emphasis on the importance of

children, in the hope that this emphasis would lead to the production of a labor force large enough to complete the agricultural work necessary for families to survive under such harsh conditions. Consequently, ambiguous sexualities were forced to exist from within the closet to avoid the death penalty established in the Levitical legislation (Lev 20:13). In fact, the death penalty for homosexuality, specifically stated only with reference to men, was more severe than the punishment elsewhere in the ANE (Crenshaw 2010:275). The absence of a death penalty for lesbians has been understood as a result of the lack of penetration, but it seems more likely that the law covering homosexuality was inclusive (Crenshaw 2010:276). This means that the economic struggle of ambiguous characters in Ruth not only tests them every day, but is a mixture of poverty and sexuality which makes these people sometimes "unusual" poor people (Althaus-Reid 2000:5).

The economic exclusion and silence of indecent queer people in contemporary Mozambique as well as in the context of Ruth leads to another critical dimension, in which the victims use their bodies as commodities for economic transaction. In fact, the economic marginalization of non-conforming people and/or different gender identities in current Mozambique often leads them to sex work (Chipenembe 2018:164). In other words, they recognize their sexualities as commodity which can be sold in exchange of economic benefits. Though this could be viewed as a negative attitude within conservative and heterosexual environments, it is seen by queer sex workers as the only available opportunity for them to satisfy their economic needs, like food and shelter (Lihahe 2020:3). However, these forms of commercial sex of queer people often are associated with unsafe sexual behaviour, such as involvement in multiple partners and low condom use, which increases the risk of getting sexually transmitted diseases. The same analogy can be depicted from Ruth's narrative, specifically from the Moabite character (Ruth). Though Ruth portrays some ambiguities in terms of sexuality, her economic vulnerability threw her to the hands of a prosperous Boaz in order to uplift the economic situation of her family of widows. In other words, Ruth uses her body as a commodity to earn some extra economic benefits. Reading it through modern eyes, it could be suggested that Ruth was involved in unprotected sex with Boaz as the only available opportunity for her to satisfy her economic needs. In fact, Ruth's pregnancy from Boaz attests to this unprotected sex, which would have led to sexual transmitted diseases if one of them was infected.

Therefore, the heteronormative system of decency in Ruth's narrative as well as in contemporary Mozambique categorizes ambiguous characters and queer sexualities as the

indecent others, who do not fit the norms of the social groups. Due to their situation of alleged indecency, they are excluded and/or silenced from the economic structures of society. As a result, they are often forced to use their sexualities as commodities, selling their bodies in exchange of economic benefits, which increase the risk of contracting sexual transmitted disease, like HIV and AIDS. Having done this, the study will proceed (in the following section) with the dialogue between contemporary Mozambique and Ruth's narrative, but now looking at the role of religion in shaping the heteropatriarchal structures and its mechanisms of economic exclusion in both contexts.

5.1.3 Religion and the Legitimation of Heteropatriarchal Economic Ideologies

From the beginning of human history to the present, religion has been a space for the exercise of power. Indeed, religion and the exercise of power have been in a relationship of collaboration and mutual ideological assistance throughout human history (see West 2011:523). In other words, there is a relationship of complicity and mutual assistance between religion and power. One of the most powerful ways in which people legitimize power structure in religion is by saying that things are the way they are because God made them so, and to challenge them is to be irreligious (Morrison 1997:61). This is why scholars like Gregory Baun (1980:34) consider religion to be an arbitrary concept, in that it makes it possible to provide answers to certain questions and solve certain problems, but it also prevents certain questions from being asked and covers up aspects of social reality that deserve attention. In fact, if people question certain aspects of religion are also questioning the divine.

Tim Morrison (1997:62) argues that religious power is mythologized into the structure of the universe through a divine chain of command: gods-men-women-animals. Anything that does not obey this divine chain of command is out of order and subject to its social and religious consequences. The consequences of not obeying this chain of command include exclusion and marginalization. Within this hierarchical and sacred order, men have power over all things and people (Neuenfeldt 2015:22) while women and animals must follow his orders. In fact, this power structure is based on gender and sexual status, whereby men are good, fathers are better, people who can be neither men nor fathers (whilst not being exactly bad) are certainly less good (Morrison 1997:63). As a result, such a structure has been oppressive and exclusive to many people, especially those considered out-of-the-closet or the indecent others (Althaus-Reid 2000:89). From this perspective, it could be argued that religion often serves to legitimize powerful institutions and individuals and dull the pain of those who suffer the abuse of that

power (Morrison 1997:63). Those who suffer the abuse of that power include women and those with ambiguous or indecent appearances.

In many religions (if not all) power structures are guided by heteropatriarchal desires and ideologies. And this structure of power in religion is as poisonous as radiation, "it seeks to permeate and kill invisibly, it wounds and maims its victims physically and psychologically" (Morrison 1997:63). The victims die in silent mode since they cannot challenge the sacred and social order established by the divine. Indeed, the image of the gods in these religious power structures promotes a world view in which some people define themselves over and against other people, animals, and the world itself, and in which some people exercise power over other people instead of using this power to combat injustices (Edwards 1997:71). In other words, those who are hierarchically close to the gods (like men) enjoy the privilege of this sacred and social order while the others (women and non-conforming or ambiguous gender identities) are likely to experience the poison of this power structure. It is within this reality that the religious dialogue between the book of Ruth and contemporary Mozambique is established to explore some resemblances on how the sacred order of religion is used to legitimize the heteronormative economic structure in both contexts.

The biblical book of Ruth and contemporary Mozambique represent two different realities in terms of religion. Indeed, the religious tradition in the book of Ruth belongs to the post-exilic Jewish context, while contemporary Mozambique is shaped by the religious plurality of the post-colonial context. Though this research recognizes the plurality of religion in contemporary Mozambique, this dialogical partner is narrowed to the Christian understanding of religion. This is a deliberate choice to limit the discussion and meet the objectives of the research. In order words, the dialogical process is established between the God of Israel in post-exilic context and the Christian God in contemporary Mozambique. And the goal is to see how the name of God is invoked or used within the heteropatriarchal economic ideologies and practices that supports economic privilege of heterosexual men, economic dependence of heterosexual women, and economic silence or exclusion of ambiguous and/or queer sexualities.

According to John Bright (1962:132), Israel's religion was based on the memory of historical experience, interpreted and responded to in faith. This interpretation took different shapes in different historical moments of Israel, but there is a general perception that Israel's religion is

patriarchal in both origin and practice (Frommer 1997:13)[35]. In support to this assumption, Mary C. Boys (2002:52) argues that Judaism was dominated by patriarchy. In fact, its women were "impoverished, subject to the whims of their husbands, forced into marriage at a vulnerable age, excluded because of menstruation, banned from giving witness or teaching, and barred from leadership" (Boys 2002:52). Though different images of God can be attested in the Hebrew Bible, the God of Israel is generally mythologized through a hierarchical chain of command, in which heterosexual male figures have authority over others (including animals). Indeed, the Hebrew Bible often portrays the Israelite deity as a masculine figure, who often praises heterosexual male figures too. And this is the same God depicted in the biblical book of Ruth, but also inherited by the Christian Church in Mozambique and elsewhere in the world. In other words, biblical religion in general, and Christianity in particular, reinforce patriarchal masculinities and unequal gender relations (van Klinken 2010:7).

Malcom Edwards (1997:70) argues that the Christian Church took on the scriptures of the Jewish community, and so inherited its God. In other words, part of the Christian scriptures (the Old Testament) is the same as the Israelite (Jewish) book of faith. And the God depicted in the Christian tradition is the same God of the Hebrew people. This is the same patriarchal God who incarnated in Christ; therefore, making the "incarnation or enfleshment of God in Christ" central to Christian faith (Thatcher 1993:40). This incarnated God is the head of the Church, a male figure and often represented liturgically by male clergy (Thatcher 2011:118). Moreover, this male God "creates and underwrites the sex-gender hierarchy, and the male priesthood is divinely authorized by Christ Himself who called 12 men, no women, to be His disciples" (Thatcher 2011:118). Nevertheless, locating God or Christ as the head is to legitimize the hierarchical structure of power in which some people have authority and control over others. Indeed, the idea of headship is a "major symbol of [hetero]patriarchal ideology that assigns power and authority to men, leaving women [and indecent sexualities] as inferior and submissive beings whose sexuality, body and life is controlled by [heterosexual] men" (van Klinken 2010:7-8).

Althaus-Reid (2000:167) argues that in Christianity there is what is called "the ceiling of decency", that is the epistemological ceiling, called faith, or patriarchal faith, which does not

[35] Future research needs to be conducted on this. We may find that this claim of the religion of Isarel as patriarchy was contested within the context of production of the texts in the Bible. But for now, this is not a concern to be discussed in this research. And the assumption of patriarchy as the characteristic of religion in Israel is subject to suspicion.

allow Christianity to reflect on its prejudices and mistakes, because the faith and its people want to be decent. As a result, queer sexualities are silenced within this binary power structure. And this reality ignores the fact that "God's image is also found in people who do not identify straightforwardly with ether sex" (Thatcher 2011:119). This means that in the Christian Church sexuality is a power issue at the mercy of those who have the decision-making power (in this case the heterosexual men), and this power is affirmed and safeguarded by a range of religious and sexual practices that frustrates the mutuality of sexual decision-making between different people (see van Klinken 2010:7). This reality can be attested in both current Mozambique and in the biblical book of Ruth. Therefore, it could be argued that both Christianity in Mozambique and Jewish religion in Ruth are operating under heteropatriarchal assumptions that "silence, marginalize, or distort queer experience" (Mollenkott 2000:15).

It has been argued that economic systems are religious systems which displace and represent sets of social relationships (Althaus-Reid 2000:17). In order to consolidate a more sustainable communal existence and economic transactions, societies develop and preserve a set of religious practices and beliefs to generate power structure among its members. This set of beliefs is crucial in maintaining the ideological orientation of such economic systems. In other words, religion is one key factor in a constellation of the "social, institutional, and ideological factors" that arise within a regime to help it hold together, and this implies a theory in which religion derives horn the socio-economic relations and serves to legitimate and sustain them (Keefe 2016:154). This sacralization of economy can be attested not only in the context of Ruth but also in contemporary Mozambique.

The economics of Ruth belongs to a world of subsistence agriculture lodged in the social networks of village communities, with allocative patterns of exchange designed to maximize group survival and continuity (Keefe 2016:155). In such a world, the religious practices and beliefs emerged in a creative engagement with these material conditions, making as sacred those social networks and generate power which sustains communal existence (Keefe 2016:155-6). In fact, the ancient economy (including the one in the biblical book of Ruth) was not an independent entity isolated from other areas of human life, but it was embedded in "the sacred" (Ro 2018:2). According to Gerstenberger (2012:26), "the administration of the huge empire by means of royal decrees and of a concept of legitimacy with religious coloring are frequently attested in the Persian era." This means that the economic ideology of Persia (in which the biblical book of Ruth is located) it was legitimized by religion. What is true is what

the Persian leader say is true, and it is important for the colonized to believe this because they must act in accordance with what the Persian god says, since he commands according to his desire, which is also the desire of the Persian god (Janzen 2022:109). In addition to that, the temple community used this ideology to portray themselves as a group of imperial subjects who depend on Achaemenid rule to survive (Janzen 2022:167). So, one cannot talk about the economics of the biblical book of Ruth without making allusion to the belief systems in which this economic reality is engaged.

The economic structure of contemporary Mozambique also is ideologically oriented, through the global capitalism system, rooted in a system of beliefs to sustain and legitimize its existence. Though current Mozambique is a lay state with different religious manifestations, the direction of political leadership has maintained a projection of public policies and laws that are rooted deeply in [a manipulation of] the belief system of Christian ideology (Clark 2020:14). In fact, many people in the country believe that economic success is a result of blessing from the gods while poverty is a curse for not obeying God's command and teachings. In other words, success is a gift from God and to God, and people are poor due to their lack of hard work (Clark 2020:18). This way of thinking does not come from nowhere, it is a result of an ideological construction of modern global economic system, where religious beliefs are invoked or used to make as sacred the economic networks and generate power imbalance between people. On one way or the other the current Mozambican economics are engaged and embedded in a system of beliefs that make its rule sacred. And Christianity does not offer sufficient space to challenge [or question] this economic order because this would mean also challenging the divine order of the constructs of Christianity (Althaus-Reid 2000:167). In short, challenging or questioning what seems to be not good in the economics of current Mozambican would mean to question or to challenge the will of the divine. Accordingly, both the economic system of Ruth and contemporary Mozambique are ideologically sustained by religious systems to generate power imbalance within economic transaction between people.

The sacralization of economics in the biblical book of Ruth as well as in contemporary Mozambique is also related to issues of sexuality and gender because power structure within this system is about possession, penetration, and control (Keefe 2016:159). The religious practices, beliefs, and rituals that support the existence of socio-economics networks follows the divine and hierarchical chain of command. Those divinely assigned the role of penetration are more likely to have economic possession, while controlling those being penetrated and

excluding those who do not conform with this binary opposition (or who are not willing to penetrate others or being penetrated). For instance, the sacred order in Ruth's narrative legitimizes the economic transaction through marriage of opposite sex, which silence the economic involvement of those who do not conform with this binary structure. The Christian Church in contemporary Mozambique follows a similar divine chain of command, whereby its beliefs and rituals are mobilized to sanction and sacralize hierarchical power relations (Keefe 2016:156). While the Christian Church in contemporary Mozambique sacralizes the economic privilege of men and economic dependency of women, it suppresses the economic participation of queer bodies (Ferreira, Garcia & Lacerda 2021:387).

It is interesting that the divine and hierarchical chain of command also affects theological reflection and discourse. Althaus-Reid (2000:22) states that, based on sexual categories and heterosexual binary systems, obsessed with sexual behaviour and orders, every theological discourse is implicitly a sexual discourse, a decent one, an accepted one. As a result, most theologians and biblical scholars in current Mozambique are tempted to do a decent and heterosexual theology for them to be accepted by the established and traditional heteropatriarchal order of the Christian Church. This is because the theology of the Bible is heterosexual since it was written from that perspective (Althaus-Reid 2000:104). And the Christian Church in Mozambique tends to reproduce that approach from the top down, from the educated to the common people, from those in power to those without power, and from the rich to the poor (Rieger 2021:60). Within such structure heterosexual men always take advantage, followed by heterosexual women, while the indecent queer people remain deliberately invisible or silenced. Using Althaus-Reid's (2000:13) language, it could be said that the colonizers stripped Mozambique with its culture, religious, and economic systems but kept heteropatriarchal power intact, if not reinforced by Christianity. And this challenges theologians not only to ask different questions but also to undertake a different way of doing contextual theology (Althaus-Reid 2000:6).

Accordingly, the religious context of Ruth is different from the religious context of contemporary Mozambique. However, the two religious contexts share some resemblances based on their rituals and beliefs. The two contexts present a collaboration and mutual assistance between religion and exercise of power, which is mythologized into the structure of the universe through a divine and hierarchical chain of command (top down). Within this sacred and social order heterosexual males have power over women and animals. People who do not

conform with this power structure fall under the category of religious indecency and are subject to marginalization, oppression and exclusion. In other words, religious practices, beliefs and rituals in the biblical book of Ruth and contemporary Mozambique legitimize the economic privilege of heterosexual men, the economic dependence of heterosexual women, and the economic silence and/or exclusion of indecent sexualities. And this oppressive sacred order cannot be challenged by the Christian Church and theologians because in doing so it would mean to challenge the established divine order. The question that follows (next sub-section) suggests a life-affirming economic, sexual, and religious ethic from Ruth's narrative for context of non-conforming sexualities or different gender identities in contemporary Mozambique (and Southern Africa).

5.2 Suggesting a Life-Affirming Economic, Sexual and Religious Ethic from Ruth

According to Robert G. Olson (1978:2) the word ethics suggests primarily a moral code, or a body of rules of right conduct. In other words, it deals with question of what is right or wrong. However, what is wrong in one context can be considered right in another reality. In fact, "moral truths are not absolutely true but true relative to a particular society or individual" (Olen, Barry & Van Camp 2008:4). And there are many different ways in which an action can be right or wrong, and sometimes an action can be right in one way but wrong in another (Olen, Barry & Van Camp 2008:2). This means that people make moral judgements based on what matters to them. Though moral issues suggest relative truths, societies need ethical principles to guide them on how different people can live together and cooperate one another. Moreover, these moral principles should build on a preferential option for the poor and marginalized (Schubeck 1993:24) to affirm their existence as fully human beings, with dignity and rights.

The Christian Church use the scriptures as the primary witness to the word of God because the Bible plays a central role in forming the moral identity of Christians and informing their moral decisions (Schubeck 1993:132). In fact, Christians rely on the Bible for their moral guidance. This assumption is based on the fact that the God of the Bible is the ultimate source of morality, and whatever people act rightly or wrongly depends on how well they pursue God's purpose (Olen, Barry & Van Camp 2008:12). However, Christian ethicists can promote oppression or liberation of the excluded and marginalized through their understanding of a biblical code of ethics. It is within this context that this section aims to discern a suggestive life-affirming economic, sexual, and religious ethic from the biblical book of Ruth, for the context of the economic, sexual, and religious exclusion of queer bodies in contemporary Mozambique.

It has been said elsewhere in this research (see section 1.4.5) that Mosala (1989:9) considers biblical texts as sites of struggle. For Mosala (1989:10), "the struggles that produced the text and those that are part of the nature of the text express themselves in terms of certain internal contradictions." In other words, the biblical texts represent different voices contending for space in different spheres of life in the ancient world. From that perspective it could be suggested that the book of Ruth is also a document of struggle. However, the struggle in the book of Ruth is not for liberation of blacks in the context of the South African apartheid, as Mosala (1989:94) would argue, but liberation from exclusion of the indecent voices in the narrative (including the world that produced this text). Therefore, to engage this biblical text in the light of contemporary struggle for economic liberation is to take sides in and connect with kindred struggles that were being waged in very ancient communities (see Mosala 1989:8). There are different struggles being fought in the biblical book of Ruth, but this research only focusses on issues of economics, sexuality and religion. Though these struggles can be depicted through different characters within the narrative, this study concentrates on Ruth (the Moabite widow) while other characters are brought into a comparative discussion, when necessary. In fact, Ruth offers the possibilities of unveiling the three selected struggles in the narrative, being economic, sexual, and religious as highlighted above.

5.2.1 Economic Struggle

Ruth is presented in the narrative as belonging to a socially subordinate category and she struggles to be included into the economic life of Israel. In fact, Ruth is described not only as a widow, but also as a poor foreign woman (Siquans 2009:449). According to Siquans (2009:446), widows in Ancient Near Eastern society, and thus in Israelite society, were most likely placed among the poor (Siquans 2009:446), who could not fully enjoy the economic outcomes of the nation. Moreover, the Moabites were accused of not providing the Israelites with bread and water during their journey through the desert (De Villiers 2017:46). Consequently, the presence of Ruth (as a Moabite woman) on Judahite soil is forbidden, and according to the exclusivists, she poses a severe threat to the economy of the community (De Villiers 2017:42). In addition to that, the concept of foreigner in the post-exilic context was mostly used in a negative sense and conveyed a hostile attitude towards the strangers or non-Israelites, and it implied malevolence and inferiority to them (De Villiers 2017:41). This understanding can be attested in other post-exilic literatures, like Ezra and Nehemiah, where the negative otherness of foreigners is explicit (see Ezra 9:1-2, Ezra 10:8 and Nehemiah 9:2).

These post-exilic texts suggest exclusion or marginalization of indecent people, including foreigners like Ruth.

The post-exilic exclusivity ideology demanded that people should submit themselves to a scrutiny of their marriage status, and those who would refuse to appear in Jerusalem would have their property confiscated and would be expelled from the community (see Ezra 10:8). As a result, "all those born from a parent of the wrong ethnic group were suddenly disenfranchised" (Fried 2015:384). Janzen (2022:4) suggests that "perhaps this exclusive understanding of community really reflects an economic fear that these marriages would cause their land to pass to other groups when the children of such unions inherited from their parents." One way or the other, Ruth can be described as a prototype character, representing many other people in the post-exilic context who were economically excluded or marginalized by the temple community because of their condition of otherness. This means that the people of the land and the repatriates competed for resources or for access/control of the temple (Middlemas 2009:183). However, the people of the land (including people like Ruth) often suffered from the burden of economic exclusion due to their ethnic indecency.

As an indecent character, there were only two possibilities given to Ruth for her economic inclusion. The first one is by attributing a legal status to her in the context of Torah (Siquans 2009:451), which overrules the exclusion of foreigners practiced in post-exilic context. Indeed, the Israelite law, as stated in Leviticus 19:9-10 and Deuteronomy 24:19, pertains to the harvest season in Israel and makes provision for the widow, the orphan and the stranger who may not have enough to eat (De Villiers 2017:41). This legal provision allowed Ruth to glean and gather among the sheaves behind the harvesters, on the harvest field of Boaz (Ruth 2:7-9), to secure her economic survival. In other words, she falls into the category of the indecent other who can only survive economically by means of picking up the leftover grain behind anyone in whose eyes she finds favour (Ruth 2:2). This means that the law in Israel provided some prescriptions for some economic provisions to strangers like Ruth. The second one is by transacting her body with Boaz through marriage. Marriage with Boaz would allow Ruth and her mother-in-law (Naomi) to enjoy the economic outcomes of the property that belonged to Elimelech, Killion, and Mahlon (Ruth 4:9-13). Based on these possibilities, Ruth could be integrated into the economic life of Israel.

Though Ruth is included in the economic life of Israel in these ways, this is done from the perspective of the established Israelite code of decency. In other words, Ruth is not included

as she is, but she is forced by the established economic system of Israel to be decent in order for her to be integrated into the economic life of the country. This means that she must conform with what the Israelite code of decency offers her. Accordingly, Ruth is engaged in struggle as an indecent character in terms of economics. In fact, Ruth is only economically integrated by means of cooptation and incorporation while the dominant Israelite economic order remains.

5.2.2 Sexual Struggle

The narrative introduces Ruth belonging to a category of sexual indecency because she was a widow, a foreigner from a land with negative sexual connotations and with an ambiguous sexuality. According to the religious law in Israel, foreigners were not allowed to marry an Israelite person. Indeed, Deuteronomy 7:3 forbids marriage between Israelite men or women and women or men of the nation other than Israel (Siquans 2009:455). In the post-exilic era, in which the biblical book of Ruth is located, those who had entered such unions were forced to break up their families, since outsiders had no place in that temple community (Jazen 2022:1). Ruth was not just a foreign woman, but someone from a land with negative sexual connotations. In fact, biblical tradition often associates the sexuality of the Moabites with incest (Gen 19:30-38) and idolatry (Num 25:1-5). Furthermore, the sexuality of Ruth, as presented in the narrative, is ambiguous because she seems to portray different sexual orientations in different settings of the text. In fact, looking at different spaces of the narrative it becomes unclear whether Ruth was attracted to male or female or to both. All of these (her condition of being a foreigner, from a land with negative sexual connotations and an unclear sexual orientation) place Ruth under the category of sexual indecency, situating her within a sexual struggle.

Indecent people like Ruth were likely to be sexually integrated in Israel only by means of sex-work. In fact, any foreign widow with no family was tempted to sleep with rich men in order to survive (Jacobson 2013:9). In fact, foreign widows did not possess a piece of land for their economic security and were tempted to venture in transactional sex for their survival, often throwing themselves to the hands of the rich to maximize their economic incomes. However, the situation of Ruth seems to be different. Ruth is eventually sexually included in Israel through levirate marriage. Though Ruth is introduced with an illicit (and ambiguous) sexual identity (Siquans 2009:447), the narrative reminds the reader that she is part of those whom the Torah calls the Israelites to care for, continually reminding them that their care should go beyond moral obligation (Alfredo 2010:85-86). Indeed, the story of Ruth is told to convince the reader that a Moabite woman is not dangerous at all but can be a valuable member of

Judahite society (Siquans 2009:449). As the wife of the dead (Ruth 4:5), Ruth is entitled to levirate marriage. This levirate marriage allowed Ruth to transact her sexuality as well as to guarantee the entire future of Israel, according to the narrator (through the production of male offspring) (Ruth 4:13). In fact, the union between Boaz and Ruth is exceptionally fruitful, and soon after he takes her as wife, Yahweh grants her to become pregnant and a son is born (De Villiers 2017:49). This son (Obed) that was born out of this sexual intercourse between Boaz and Ruth became an ancestor of David, the great king of Israel.

Thus, it could be argued that the narrative suggests an inclusion and celebration of Ruth, regardless of her sexual indecency, and that she is given the right to participate in the sexual transactions of Israel. However, this sexual inclusion is done through the heteropatriarchal system in which male and female bodies are presupposed to have biological and anatomical features that complement each other through marriage. Once again Ruth is not sexually accepted the way she is, but she is forced to become decent in order to be included into the sexual life of Israel. This means that Ruth is also engaged in a struggle of sexuality. Even the son (Obed) that was born from this mixed marriage between Ruth and Boaz is embraced (literally) by his grandmother (Naomi) and is named by the townswomen (Carroll 2015:187; Ruth 4:16-17), locating him within the Israelite heteropatriarchal system. Ruth disappears, having been fully coopeted by heteropatriarchy. This sexual struggle of Ruth is clearly visible throughout the narrative, but the book is silent about a solution to this problem. Ruth is sexually included through cooptation and incorporation while the dominant sexual order remains unchanged. In other words, sexual integration of Ruth in the narrative is minimal.

5.2.3 Religious Struggle

As a Moabite woman, Ruth is also presented in the narrative as an indecent character in terms of religion. According to biblical tradition, when the Israelites were wondering through the desert, the Moabite king (Balak), overcome by fear for this awesome nation, hires the soothsayer Balaam to curse them (see Nm 22-23, De Villiers 2017:37). Hence, Deuteronomy 23:4 rules out the incorporation of Moabites into the assembly of Israel. This means that the people of Moab could not be part of the religious practices of Israel. Moreover, the Moabites were seen by the Israelites as those who led them back into idolatry, after God had banished them shortly after their liberation from the Egyptian slavery (Packer, Tenney & White 2002:60). And this idolatry has been pointed out as the cause of the fall of Israel's leaders in different periods of its history, which finally led God to allow the nation to be defeated because

of its sacrifices to pagan idols (Packer, Tenney & White 2002:60, Hos 4:19). To avoid anger and/or punishment from God, the Israelites were forced to exclude the idolatrous Moabite people into their religious life. Therefore, the presence of a Moabite woman in post-exilic Judah would have generated some hostility against her, although this is never stated explicitly in the book of Ruth (Siquans 2009:447). In fact, the past experiences between the Moabites and the Israelites would have generated some suspicions about the presence of Ruth in the religious life of Judah in post-exilic period.

The religious context of post-exilic Judah was influenced by the exclusivist ideology of the repatriates, but with support of Persian imperial ideology. According to Gerstenberger (2012:58), at times one spoke almost euphorically of the Persian exemplary tolerant politics of religion, which could include an active promotion of alien cults, but this relative religious tolerance should not compromise the financial demands of the Empire. In other words, the worship of the Jews was considered harmless, as long as it did not cause any problem to the imperial structure (including the collection of taxes). To assure this imperial tranquility, the Persian governor appointed temple officials who were responsible to him (Fried 2015:393). These temple officials were responsible for the religious ceremonies and rituals, and most of them concentrated on the capital Judah (Gerstenberger 2012:107). In addition to that, the constitution of Torah was used by the repatriates to regulate the worship of God as well as define themselves as the true worshipers of Yahweh (Gerstenberger 2012:107). Within this religious apparatus the identity of Yehud's temple community is defined by religious faithfulness and ethnicity (Middlemas 2009:186). Those who were part of the people of the land or who acted less religiously were excluded from entering the assembly of God. And Ruth is one amongst those who were not supposed to participate in the religious activities of Israel.

Janzen (2022:167) argues that the way in which the imperial ideology is used in the post-exilic context to portray the temple community as a group of imperial subjects who depend on Achaemenid rule to survive was not, as far as we can tell, widely shared among the members of the temple assembly. This means that within the members of the temple community there were voices struggling to integrate marginalized people of the land. This contestation can be supported by Nehemiah 6:10-14, who mentions Shemaiah and Noadiah as prophets supposedly hired against Nehemiah by Sanballat and Tobiah (Silverman 2019:19). These opposing voices represent many more people in post-exilic Judah who were not comfortable with both the exclusivity ideology of the repatriate and the imperial domination of Persia. However, the

dominant exclusivity ideology prevails over against the religious inclusion of the people of the land. Even people like Naomi, it could be argued, seem to have not trusted Ruth as decent companion, on her way back to Bethlehem, when hearing that God had blessed Israel with food (Ruth 1:8-9). In other words, Naomi was not comfortable to go back to Israel with an indecent religious person like Ruth. This means that people like Ruth were likely to struggle for integration because they belonged to a community that was not supposed to enter the assembly of God due to their religious indecency.

Though Ruth is described as someone who comes from the context of religious indecency, through this biblical book she is integrated into Israelite religion. Indeed, while the Deuteronomic laws forbid a Moabite from entering the congregation of Israel, the biblical book of Ruth not only describes but also celebrates the entry of a Moabite into the community (Stahlberg 2008:445). In other words, the curse on Moabites was changed by Yahweh into a blessing by means of what Ruth had done (De Villiers 2017:46). This unexpected change suggests that the people of the land (like Ruth, the Moabite) should not be excluded from the assembly of the Lord but included within the religious structure of the nation. In fact, Ruth became part of Israel and a worshiper of Yahweh, at least according to her actions (Siquans 2009:451). And the God of Israel also became the God of Ruth (see Ruth 1:16). However, Ruth is not integrated as she is, and her belief systems are silenced in the narrative. In fact, all the events that take place throughout the narrative are legitimized by the God of Israel and nothing is said about the belief system of Moab, where Ruth comes from. She is forced to be decent in order to be integrated into the religious life of Israel. This means that Ruth is engaged in a struggle in terms of religion. Once again, her religious inclusion is accomplished by means of coaptation and incorporation, while the dominant religious structure of Israel remains intact.

Accordingly, Ruth is a struggling character in terms of economics, sexuality and religion. As a Moabite widow with sexual indecency, she was not supposed to be part of the economic, sexual and religious life of Israel in post-exilic Judah. However, the biblical book of Ruth argues against this ideology of exclusion and celebrates the economic, sexual and religious integration of Ruth. Though Ruth is integrated in terms of economic, sexual religion, her inclusion is done through the existing code of decency of Israel and not as she is. This lays foundations to move (in the next section) towards discernment of an infrapolitical ethic of the powerless as an attempt to suggest full integration of indecent bodies in the biblical book of Ruth as well as in current Mozambique.

5.3 Towards an Infrapolitical Ethic of the Powerless

The biblical book of Ruth is a document of struggle, where characters like Ruth struggle for integration in Israel, in terms of both economics, sexuality, and religion. This means that oppression in the book of Ruth "is not a singular process or a binary political relation, but is better understood as constituted by multiple, converging, or interwoven systems" (see Carastathis 2014:304). In other words, one condition of oppression leads Ruth (and other indecent characters) to experience multiple situations of marginalization. So, the claims of exclusion in the biblical book of Ruth must not be unidirectional (Crenshaw 1989:149), but a combination of struggles against interconnected (Muirhead et al 2020:465) or interlocking or intersecting (West, Zwane & Carlos 2023:590) systems of oppression.

Though Ruth is a character of struggle, the narrative describes and celebrates her economic, sexual, and religious integration. This suggests that the biblical book of Ruth argues against the exclusivity ideology practiced in post-exilic Judah against the people of the land by the temple community. Reading the book from that perspective, one can assume that the narrative is a life-affirming literature which can be used to encourage inclusion of indecent bodies in terms of economics, sexuality and religion. Indeed, there are life-affirming elements or resources in the biblical book of Ruth that can be used in modern context of Mozambique (and elsewhere in Southern Africa) to shed light on issues of economic, sexual and religious exclusion of non-conforming people and/or different gender identities. But these life-affirming resources must be discerned from the perspective, experience, and realities of indecent people or oppressed characters. The way in which Ruth is included into Israel does not liberate indecent people at all, because she is integrated through the established dominant ideology. In fact, Ruth is not integrated according to her economic, sexual, and religious reality. She is forced to change her condition of indecency and become decent in order to be integrated into Israel, in terms of economics, sexuality and religion. From Ruth's indecent perspective the people of the land were not supposed to be included by means of incorporation or coaptation, but as fully humans with a dignity whose economic, sexual and religious reality are respected and affirmed.

Likewise, indecent sexualities or different gender identities in contemporary Mozambique (and elsewhere in Southern Africa) must not be included by means of incorporation or coaptation, but accepted the way they are in terms of their economic situation, sexual orientation and belief systems. In other words, decent people must change so that indecent people have a dignified

inclusion, not like the minimal inclusion of Ruth. This requires a life-affirming ethic that does not silence, exclude or distort queer experiences and feelings. This will foster the Church and the society in general to think about more inclusive and alternative communities in terms of sexual and gender diversity.

In doing that, an infrapolitical ethic of the powerless is suggested in this thesis to capture resistance in disguise, to embarrass and subvert the dominant exclusivity ideology and suggest alternative and inclusive communities, while preserving the safety and dignity of indecent people. Through an infrapolitical ethic of the powerless, indecent sexualities in contemporary Mozambique (and elsewhere in the region) will find life-affirming resources from the biblical book of Ruth to resist contemporary systems of marginalization, based on economic, sexual and religious indecency. These life-affirming resources also will force decent people to change their attitudes towards indecent or non-conforming sexualities.

James C. Scott (1990:19) suggested the concept of infrapolitics of subordinate groups to designate a wide variety of low-profile forms of resistance that dare not speak in their own name. This often happens when the powerless or marginalized people get tired of obeying systems that generate oppression but cannot challenge them publicly for fear of attack or condemnation. In such situations, societies experience acts of insubordination or the infrapolitics of the powerless (Scott 1990:xiii). This means that people (both the oppressed and the oppressor) will have two languages or performances: one for the public and the other for the hidden. But the focus in this research is the hidden discourse or performance of the oppressed or marginalized.

The biblical book of Ruth suggests a hidden discourse, making use of "disguise, deception, and indirection while maintaining an outward impression, in power-laden situations, of willing, even enthusiastic consent" (Scott 1990:17). In other words, the book of Ruth is understood in this research as an infrapolitics of the powerless within the context of economic, sexual, and religious exclusion of the people of the land, practiced by the temple community in post-exilic Judah. This means that the biblical book of Ruth is a form of resistance in camouflage. The context in which this literature emerged was hostile and the author could not publicly critique the oppressive systems of the time. The only possible way available was to tell a story about the celebration of economic, sexual, and religious transaction between the decent Israelites and the indecent people of the lands (including the Moabites). This way of resistance would have interested oppressed hearers (or readers) but through its disguised form it would also have

prevented that more harm is done to the victims of this hostility. Therefore, this infrapolitical ethic of the powerless is discernable as a life-affirming resource for resistance in contexts of economic and religious exclusion of indecent sexualities in contemporary Mozambique (and other similar contexts in Southern Africa). Through this form of resistance, the dominant groups have no control of indecent actions and their respective spaces. In short, oppressed people find safety while resisting marginalization.

Janzen (2022:6) points out that economic and geopolitical factors can shape a group's actions and attitudes. In fact, economic and geopolitical factors shaped actions and attitudes of post-exilic Judah. On one hand, the temple community established a language or performance "designed to be impressive, to affirm and naturalize the power of dominant elites, and to conceal or euphemize the dirty linen of their rule" (Scott 1990:17). This is what Scott (1990:2) calls the public transcript of the dominant. This public transcript was important in maintaining the post-exilic exclusivity ideology of those who had returned from Babylon, with support of the Persian ideology of domination. On the other hand, the people of the land created a discourse or performance of resistance through "politics of disguise and anonymity that takes place in public view but is designed to have a double meaning or to shield the identity of the actors" (Scott 1990:19). This is a tactical prudence to ensure that excluded people rarely blurt out their hidden transcript directly, but by taking advantage of the anonymity of a crowd or of an ambiguous accident, they manage in a thousand artful ways to imply that they are grudging conscripts to their performance the public transcript of compliance (Scott 1990:15). And this is a reality reflected in the narrative of Ruth.

The biblical book of Ruth suggests an infrapolitical ethic of the powerless that is presented as a story of celebration and integration of a Moabite (or indecent) woman into the economic, sexual, and religious life of the temple community in Judah. This must have been a tremendous shock and embarrassment to the dominant class, and probably the story was not heard with comfort by the temple community. Indeed, the incorporation of a Moabite (including other indecent people) in the life of Israel was detestable to the descendants of the exile, who would have created mechanisms of silencing this story. To the understanding of the temple community, the author(s) of Ruth is (are) turning their world upside-down (see Scott 1990:166). Though the wishes of the dominant often prevail, they never control the stage absolutely (Scott 1990:4). In such circumstances, subordinate groups must find ways of getting their message across, while staying somehow within the law (Scott 1990:138). In other words,

marginalized groups always find ways to resist in a clandestine space, and when the critique reaches the dominants, it results in embarrassment and subversion. This resistance often is preserved and propagated through rumor, gossip, folktales, jokes, songs, rituals, codes, and euphemisms (Scott 1990:19). The story of Ruth is told as euphemism to embarrass and subvert the exclusive temple community and suggest an alternative community in Israel. In other words, it is used to obscure something that is negatively valued or would prove to be an embarrassment if declared more forthrightly (Scott 1990:53).

The story of Ruth has survived since its oral presentation or performance until its written stage, including retelling, multiple editings and canonical processes. This means that there are various counter-narratives within the book of Ruth that have survived throughout this process (see Braulik 1999:3). If these materials survived the many constraints of their existence, this means that they have been relevant to a range of different contexts of power relations (Scott 1990:9). Therefore, the story of Ruth is still relevant in contemporary Mozambique (and elsewhere in Southern Africa) within the context of economic and religious exclusion and/or silence of different and/or ambiguous sexualities and gender identities. If the story of an indecent person embarrassed the decent temple community in post-exilic Judah, this same story can embarrass and subvert the decent heteropatriarchal ideology (also present in the Church) that excludes, silences and marginalizes indecent sexualities in contemporary Mozambique (and other similar contexts). This means that heteropatriarchal ideology (principally the one rooted within Church and/ or faith-based institutions) must hear the story of Ruth, though it is embarrassing and subverting. This embarrassing story will expose an ethical system that honors necessary subversion and ceases to shame those who practice sexual indecency (Mollenkott 2000:15) in Mozambique. Besides that, this embarrassing story will inspire indecent sexualities in current Mozambique in their struggle towards construction of alternative and inclusive communities in terms of sexual and/or gender identities.

It has been argued that the powerful have a vital interest in keeping up the appearances appropriate to their form of domination (Scott 1990:70). This means that the so-called decent people (see Althaus-Reid 2000:2) often avoid shame, but when infrapolitical of embarrassment ‘hits the spot’, they are forced to respond in some way in order to maintain their public transcript. This means that the act of the oppressed must be performed almost automatically as a ritual or habitual act, it must be the result of a careful calculating of its advantages, it must be successful dissembling (Scott 1990:24). If the story of Ruth is told publicly, highlighting the

tensions between the final form of the story and the various counter-narratives the analysis in this research has identified, then the decent heteropatriarchal ideology will be forced to make changes in its view about people with different sexualities or gender identities. In fact, decent people would be forced to implement alternative approaches on issues of sexuality and gender in order for them to preserve their public transcript. This means that indecent sexualities (including heterosexual allies) can read the biblical book of Ruth as a form of resisting discourse. This discourse of resistance is discerned not only in the final form of Ruth's narrative, but also in other counter-narrative options that were identified throughout the research process. Such a re-reading of the biblical book of Ruth can be done through Contextual Bible Studies (CBS) within organized communities of faith to suggest or foster construction of alternative and inclusive communities.

One of the components of this research is to produce Contextual Bible Studies for change. This is done in chapter six, but the joy of CBS is that the hidden transcript is least inhibited because it is voiced in a sequestered social site where the control, surveillance, and repression of the dominant are least able to reach, and this sequestered social milieu is composed entirely of close confidants who share similar experiences of domination (Scott 1990:120). Those who will hear, through CBS, the infrapolitics behind the story of Ruth will be called to reflection and change. And many more people will be reached by this life-affirming ethic (both the oppressed and the oppressor), therefore impacting positively on the construction of alternative communities within the contexts of different sexualities or gender diversity. Moreover, those attending such a CBS will share the infrapolitics of Ruth within their families, working places as well as religious spaces. This will also suggest change towards alternative or inclusive communities in the context of different sexualities and gender diversity.

Scott (1990:24) points out that in any established structure of domination, it is plausible to imagine that subordinate groups are socialized by their parents in the rituals of homage that will keep them from harm. In fact, the intention of this research is not to expose LGBTIQA+ people to danger, but to avoid that more damage is done to them, specifically by the Church, and foster change to overcome their struggle of economic, sexual and religious exclusion and/or silence. Once again, this can be well articulated within the CBS to keep them from harm. This will convey the outward impression of conformity with standards sustained by the dominant, while performing, through CBS, an act of resistance in a form of disguise, because beyond this they may not safely go (see Scott 1990:24). This study does not support changes

through radical actions like violence and public manifestations because this would expose queer bodies to more harm and spoil the process of building inclusive communities. This means that the infrapolitics of Ruth is important not only to dominant class who will be forced to change, but is also relevant to the struggling indecent people in contemporary Mozambique who will find a life-affirming ethic that can be used to resist the economic and religious exclusion and silence, without putting their lives in danger.

Accordingly, the biblical book of Ruth is a document of resistance, but in a form of disguise. The book resists the dominant exclusivity ideology practiced by the temple community in post-exilic Judah. It presents different and intersecting systems of oppression, with a special focus on aspects of economics, sexuality, and religion. Excluded indecent characters within the narrative face multiple and interlocking challenges for their economic, sexual and religious integration in Israel. However, the biblical book of Ruth ironically recognizes and celebrates the entry of a Moabite (indecent) women into Judahite life. But this is done based on the established and dominant heteropatriarchal ideologies and practices of Israel. Nevertheless, the alternative narrative strands and fragments within the narrative offer other possibilities. These counter-narratives offer the possibilities that indecent people should not be integrated by means of incorporation or coaptation or forced to change who they are, but should be accepted in ways that reorder and reconstruct the dominant systems, resisting the economic, sexual and religious systems that diminish their humanity. This is because the historical prejudice against the Moabites by refusing them admission to the assembly of Yahweh (including their economic participation), is being disproved by a counter story which promotes sympathy throughout the whole book (Braulik 1999:18). An ethic that captures this understanding is an infrapolitics of the powerless.

An infrapolitical ethic of the powerless gives tools to resist against dominant systems, using disguised discourse or performance to keep the marginalized groups safe. From that perspective, the biblical book of Ruth can be read as a euphemism to critique systems of exclusion and marginalization, based on issues of economics, sexuality and religion. Such a reading of the biblical book of Ruth within communities of faith (where heteropatriarchal ideology is also strong) will embarrass the dominant structure of this ideology, who will, then, be forced to implement some signs of change to avoid more shame. And this would work towards constructing alternative and inclusive communities. The infrapolitical ethic of the powerless discerned from the biblical book of Ruth can be read within communities of faith

through Contextual Bible Studies for future community-based research and praxis, which is the focus of the next chapter.

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter focused on the discernment of an economic, sexual, and religious ethic from Ruth's narrative for contexts of non-conforming sexualities. It looked at the appropriation dialogue between the biblical book of Ruth and contemporary Mozambique, and then suggested an economic, sexual, and religious ethic from Ruth for context of non-conforming sexualities in the country. It noted that contemporary Mozambique and the context of Ruth represent two different realities in terms of geographical location, historical trajectory, belief systems and the mechanisms of production, distribution and consumption of wealth. However, the two contexts share some resemblances, like signs of poverty or economic deprivation, heteropatriarchal practices and ideologies that promote the economic privileges of heterosexual men, the economic dependence of heterosexual women, and the economic exclusion (or silence) of ambiguous and/or non-conforming sexualities. This heteropatriarchal structure is protected by an ideological construction in which political and male sexual power is about possession, penetration and control. And this is legitimized by religion through collaboration and mutual assistance with the exercise of power, which is mythologized into the structure of the universe through a divine and hierarchical chain of command (top down). Those who do not conform with this power structure (for instance, ambiguous sexualities or queer bodies) are placed in the category of indecency or who do not fit the norms of the social groups.

Finally, it noted that an infrapolitical ethic of the powerless is a life-affirming tool or resource from the biblical book of Ruth that can be used to resist dominant heteropatriarchal ideology that silences, excludes and marginalizes indecent queer bodies, and foster change towards construction of alternative and inclusive communities. An infrapolitical ethic of the powerless captures economic resistance, sexual resistance and religious resistance, while preserving the safety of indecent (or ambiguous) people. This hidden language or performance of the marginalized groups can be propagated through CBS to embarrass the dominant heteropatriarchal ideology of the Church and other faith-based organizations. This may facilitate change within the dominant structure to avoid being shamed by infrapolitical counter-narratives. With this in mind, the following chapter appropriates within Contextual Bible Studies the infrapolitical ethic of the powerless discerned from the book of Ruth, based on the contexts of economic, sexual and religious exclusion and/or silence of non-conforming or

ambiguous sexualities and different gender identities. In other words, chapter six constructs CBS resources for change. These LGBTIQA+ biblical resources for change are also a deliberate attempt, post-PhD work to engage directly with LGBTIQA+ people in Mozambique (and elsewhere in the region), drawing their direct voices into this work. These CBS resources can be adjusted (if needed), according to the reality in which they are used.

CHAPTER SIX: CONSTRUCTING CONTEXTUAL BIBLE STUDIES FOR CHANGE

6.0 Introduction

This thesis uses the tripolar African biblical studies approach to bring the intersection between economics and sexual identity in Mozambique into dialogue with the intersection between economics and sexuality in the book of Ruth, in order to construct potentially transformative Contextual Bible Studies for contexts of non-conforming gender identities or different sexualities. After introducing the study in chapter one, chapter two (the contextual pole) analyzed the intersection between economics and sexuality in contemporary Mozambique. And it has noted that there are lines of interaction between economics and sexuality in the country, whereby the heteronormative economic structure creates three categories of poverty, represented by poor heterosexual men, poor heterosexual women and poor queer or indecent people. Chapter three (the textual pole) analyzed the intersection between economics and sexuality in the biblical book of Ruth. And it has concluded that there are spaces in the narrative where economics and sexuality intersect, creating three levels of economic status, characterized by economic privilege of men, economic dependence of (heterosexual) women, and economic silence of ambiguous or indecent characters.

In chapter four the study has returned to both contextual and textual poles of the tripolar approach to analyze the religious contexts that shape the intersections between economics and sexuality in contemporary Mozambique and in the biblical book of Ruth. On one hand, it has concluded that religious confessions in contemporary Mozambique have been contributing to minimize the economic deprivation of the country through education, health services, entrepreneurship, and services of charity, but this is done based on the traditional and established heteronormative economic structure that promotes the economic privilege of men, economic dependence of (heterosexual) women, and economic exclusion of non-conforming sexualities or queer bodies. On the other hand, it has concluded that the biblical book of Ruth argues against the post-exilic ideo-theology of exclusion, but that religion in the narrative is invoked to legitimize and reinforce the established heteronormative economic structure of the book, which normalizes the economic privilege of men, economic dependence of women, and economic silence of ambiguous characters.

In chapter five, the study moved to the pole of appropriation to discern a life-affirming economic, sexual, and religious ethic from the biblical book of Ruth for contexts of non-

conforming sexualities and/or different gender identities. It has noted that contemporary Mozambique and the context of Ruth represent two different realities in terms of geographical location, historical trajectory, belief systems, and the mechanisms of production, distribution and consumption of wealth. However, the two contexts share some resemblances in terms of economic deprivation and heteropatriarchal practices and ideologies that promote economic privileges of heterosexual men, economic dependence of heterosexual women, and economic exclusion (or silence) of ambiguous and/or non-conforming sexualities. Dialogue between context and text has also suggested an infrapolitical ethic of the powerless as a life-affirming economic, sexual and religious tool or resource discernable from the biblical book of Ruth, which can be used to resist, in a disguised form, the dominant heteropatriarchal ideology that silences, excludes, and marginalizes indecent queer bodies in contemporary Mozambique, and to influence changes towards construction of alternative and inclusive communities. In this chapter, the study continues with the pole of appropriation to apply, within Contextual Bible Studies resources, the infrapolitical ethic of the powerless discerned from the biblical book of Ruth. Hence, it will describe briefly, the process of doing Contextual Bible Studies, and then present some examples of CBS resources for change, based on the infrapolitical ethic discerned from the biblical book of Ruth.

6.1 The Process of Doing Contextual Bible Study

Contextual Bible Study is a process of reading the Bible with marginalized communities. There are many forms of reading the Bible with marginalized people, however this research works with the way in which the Ujamaa Centre,[36] reads the scriptures with different struggling groups of the African continent and beyond. The Ujamaa Centre calls this process Contextual Bible Study or CBS. In fact, the CBS process is "one form of contextual Bible re-reading among many" (West 2022:11). This process emerged as a result of collaboration between CEBI (*Centro de Estudos Bíblicos* or Centre for Biblical Studies) in Brazil and the Ujamaa Centre for Community Development & Research in South Africa, that begun in the 1980s (West 2015:235). In the South African context "CBS was important because it was a tool that could be used to engage and convince people of the injustice of apartheid, especially in a context where apartheid was religiously sanctioned" (Nadar 2009:388). This means that CBS was one of the tools used to resist the oppressive apartheid system in South Africa.

[36] For the meaning of Ujamaa Centre refer to section 1.3.4 above.

However, today CBS has been widely used to resist different struggles in different contexts of the world, such as economic, sexual, religious struggles, amongst others. In fact, CBS emphasizes the presence of a significant "resistance theology" in the Bible (West 2022:12). This means that CBS is widely recognized as one form (amongst others) of resisting interlocking system of oppression within faith-based organization or institutions and communities. This is a context in which CBS resources for change must be constructed in this study, from the biblical book of Ruth, to resist the economic, sexual, and religious marginalization or exclusion of indecent queer people (or non-conforming sexualities) in contemporary Mozambique (and other similar contexts). This is a difficult conversation in the Church, including the society in general because there is a lack of proper language to talk about this issue and the unwilling to change by the dominant heteropatriarchal ideology and practice of the Church and society. Indeed, both the Church and the society are divided concerning the acceptance and rejection of LGBTI persons in the Church (Gunda 2016:2) and in society. Fear of the other (or stranger or indecent or queer) and lack of appropriate language to talk about issues of human sexuality constitute the main issues that make difficult the conversation about economic, sexual, and religious inclusion of non-conforming sexualities in the Church and society in general. Therefore, this study has suggested the infrapolitical ethic of the powerless which can be appropriated within CBS. Contextual Bible Study offers this capacity of resisting in disguise to avoid that more harm is done to the excluded and marginalized sectors of society.

It has been argued that CBS has "its origins within liberation theologies in general and liberation hermeneutics in particular" (West 2022:3). In other words, CBS is "a response to liberation theologies which urged scholars to take context seriously" (Nadar 2009:387). Indeed, the context of South African apartheid was taken seriously in the past, but today other contexts of marginalization (like economic, sexual, and religious marginalization of indecent queer people in current Mozambique) also must be taken seriously. This is because contextual struggles require contextual actions of liberation. In fact, what is important in theology is not stability but discontinuity, locating the areas of exclusion in theology (Althaus-Reid 2000:4). Therefore, there is a need of contextual actions of liberation for economic, sexual, and religious struggles of queer bodies in contemporary Mozambique. And these intersecting struggles must be captured within CBS. Once again, the process of doing CBS is captured within the infrapolitical ethic of the powerless, or resistance in disguise, to avoid that more harm is done to marginalized sexualities or different gender identities. The construction of these CBS resources is very important for future community-based research and praxis since they will

allow LGBTIQA+ people and ally[37] to draw their voices into work. This means that the CBS resources constructed in this research represent a deliberate post-PhD attempt as well as an opportunity for LGBTIQA+ people to engage directly with their struggles and advocate for alternative and inclusive communities in Mozambique and beyond.

The process of CBS offers a potential safe socio-religious space in which marginalized people might construct their own discourse, including a theological component, concerning different struggles (West and Haddad 2016:147). This is a religious resource that enables the voices of the vulnerable sectors to become even more evident (West and Haddad 2016:147). Through CBS marginalized communities are able to unveil and challenge the systems that create their vulnerability. The Ujamaa CBS privileges organized groups, who "have already constructed their own safe and sequestered sites, and have already began to assembly their own discourse concerning their realities" (West & Haddad 2016:148). These organized groups include people who are racially oppressed, economically marginalized, sexually excluded or silenced, religiously attacked amongst others. This does not mean that the Ujamaa Centre cannot form new groups of CBS, but this is to emphasize that organized groups have their own language, a particular way of dealing with issues, common struggles and working to achieve one objective. Unlike new groups, organized groups know already the problems behind their marginalization. This is very important for Ujamaa CBS because the Bible becomes the companion to social transformation, based on specific struggle(s) of that organized group(s). In other words, working with people who have already identified their specific struggles becomes easier for Ujamaa Centre to develop and apply specific CBS resources with them.

CBS makes people aware of the injustices perpetrated by the oppressive systems around them, and then facilitates through CBS resources with which to find alternative ways of resisting without necessarily confronting the system publicly, in order to avoid that more harm is done to marginalized groups or communities, thus making CBS a safe space of resistance in disguise. So, the CBS resources for change in this research will allow safe space for future community-based research (for instance post-PhD work) as well as create safe space for dialogue and engagement within religious (and specifically the church) setup. The researcher (and other heterosexual allies) will use the CBS resource as a safe platform to begin a dialogue and resistance without confronting publicly the hostile system of the country, both in the Church and society in general. Through this approach the dominant oppressive system in Mozambique

[37] Including myself as an ally and a church leader in Mozambique.

(and beyond) will be forced to change towards construction of alternative and inclusive communities regarding people with different sexualities and/or non-conforming gender identities. It is also believed that these CBS resources will allow LGBTIQA+ people to articulate their own struggles, using their language to express their feelings and challenges in a context where sex talk is an assumed taboo.

The CBS process requires an interactive study of particular texts in the Bible, which brings the perspectives of both the context of the reader and the context of the Bible into dialogue, for the purpose of transformation (Nadar 2009:387). The idea of CBS is to unveil injustices and look for alternative solutions to construct more alternative and inclusive communities. This means that both the context of the reader and the context of the biblical text shape the CBS process. This makes the Bible to become a resource through which God speaks into the lives and contexts of the marginalized groups (see West 1993b:434). In fact, through CBS oppressed and marginalized people have the opportunity to hear the voice of God again addressing their struggle in an affirming point of view. Moreover, CBS gives new opportunities for heterosexual allies (including the researcher who is also a religious leader) to articulate a more inclusive theology that affirms the humanity of non-conforming sexualities and/or different gender identities. Since the Bible is believed to be the word of God, CBS has the capacity of bringing into conversation even those hostile religious people who are not willing to welcome LGBTIQA+ people due to their ignorance about the concept of sexual diversity. And the engagement through CBS process can impact some changes on them and minimize their hostility to those who are sexually different.

Every context has its own struggle(s) which need to be addressed by a particular biblical text, through a CBS process. However, this particular research uses the biblical book of Ruth (including its context of production) to construct CBS resources for the context of economic, sexual, and religious marginalization of non-conforming bodies or different sexualities in contemporary Mozambique (and other similar contexts in Southern Africa). On one hand, the assumption is that these CBS resources will foster transformation towards the construction of alternative and inclusive communities within the contexts of sexual diversity and/or different gender identities in the country. On the other hand, these CBS resources will enable future community-based research and praxis, drawing direct voices of LGBTIQA+ people into this work. CBS resistance takes place in a space in which people are safe to talk about their own problems and plan actions for change without fear of attack and condemnation. In fact,

dominant sectors of society have no control of what is happening within CBS process. The process is controlled and directed by marginalized groups and their allies.

In terms of methodology CBS is not a fixed formula but a process that is done as part of the process of action and reflection, as one moves from practice to theory, and then from theory to practice, and then from practice to theory, in an endless cycle of praxis (West 1993b:432). The action-reflection praxis of CBS requires routine reflection on the conceptual infrastructure that shapes CBS's emancipatory practice (West 2022:13). This means that there is no fixed formula of doing CBS; the only way to learn about Contextual Bible Study is to do it (Ujamaa Centre 2015:3). In fact, the more one practices it the more he/she becomes an expert of the process. Though the CBS process is not fixed in terms of methodology, it follows the See-Judge-Act framework, formed in the worker-priest movement in Europe in the 1930-40s, which was then taken up and elaborated in the liberation struggles of South Africa, Latin America, the Philippines, and other struggling contexts (West & Haddad 2016:139). This means that the Ujamaa CBS has borrowed the See-Judge-Act methodology formed in Europe and re-elaborated it to meet the specific realities of South Africa (and beyond).

Within this See-Judge-Act method, the Bible study process "begins with analysis of the local context (See), and then re-reads the Bible to allow the biblical text to speak to the context (Judge), and then moves to action as we respond to what God is saying (Act)" (Ujamaa Centre 2015:4). This means that the See-Judge-Act process moves from community to biblical text and from the biblical text to the community, in an endless process of praxis. Following this framework, this study constructs some CBS resource for change, based on the biblical book of Ruth within the context of economic, sexual, and religious struggle of non-conforming people or different sexualities in contemporary Mozambique (and other similar contexts in Southern Africa). These Contextual Bible Study resources for change are enlightened by the infrapolitical ethic of the powerless discerned from the biblical book of Ruth for hostile contexts of economics, sexuality and religion. In fact, the process of doing CBS follows under the infrapolitics of resistance in disguise (or a hidden language of resistance).

An important aspect of CBS is that the process is driven by a series of direct questions that move the process from See to Judge to Act (West 1993:434ff; West and Haddad 2016:152). The process begins and ends with what is called community consciousness questions, which "tie the Bible study into the context of the participants, drawing on both their local knowledge and analysis and their interpretive resources" (West 2006a:142). Community consciousness

questions draw on the lived experience and the embodied theologies of the participants themselves (Ujama Centre 2015:10). Within this framework of community consciousness questions, critical consciousness questions (or text-related questions) are carefully constructed, "which force the group to constantly engage with the biblical text" (Ujamaa Centre 2015:10). In other words, CBS begins with context and experience, then analyses the biblical text, and lastly attempts to communally find ways of engaging in the struggle to overcome oppression and suffering (Nadar 2009:387). However, this process is guided by questions clearly formulated and directed to both, the biblical context and the context of the participants.

The Ujamaa Centre uses the 'Sandwich' diagramme to illustrate the collaboration between community consciousness questions and critical consciousness questions, in which the See and Act components of the CBS process is about the community while the Judge component is about the text (Ujamaa Centre 2015:12). In other words, the See and Act components represent the bread while the Judge component represent the meet/cheese in the sandwich diagramme (Ujamaa Centre 2015:12). This analogy emphasizes the fact that the flavour of this sandwich cannot be felt if it is only constituted by bread without meet or cheese in between. In short, the CBS process does not make sense if there is a struggling community without the biblical text and vice versa. However, the questions that drive the process of CBS must be critical and framed or informed by the experiences of the poor or oppressed communities (see West 1993a:75). In other words, the questions for CBS must reflect the needs of a particular struggling group or community.

The CBS process starts in plenary, where participants are asked to read the text (or participate in a dramatic reading) to acknowledge the agency of the participants and consider their interpretive contributions (West 2006a:142). Following the reading of the text, participants are often asked questions about what the text is about. The idea here is to draw on the understanding of what the text says or has said to the participants (see Ujamaa Centre 2015:11). The responses of the participants in this stage of the Contextual Bible Study process are guided by the ordinary knowledge of the participants about the text. The questions here can be discussed in pairs and reported in plenary, but the responses are written-up on newsprint (West 2006a:142). And "this newsprint documentation not only serves as a reference throughout the workshop, but is collected, collated, and recorded by Ujamaa Centre facilitators after the workshop" (West, Zwane and van der Walt 2021:8). The question about the understanding of what the text says

often allows the details of the text to have its own voice among the voices of the participants (Ujamaa Centre 2015:11).

Having presented the responses about what the text is about, the process then moves to what is called critical consciousness questions or structured and systematic questions to trace the literary and socio-historical dimensions of the text (West 2006a:143). In other words, participants must discuss two types of questions in this stage of the process, namely: literary questions and socio-historical questions. Literary questions help the participants to read within the final canonical form of the text while socio-historical questions allow the participants to read behind the text. In other words, participants are invited to look for the details of the text in the text and behind the text.

Participants are divided into small groups of about 5 to 6 people, depending on the number of those who attend the study process, in order to facilitate participation. There are various ways of dividing the groups. One example is by counting 1-2-3-4, etc. Another one is by putting people together according to their age or gender or choosing some types of fruits (group orange, group banana, group mango and others) and many other forms, depending on the reality of the participants. If one of the participants is not comfortable with a certain group, the CBS process is flexible in putting him/her in another group, where he/she feels better. So, the process belongs to the group or the participants who can articulate it the way they feel comfortable, as long as they move towards change or construction of alternative possibilities regarding their struggles. This would require a facilitator to avoid that the participants get lost during the process. The role of a facilitator in the CBS process is discussed below in this chapter.

The CBS process requires that "the biblical text now becomes a dialogue partner, but on its own terms" (West 2006a:142). The questions that are formulated for this stage of the CBS must allow the selected biblical text to engage in a conversation with the reality of the participants. The questions of this stage allow the participants to slow down the process, re-reading carefully the different units of the selected text in order to get a full and a more comprehensive understanding about the text. In fact, there is no need to rush the process in this stage of the CBS and people must be given enough time to interact with the text so that a more comprehensive picture of it is outlined. This implies a re-reading of the text as many times as possible to carefully reconstruct the meaning of the selected biblical text. The discussion is done in small groups and then reported back in plenary. If necessary, some inputs about the

literary and socio-historical dimensions of the text must be given to the participants in order to orient them towards the goal of the CBS process.

When the discussion on the critical consciousness questions is completed and presented in plenary, the CBS process goes back to ask questions about what the text says to the participants. In other words, the CBS process shifts back again to the context of the community, via the community consciousness questions (West 2006a:144). This allows the participants to engage theologically with the theme that emerged from that specific social analysis (West 2006a:144). This engagement is based on both literary and socio-historical analysis previously done through critical consciousness or textual questions. In fact, the questions in this stage use internal (on the text) and external (behind the text) resources to ask once again what the text says to the participants (see Ujamaa Centre 2015:11). This is also done in small groups and then reported back in plenary. As in other stages of the process, the responses here are also written-up on newsprint. The Ujamaa Centre encourages the use of a data projector (where available) so that all questions are clearly visible to the participants. This also allows flexible changes or editing of some aspects of the CBS process if the group agree on that. However, "whenever a PowerPoint CBS slide is edited, as we adjust CBS questions, it is done publicly, inviting participants to bear witness to how they have contributed to the reshaping of a particular CBS" (West, Zwane and van der Walt 2021:8).

The study concludes the process through community consciousness questions, planning a response to the socially analyzed and theologically addressed context (West 2066a:144). Here the study process moves from the biblical text to the lived context of the participants. The idea of these questions is to plan an action in order to change the situation that challenges or marginalizes that specific group. The Ujamaa Centre encourages participants to think about concrete actions, but not beyond their capacity. In fact, they cannot plan an action that is not accomplishable. These last community consciousness questions allow the biblical text to have a clear and distinct voice among the participants, who will then join their voices with the voices of the text to hear God speaking a new word to them; and they then commit themselves to God and each other in a plan of action (Ujamaa Centre 2015:13). This concluding stage of the CBS process is also done in small groups and then presented in plenary. The reporting can take a variety of forms, and participants are encouraged to come with drawings, etc. that illustrate their understanding about the text. This is also a very crucial stage in which the participants decide on what to do after their participation in the CBS process.

Another important aspect of the CBS process is facilitation, which enables participatory transformation (West 2015:245). The facilitation process is a skill and a spirituality that can be learned by doing it (Ujamaa Centre 2015:14). In other words, there is no specific training for someone to be a facilitator, but the facilitation expertise emerges as one practice it. CBS always begins with an act of community, whether singing, praying, an ice-breaker, or some other opportunity to experience a sense of being part of a community (West 1993:434). And this needs to be facilitated by someone who is not a dominant leader in the group, but someone who assists and allows the process to move while guiding the participants collaboratively towards a common action for change. A facilitator must be able to manage conflicts that might arise during the CBS process, provide information when requested, manage the time of discussion and of reporting back in plenary, understand the needs of the group and ready to learn new things. At the end the facilitator can also orient the group with an act of community. This could be a prayer, singing or a simple reflection on what has been done. A facilitator is like a 'steering wheel' that guide the process towards a clear direction as well as allowing that all people in the process are given time and opportunity to share or interact. This means that a facilitator is one voice amongst many others in the group, but one who guides the process and keeps it moving.

This is a brief description of what the CBS process of the Ujamaa Centre is. For more information about what is Contextual Bible Study and how is done, one must go to the Ujamaa Centre's Website (http://ujamaa.ukzn.ac.za). This is not a unique form of reading the Bible with marginalized groups, but one among many. This process captures the See-Judge-Act framework, and it is about framing community consciousness questions and critical consciousness questions. The facilitation process is also an important aspect that moves the process towards a collaborative action for change. The action and reflection praxis of CBS takes different shapes according to different realities of the struggling groups. So, the process of doing Contextual Bible Study has no fixed formula in terms of methodology and facilitation. And the participants have the right to suggest changes during the process if this is needed.

There is an extensive and important work done by the Ujamaa Centre on LGBTIQA+ CBS. Gerald O. West, Sithembiso Zwane and Charlene van der Walt (2021) have published a collaborative work on LBGTIQA+ CBS on Genesis 18 and 19 to address the issue of exclusion and inclusion of homosexuals on the African continent. Their article emerges as an example of decades of daily reflection as a component of the action-reflection cycle of praxis, which began in the area of gender-based violence in the late 1990s and then offered the opportunity to open

interpretive space for faith-based engagement with the emerging topic of homosexuality, while also addressing the topic of male rape (West, Zwane and van der Walt 2021:9). After combining elements from different CBS works on Genesis 18 and 19, the authors came out with a new version of CBS in which LGBTIQA+ communities are affirmed, and those who have condemned them using Genesis 19 are given textual pause and cause to reconsider; proclamations of hate are transformed to gestures and words of welcome, welcomed strangers share gifts, and exclusion is transformed into inclusion (West, Zwane and van der Walt 2021:23). There is another collaborative LGBTIQA+ CBS work done by the Ujamaa Centre, through the work of Charlene van der Walt and Hanziline R. Davids (2022:32), in their reading of Genesis 37 to engage critically and creatively with life-denying realities of *Izitabane* (queer people) during Covid-19, and to search for impulses of hope and life. In this article the authors read the Joseph story as presented in Genesis 37 and argue that African *Izitabane* people who express gender and sexuality outside the heteropatriarchal norm are particularly vulnerable to exclusion, victimisation and violence; and these realities are further compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic (van der Walt & Davids 2022:47). Therefore, they suggest a LGBTIQA+ CBS to reclaim Joseph as an *Izitabane* icon who enable resilience and hope during the time of COVID-19 (van der Walt & Davis 2022:44).

These LGBTIQA+ CBS work of the Ujamaa Centre also include the works of Gerald O. West, Charlene van der Walt and Kapya J. Kaoma (2016) entitled: *When Faith Does Violence: Reimagining Engagement between Churches and LGBTI Groups on Homophobia in Africa*, the work of Charlene van der Walt (2024) on her *Reclaiming the Stolen Bible One Contextual Bible Study at a Time*, and the *Queering the Prophetic Process: From Jonah to the Ujamma Centre's CBS on Galatians* by Gerald O. West, Charlene van der Walt, Sithembiso Zwane, Crystal L. Hall, Sizwesamajobe (Sizwe) Sithole, and Tracey Sibisi (2023), to cite some examples. These LGBTIQA+ CBS works do not deal specifically with the biblical book of Ruth, but they constitute a valuable background in which the biblical resources for change in this thesis are located. This means that LGBTIQA+ CBS resources on Ruth come as a contribution alongside this extensive work being done by the Ujamaa Centre on the struggle of non-conforming sexualities and/or different gender identities. Moreover, future community-based research and praxis (including post-PhD work) will be located within this body of work done by the Ujamaa Centre.

Having this in mind, the research moves to construct some Contextual Bible Studies for change (in the following section), based on the biblical book of Ruth, for contexts of economic, sexual, and religious exclusion or silence of indecent queer bodies or non-conforming sexualities in contemporary Mozambique (and other similar contexts in Southern Africa). These CBS resources are enlightened by the infrapolitics of the powerless discerned from the biblical book of Ruth as a life-affirming resource or tool through which marginalized groups can resist in disguise within contexts of economic and religious exclusion or silence of non-conforming or indecent sexualities in contemporary Mozambique (and other similar contexts).

6.2 Examples of CBS on Ruth for Contexts of Non-conforming People or Different Sexualities

There is a significant number of Contextual Bible Study resources constructed or being constructed on the biblical book of Ruth to address different issues of marginalization in different contexts of the African continent and beyond. Some of these CBS resources can be found on the Ujamaa Centre's Website (http://ujamaa.ukzn.ac.za). For instance, the Ujamaa Centre has constructed CBS resources on Ruth to address sugar daddy relationships in South Africa (see West & Haddad 2016) as well as many other themes that are relevant to the Church and community (see http://ujamaa.ukzn.ac.za). Therefore, the CBS resources in this research come as a contribution alongside those that have been or are being constructed on the biblical book of Ruth, to address specifically the economic, sexual, and religious exclusion and/or silence of non-conforming sexualities and/or different gender identities in current Mozambique (and the region). These Contextual Bible Study resources are enlightened by the infrapolitical ethic of the powerless. In other words, they form part of resistance in disguise.

What follow are three examples of these CBS resources for change, which it is hoped will encourage a series of many more resources for change that can be constructed in addition to these suggested in this research. While the Ujamaa Centre does not usually give titles to its CBS, this research presents some suggestive titles to guide the reader through the process.

6.2.1 CBS 1: On the Road from Moab to Judah (Ruth 1:6-22)

This is the first CBS resource constructed in this research to intersect economic, sexual and religious struggles of ambiguous or indecent peoples, based on the episode on the road from

Moab to Judah. The text for this CBS resource is Ruth 1:6-22 (New International Version) and it reads as following:

When she [Naomi] heard in Moab that the LORD had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them, Naomi and her daughters-in-law prepared to return home from there. With her two daughters-in-law she left the place where she had been living and set out on the road that would take them back to the land of Judah. Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go back, each of you, to your mother's home. May the LORD show kindness to you, as you have shown to your dead and to me. May the LORD grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband." Then she kissed them and they wept aloud and said to her, "We will go back with you to your people." But Naomi said, "Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons, who could become your husbands? Return home, my daughters; I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me-- even if I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to sons-- would you wait until they grew up? Would you remain unmarried for them? No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you, because the LORD's hand has gone out against me!" At this they wept again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law good-by, but Ruth clung to her. "Look," said Naomi, "your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her." But Ruth replied, "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me." When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her. So the two women went on until they came to Bethlehem. When they arrived in Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them, and the women exclaimed, "Can this be Naomi?" "Don't call me Naomi," she told them. "Call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter. I went away full, but the LORD has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The LORD has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me." So Naomi returned from Moab accompanied by Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter-in-law, arriving in Bethlehem as the barley harvest was beginning.

Following the praxis of the Ujamaa Centre, this CBS starts in plenary with some liturgical procedures (singing and praying) and with the participants introducing themselves to each other, and then discuss the questions bellow. The process of introducing the participants must be guided by an exercise often used at Ujamaa Centre in which the members of the group

mention their names and say something about the first letter of their names. For instance, if a person is 'Susan', the person can call him/herself sweet Susan. Then, the process is repeated by all the participants to easily memorize the names of their colleagues. This moment is very crucial and must be carefully handled to create trust in the group. Here the participants must feel comfortable and not ashamed to share their ideas, based on their experiences.

1. Listen to Ruth 1:6-22 carefully being read aloud.

While the focus of this study is on Ruth 1:6-22, the reading can start in verse 1 of this chapter for the participants to have an idea of what has happened before the episode on the road to Bethlehem (in Judah). This reading can be done in different languages or different translations and by different people. If possible, a dramatic reading can be suggested, where different people in the group take on the roles of different characters of the narrative. Then, the process moves to question 2.

2. What is this text about?

This question is briefly discussed in pairs to explore the agency and contribution of the participants. Within these pairs participants are encouraged to give more details also about each other so that more trust is built in the group. The answers to this question are given randomly in the plenary, while the facilitator writes the answers on board or newsprint, depending on what is available. Some of those who will share in plenary can also touch interesting or painful experiences shared in their respective small groups that may deserve attention and reflection from the bigger group. This may generate some discussions, but the facilitator must move on the process to ask critical consciousness (or textual) questions.

Having discussed question 2, the participants are divided into small groups (5 or 6 members) to discuss the following questions. All the members of these groups are encouraged to give more details about themselves (if comfortable) and know more about the experiences of the other. These are the questions to be responded in groups:

3. Why did Naomi decide to return to Judah? What makes her hesitant to return with the Moabite women (Ruth and Orpah)?
4. How does Naomi think the Moabite women (Ruth and Orpah) must overcome the problem of their poverty in Moab?

5. How does Naomi use the name of God in her attempt to exclude the Moabite women from returning with them to Judah?

The aim of questions 3, 4 and 5 is to explore the literary elements of the text. These questions are discussed in small groups and then presented in plenary. These questions allow the group to discuss the exclusivity ideology practiced in post-exilic Judah by the returning exiles against the people of the land. The facilitator must know something about the infrapolitical reading of the biblical book of Ruth. If necessary (depending on the type of that group), the facilitator can give an input, explaining that the book is a form of resistance in disguise. This input can be given immediately after the questions have been read (or presented) in plenary so that questions 3, 4 and 5 are discussed with this assumption in mind. The idea here is to slowdown the process, and sufficient time is needed to capture more stories and experiences related to what they have shared in their groups. The issue of time is tricky since one cannot tell exactly how much time (quantity) is needed in each stage of the CBS process. This is because the time allocated to each section of the CBS depends on the total time given for all CBS process and the relevance of each discussion in small groups as well as the bigger one. For instance, for this CBS one day is sufficient. A 30-minute CBS is impossible for the infrapolitical reading of the biblical book of Ruth. This will also depend on the time spent during break and meals (if available). After that, the participants return to their small groups to discuss other questions. These are also critical consciousness questions, and they begin the socio-historical analysis of the text.

6. What influences Naomi's understanding of the intersection between economics (poverty), sexuality (marriage), and religion?
7. How does Ruth respond to Naomi's suggestion? What alternative solution does this response suggest in terms of the economic capacity of women and strangers in the context of the text?

Question 6 leads the participants to understand the reasons behind Naomi's attitude towards the Moabite women. This is a reading behind the text or a socio-historical dimension of the text. Question 7 begins the concept of resistance through Ruth's agency. In this question participants discuss how Ruth's agency suggests alternative possibilities in terms of the economic capacity of the excluded. The two questions are also discussed in small groups and then presented in plenary. It is important to highlight that participants here are encouraged to give chance to everyone for participation in small groups as well as in plenary. This means that sharing in plenary (for instance) must be rotated within different members of the groups. After

that, the study shifts back to the community to understand how the story can be used to shed some lights to their struggle. This is done through the discussion of the questions that follow.

8. Do you have people like Ruth in your context, who are excluded because of their condition of being strangers or in some way 'indecent' (for instance women, foreigners, strangers or people with different sexualities)? Give examples.
9. What prevent strangers or indecent people in your context from being integrated into the economic, sexual, and religious life of the community?
10. How is religion used to sanction or legitimize the exclusion or marginalization of indecent people in your context?
11. In what ways can this text be used to resist the interlocking systems of oppression of non-conforming sexualities in your context? These systems can be economic, sexual, religious, etc.
12. What are you going to do in your own community or faith-based institution as a response to this Bible study?

These last questions of the CBS move from the reality of the biblical text to the reality of the participants. The aim of these questions is to explore how the participants can use this story in Ruth to address or resist the systems that oppress, exclude, or marginalize indecent queer bodies in contemporary Mozambique and elsewhere in Southern Africa. Participants are invited to think about solutions that are possible to be done without causing more harm to marginalized non-conforming people. When the responses for the last questions are presented in plenary, the facilitator or anyone (assigned the role) can present some concluding remarks to end the study. If possible, the study can end with a prayer.

This is one of the CBS resources that can be suggested from the biblical book of Ruth for the context of economic, sexual, and religious exclusion or silence of ambiguous or non-conforming sexualities and/or different gender identities in Mozambique (and the region). This LGBTIQA+ CBS can be adjusted, according to the reality of the participants in which it is used. It is also expected that LGBTIQA+ people in Mozambique and elsewhere in Southern Africa will draw, through this biblical resource for change, their direct voices into this work. Having done this, the study moves on to suggest another CBS resource for change in the following section. These CBS can be used independently, but could also be used as a series, following the story of the book of Ruth.

6.2.2 CBS 2: Ruth and Boaz at the Threshing Floor (Ruth 3:1-18)

This study also intersects economic struggles, sexual struggles and religious struggles of ambiguous or indecent bodies. The New International Version (NIV) of the biblical text also has been used in this study. And the text reads as following:

One day Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, "My daughter, should I not try to find a home for you, where you will be well provided for? Is not Boaz, with whose servant girls you have been, a kinsman of ours? Tonight he will be winnowing barley on the threshing floor. Wash and perfume yourself, and put on your best clothes. Then go down to the threshing floor, but don't let him know you are there until he has finished eating and drinking. When he lies down, note the place where he is lying. Then go and uncover his feet and lie down. He will tell you what to do." "I will do whatever you say," Ruth answered. So she went down to the threshing floor and did everything her mother-in-law told her to do. When Boaz had finished eating and drinking and was in good spirits, he went over to lie down at the far end of the grain pile. Ruth approached quietly, uncovered his feet and lay down. In the middle of the night something startled the man, and he turned and discovered a woman lying at his feet. "Who are you?" he asked. "I am your servant Ruth," she said. "Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a kinsman-redeemer." "The LORD bless you, my daughter," he replied. "This kindness is greater than that which you showed earlier: You have not run after the younger men, whether rich or poor. And now, my daughter, don't be afraid. I will do for you all you ask. All my fellow townsmen know that you are a woman of noble character. Although it is true that I am near of kin, there is a kinsman-redeemer nearer than I. Stay here for the night, and in the morning if he wants to redeem, good; let him redeem. But if he is not willing, as surely as the LORD lives I will do it. Lie here until morning." So she lay at his feet until morning, but got up before anyone could be recognized; and he said, "Don't let it be known that a woman came to the threshing floor." He also said, "Bring me the shawl you are wearing and hold it out." When she did so, he poured into it six measures of barley and put it on her. Then he went back to town. When Ruth came to her mother-in-law, Naomi asked, "How did it go, my daughter?" Then she told her everything Boaz had done for her and added, "He gave me these six measures of barley, saying, 'Don't go back to your mother-in-law empty-handed.'" Then Naomi said, "Wait, my daughter, until you find out what happens. For the man will not rest until the matter is settled today."

This study also follows the praxis of the Ujamaa Centre, beginning in plenary with a devotion (which includes singing and prayers). Some forms of individual introductions are needed in this stage of the process. Then the questions for discussion are presented. This will start with questions 1 and 2 to explore the agency of the participants.

1. Read Ruth 3:1-18 in different translations (and different languages where is needed) as a story addressed to you.
2. Who are the characters in the story and what do you know about them?

The aim in this stage of the CBS process is to have an indication from the participants of what understanding they have about the text. In other words, these questions explore the agency and the contribution of the participants. These questions are discussed in small groups of two or three members and then reported in plenary. The responses to this presentation are written-up on newsprint. The groups will indicate themselves who will present on behalf of them and how they will present. They must make sure that no one in the group becomes an unchangeable presenter. All the members of the groups must be given some forms of opportunities to share and learn. When these questions are presented and discussed the process remains in plenary.

In plenary the participants are divided into groups of 5 or 6, depending on the number of the participants in the CBS process. They discuss the following critical consciousness (and literary) questions. While the groups discuss these literary questions their members must find this as an opportunity to know each other better. In other words, they must tell each other a bit more about who they are (if this is not a problem for them).

3. Why did Naomi send Ruth to invade Boaz's private space at night?
4. How did Ruth respond to Naomi's instructions?
5. How did Boaz react to Ruth's unexpected visit at the threshing floor?
6. How is the name of the Lord used to procure the land (economics) and assure an heir (sexuality) at the threshing floor?

These are critical consciousness questions that aim to trace the literary dimension of the text. They are discussed in small groups and then presented in plenary. These questions explore the agency of the indecent people in the narrative of Ruth and how the decent react to the economic, sexual and religious struggles of these people. When this is done, the study moves to another set of critical consciousness questions, but now to trace the socio-historical dimension of the

selected story. In both stages (literary and socio-historical), the process must slow down to allow that a bit of engagement is done with the text, in plenary and in their particular small groups. The textual questions that follow are also discussed in their small groups.

7. What are the various factors that force Naomi and Ruth to seek economic stability in this way?
8. In what ways does the threshing floor episode represent the economic and sexual exploitation of indecent people (like women, widows, foreigners, or strangers) in post-exilic Judah?

These critical consciousness questions lead the participants to read behind the text in order to highlight the agony that indecent people (women, widows, foreigners and ambiguous sexualities) had to go through due to the exclusivity ideology practiced by the repatriates against the people of the land in post-exilic Judah. This means that the facilitator must have some information about the situation of indecent people in ancient world (including the context of Israel, particularly the post-exilic Judah in which the biblical book of Ruth is located). After the discussion in small groups the responses are presented in plenary. Then the process shifts back to community consciousness questions to discuss how the story can offer alternative solutions to the problem of economic and sexual marginalization of indecent people. The questions that follow push the groups to think about possibilities of more inclusive communities in terms of sexuality and gender identity.

9. Do you have indecent people in your context who transact their bodies for economic benefits? Give examples.
10. What are the social and religious factors that force indecent people to uplift their economic situation in this way?
11. In what ways can this story be used to resist the economic, sexual, and religious marginalization of indecent queer bodies in your context?
12. What actions will you take in response to this study?

The responses to these community consciousness questions are presented in plenary when the discussion in small groups is completed. The expectation in this stage is that the study would have created enthusiasm to the participants, revealed that their struggling situation can change and enlightened possibilities of actions for change. Like others, this CBS resource can end with a word of gratitude and/or a prayer.

Once again, this is a suggestive CBS resource. This can be adjusted or edited according to the reality of the group in which is conducted. Having constructed this CBS, the research moves on to construct another CBS resource in the next section (the last CBS in this research).

6.2.3 CBS 3: Redemption of the Land and Levirate Marriage at the Town Gate (Ruth 4:1-12)

Like other CBS resources in this research, this last one also is illuminated by the infrapolitical ethic of the powerless, intersecting economic, sexual and religious struggles of indecent people (including ambiguous and non-conforming sexualities). Here is the text (of Ruth 4:1-12) for this CBS resource, also taken from the New International Version. It reads:

Meanwhile Boaz went up to the town gate and sat there. When the kinsman-redeemer he had mentioned came along, Boaz said, "Come over here, my friend, and sit down." So he went over and sat down. Boaz took ten of the elders of the town and said, "Sit here," and they did so. Then he said to the kinsman-redeemer, "Naomi, who has come back from Moab, is selling the piece of land that belonged to our brother Elimelech. I thought I should bring the matter to your attention and suggest that you buy it in the presence of these seated here and in the presence of the elders of my people. If you will redeem it, do so. But if you will not, tell me, so I will know. For no one has the right to do it except you, and I am next in line." "I will redeem it," he said. Then Boaz said, "On the day you buy the land from Naomi and from Ruth the Moabitess, you acquire the dead man's widow, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property." At this, the kinsman-redeemer said, "Then I cannot redeem it because I might endanger my own estate. You redeem it yourself. I cannot do it." (Now in earlier times in Israel, for the redemption and transfer of property to become final, one party took off his sandal and gave it to the other. This was the method of legalizing transactions in Israel.) So the kinsman-redeemer said to Boaz, "Buy it yourself." And he removed his sandal. Then Boaz announced to the elders and all the people, "Today you are witnesses that I have bought from Naomi all the property of Elimelech, Kilion and Mahlon. I have also acquired Ruth the Moabitess, Mahlon's widow, as my wife, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property, so that his name will not disappear from among his family or from the town records. Today you are witnesses!" Then the elders and all those at the gate said, "We are witnesses. May the LORD make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel. May you have standing in Ephrathah and be famous in Bethlehem. Through the offspring the

LORD gives you by this young woman, may your family be like that of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah."

This CBS resource starts in plenary. Participants greet each other and then pray together. The Ujamaa Centre CBS uses different ways to introduce the participants to each other, and one of them must be used. Some forms of creativity can be used to introduce each other, making it more interesting and easier for the participants to remember the names of their colleagues. If necessary, some of the members of the group can be involved in this liturgical and introductory stage. However, this stage must include interactive exercises to break the ice and consolidate the group as a team. The liturgical procedures (including singing, if possible) need not to follow the traditional liturgies of the Church and/or any other religious denomination. Those assigned to lead the devotional part must be encouraged to be creative. This creativity also keeps the group connected because the participants begin to share some resemblances concerning their belief systems, as well as their struggles. When this is done question 1 is presented on board or beamed (if possible) on the wall.

1. Read the story in Ruth 4:1-12 and re-tell it, using your own words, to the two friends next to you.

This question introduces the episode at the town gate and the buying of both the land and the Moabite woman. This is discussed into small groups of three, then the participants share their stories in plenary, while the facilitator guides them through the process. This retelling of the story helps the participants to internalize it based on how they have been reading (if this is the case) or how they have heard the narrative in the community where they belong or faith-based environments (including the Church). After presentation and discussion, then the process moves to question 2.

2. Who are the characters in this story? And what are they saying or doing?

This question slows down the process to allow more time to understand the story, re-reding it in different translations (or versions) and languages. While questions 2 begins the literary dimension of the text it also explores the agency of the participants. Question 2 is discussed in groups of 5 or 6 members each, but this always depends on the number of participants attending the CBS. The praxis of the Ujamaa Centre is flexible to this aspect. The groups can be divided through the usual counting of numbers (like 1-2-3, 1-2-3, etc.) or adopt other ways of

organizing people into groups, depending on the reality of those involved. The responses to this question are presented in plenary and written-up on newsprint. When this is concluded the participants quickly return to their groups and respond to the questions that follow bellow.

3. Why did Boaz call for a meeting at the town gate?
4. How did the kinsman-redeemer react to Boaz's information about Naomi's land? Consider verses 4 and 6.
5. What are the things that Boaz buys at the town gate?
6. How did the elders react to Boaz's buying of the land and the woman in one transaction?

These literary questions are discussed in the groups already formed and then presented in plenary. It is important to note that participants must use the group work to know each other better and share their personal stories of struggle. This stage requires more allocation of time to slow down the process and allow the participants to understand the actions taken by the main characters of the narrative. Though these are literary questions (or reading on the text), at the end of question 6, a brief explanation of names like Rachel, Leah, Ephrathah, Perez and Tamar should be given by the facilitator. Depending on level of the participants, the following input can be presented before or after question 6 to avoid confusion of the participants.

This is the input by the facilitator (s) in plenary:

'Rachel was Jacob's wife bought (see Gen 29:30) from Laban (a brother to Jacob's mother), initially a barren woman who gave many children to Jacob through her older sister Leah (Gen 29:31) and their servants (Gen 30:1-21), but who eventually conceived at a later stage becoming the mother of Joseph (the one who went to Egypt) (see Gen 30:22-24). Rachel died when she was giving birth to a second son (Benjamim) in Ephrathah or Bethlehem, and she was buried there (Gen 35:16-19). Perez was one of the twin sons that were born from Tamar (Gen 38:29). And Tamar is the daughter-in-law of Judah, a widow who became pregnant from her father-in-law after the death of her husbands, and who did this in disguise by acting as a sex-worker (see Gen 38:1-29). These names show the presence of stories in the Bible (including its context of production) that are similar to the story of Ruth, where lineage extension is fulfilled through unusual ways, but at the end of these stories these strange ways are celebrated, including the characters that portray these unusual ways of fulfilling lineage extension.'

After this input in plenary, the study moves to group work. The small groups of 5 or 6 are given some time to discuss and write down the responses of the questions that follow.

7. Why does the story present Ruth as part of the property (like the land) to be bought by Boaz?
8. What does this story tell about the situation of indecent characters (like widows, foreigners, and ambiguous sexualities) in the context of the text?
9. How do the elders understand the relationship between God and the business arrangement that takes place at the town gate?

These are textual questions that draw a picture of how the society behind the text was. These questions help to explore the socio-historical intersections between economic struggles, sexual struggles and religious struggles. When the report back is done in plenary, the responses on the newsprint are fixed on the wall for everyone to see their contribution, and compare what they have written with what came out from other groups. Then the process moves back to community consciousness questions. Now the process must move from Judge to Act.

10. Do you have people like Ruth in your context who are bought like property? Share their stories. Why are these people bought like property?
11. How is religion used to sanction the economic and sexual marginalization of indecent queer people in your context?
12. After hearing the story in this episode, what are you going to do in order to resist the systems that marginalize non-conforming sexualities and/or different gender identities in your context?

These questions have moved the process from Judge to Act. In fact, the groups would have seen some resemblances between struggles and possibilities in the story and the struggles and possibilities in contemporary contexts. And then suggest some forms of resistance in disguise. These questions are discussed in their respective groups and then presented in plenary. Then some concluding liturgical procedures will briefly conclude the CBS process. As in other CBS resources, the facilitator in this study must allocate enough time to each question to allow the participants to engage the text and have an in-depth picture of what the narrative is about.

These are some of the examples of CBS resources constructed from the biblical book of Ruth for contexts of non-conforming sexualities and/or different gender identities in contemporary

Mozambique and other similar contexts in Southern Africa (and beyond). However, this series can be expanded, edited, and used in different contexts according to their specific needs. Each of these three CBS include aspects of an infrapolitical ethic of resistance. And the time allocated should not be too short. Some of the CBS workshops of the Ujamaa Centre take 3 to 5 days, but this can be extended or reduced, depending on the reality of where the study will take place and under which circumstances. This means that the process of doing CBS also involves financial resources to cover some expenses like stationary (notebooks, pens, newsprint, data projector, etc.), meals, transport, venue and other relevant aspects.

6.3 Conclusion

The focus on this chapter was on the construction of example of CBS resources for change from the biblical book of Ruth for contexts of economic, sexual, and religious exclusion or marginalization of non-conforming sexualities and/or different gender identities in contemporary Mozambique (and the region). It has briefly looked at the process of doing Contextual Bible Study as developed by the Ujamaa Centre for Community Development & Research in South Africa. It noted that the Ujamaa CBS emerged as an attempt to resist systems that oppressed poor people in the context of the South African apartheid, but today is being used in different contexts of the world to unveil and challenge interlocking systems of oppression, as well as to suggest alternative and inclusive communities within these systems.

This chapter has then constructed some examples of CBS resources from the biblical book of Ruth for change in the context of sexual diversity in current Mozambique and elsewhere in Southern Africa. Each of these CBS incorporate an infrapolitical ethic of resistance. These CBS resources are suggestive examples that can be expanded, edited, and used according to the reality of the struggling group or community. These LGBTIQA+ CBS resources constructed in this thesis also emerge as a deliberate attempt, post-PhD to engage directly with LGBTIQA+ people in Mozambique and beyond, drawing their direct voices into this work. The Ujamaa CBS (including those in this research) involves financial resources to cover some expenses related to logistics and facilitation. Having done this, the research now moves to the last chapter for conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This thesis uses the tripolar African biblical studies approach to bring the intersection between economics and sexual identity in Mozambique into dialogue with the intersection between economics and sexuality in the book of Ruth, in order to construct potentially transformative Contextual Bible Studies for contexts of non-conforming gender identities or different sexualities. After introducing the study in chapter one, chapter two (the contextual pole) analyzed the intersection between economics and sexuality in Mozambique. And it has noted that there are lines of interaction between economics and sexual identity in the country, whereby the heteronormative economic structure creates three categories of poverty, represented by poor heterosexual men, poor heterosexual women, and poor queer or indecent people. Chapter three (the textual pole of the tripolar approach) analyzed the intersection between economics and sexual identity in the biblical book of Ruth. And it has concluded that there are spaces in the narrative where economics and sexuality intersect, creating three levels of economic standards, characterized by economic privilege of men, economic dependence of (heterosexual) women and economic silence of ambiguous or indecent characters.

In chapter four the study has returned to both the contextual and textual poles of the tripolar approach, to analyze the religious contexts that shape the intersections between economics and sexuality in contemporary Mozambique and in the biblical book of Ruth. On one hand, it has concluded that religious confessions in current Mozambique have been contributing to minimize the economic deprivation of the country through education, health services, entrepreneurship, and services of charity, but this is done based on the traditional and established heteronormative economic structure that promotes the economic privilege of men, economic dependence of (heterosexual) women and economic exclusion of non-conforming or queer bodies. On the other hand, it has concluded that the biblical book of Ruth argues against the post-exilic ideo-theology of exclusion, but religion in the narrative is invoked to legitimize and reinforce the established heteronormative economic structure of the book, which normalizes the economic privileged of men, economic dependence of (heterosexual) women and economic silence of ambiguous or indecent characters.

In chapter five, the study moved to the pole of appropriation to discern a life-affirming economic, sexual, and religious ethic from the biblical book of Ruth for contexts of non-conforming sexualities. It has noted that current Mozambique and the context of Ruth represent two different realities in terms of geographical location, historical trajectory, belief systems

and the mechanisms of production, distribution and consumption of wealth. However, the two contexts share some resemblances in terms of poverty or economic deprivation and heteropatriarchal practices and ideologies that promote economic privileges of heterosexual men, economic dependence of heterosexual women, and economic exclusion (or silence) of ambiguous and/or non-conforming sexualities. It has also suggested an infrapolitical ethic of the powerless as a life-affirming economic, sexual and religious tool or resource discernable from the biblical book of Ruth, which can be used to resist in disguise, the dominant heteropatriarchal ideology and practices that silences, excludes and marginalized indecent queer bodies in contemporary Mozambique, and influence changes towards construction of alternative and inclusive communities. The infrapolitics of the biblical book of Ruth allows resistance in disguise to avoid that more harm is done to excluded and marginalized indecent people (including non-conforming sexualities and/or different gender identities).

In this chapter, chapter six, the study has continued with the pole of appropriation, to apply within Contextual Bible Studies resources the infrapolitical ethic of the powerless discerned from the biblical book of Ruth. Hence, it has briefly described the process of doing Contextual Bible Studies, and then present some examples of CBS resources for change, based on the infrapolitical ethic discerned from the biblical book of Ruth. The praxis of Ujamaa Centre has been used to construct these biblical resources for change.

This chapter ends the research with general conclusions and recommendations for future studies and/or work with marginalized communities (indecent queer bodies) in Mozambique and elsewhere in the Southern African region (or the world). What follows in the next section is the summary of this thesis.

7.1 Summary of the Research

This research has introduced the topic of analysis, looking for an intersecting economic, sexual and religious ethic from the biblical book of Ruth to be used as a resource to reclaim the economic and religious inclusion of non-conforming sexualities in contemporary Mozambique. One of the things this research has done is to intersect economic and sexual identity in Mozambique. This has identified lines of interaction between economics and sexuality in Mozambique. Poverty and sexual transaction intersect in current Mozambique. The type of sexual orientation determines the chances for economic involvement of people in the country. This is a product of heteropatriarchal ideologies and practices in the country, where the

intersection between economics and sexual identity results in three categories of economic participation: the economic privilege of heterosexual men, the economic dependence of heterosexual women, and the economic silence or exclusion of non-conforming sexualities or different gender identities. The discussion on this aspect has concluded that both heterosexuals and non-conforming sexualities transact their bodies for economic benefits, but men always take advantages, followed by heterosexual women while non-conforming sexualities remain invisibles or marginalized.

Then, the research process moved to the second aspect, analyzing the intersection between economics and sexuality in the biblical book of Ruth. The book of Ruth is clear about economic deprivation, but it is ambiguous in terms of sexuality. There are spaces in the biblical book of Ruth where economics and sexuality intersect, but the sexualities of some of its characters are ambiguous which lead the reader to think about sexualities not accepted in post-exilic Judah. The book of Ruth presents three categories of poverty or economic deprivation: poor heterosexual men who struggle because of the general constrains of the nation, poor women who struggle because of both the general problems of the country as well as the exploitation of men, and poor ambiguous characters who are excluded or silenced within this binary sexual system. This is part of the complex context of post-exilic Judah, characterized by the exclusivist ideology practiced by the returning Israelites against the people of the land, the heteronormative economic ideologies and practices that dominated the majority of the communities and Persian imperial interference. In this stage of the research, it has been concluded that indecent people (women, foreigners, strangers, widows, and ambiguous sexualities) are forced to transact their bodies to uplift their economic standards, often conforming with the existing binary sexual structure of post-exilic Judah.

The third aspect that this research has analyzed are the ways in which religion shapes the intersections between economics and sexualities in contemporary Mozambique and in the biblical book of Ruth. The two contexts represent different belief systems, but in both cases, religion is used to sanction heteropatriarchal ideologies and practices that legitimize the economic privileges of heterosexual men, the economic dependence of heterosexual women, and the economic exclusion or silence of ambiguous or non-conforming sexualities. This structure follows the chain of command (top down), where the gods occupy the most privileged space, followed by heterosexual men who have the capacity to penetrate others (including women and slaves), and the others (not willing to penetrate or be penetrated) follow under the

category of indecency. The research has concluded that sexual indecency is religiously sanctioned in current Mozambique (by the Church and other religious manifestations) as well as in the biblical book of Ruth (through an exclusive worship of Yahweh).

Then the research moved to a fourth aspect, to discern a life-affirming economic, sexual, and religious ethic from the biblical book of Ruth to be applied within the context of economic and religious exclusion of non-conforming sexualities and/or different gender identities in contemporary Mozambique (and elsewhere in the Southern African region). The biblical book of Ruth represents a critique to the exclusivity ideology practices in post-exilic Judah against the people of the land. Characters like Ruth unveil the need for change towards construction of alternative and inclusive communities in the context of exclusion of foreigners, women, ambiguous sexualities, a different religion and other forms of marginalization. The book presents unusual or strange ways of economic, sexual, and religious integration and celebration of indecent characters like Ruth who is an ambiguous and struggling character in terms of economics, sexuality, and religion. Ruth has contested for alternative solutions to the problems created by the heteropatriarchal ideologies and practices in post-exilic Judah. The conclusion here is that though Ruth's narrative is an embarrassing story, within it a Moabite woman was integrated and celebrated as part of the economic, sexual, and religious life of Israel.

However, the integration of indecent characters like Ruth is done based on the existing and established code of decency of Israel, in terms of economics, sexual identity, and religion. This aspect has led to another conclusion in which we see the integration and celebration of Ruth as minimal since it does not fully liberate people in Ruth's narrative. Ruth is forced to be decent in order to be integrated in Israel while the dominant code of decency remained unchanged. Consequently, this cannot be used to fully liberate struggling indecent queer people in current Mozambique. Therefore, an infrapolitical ethic of the powerless has been suggested in order to recognize the reading of Ruth's story as a form of resistance in disguise. The importance of this infrapolitical ethic of the powerless is that it enables struggling communities to resist the combination of systems that marginalize them, but recognizing too that this resistance must not bring more harm to them. This can be done through Contextual Bible Studies for change towards the construction of alternative and inclusive communities within the context of economic and religious exclusion of non-conforming sexualities and/or different gender identities in Mozambique (and other similar struggling contexts in the region). As a conclusion

to this discussion, it has been indicated that the infrapolitical ethic of the powerless must be applied within Contextual Bible Study resources for change.

The last aspect of this research has been the construction of Contextual Bible Studies for change. The Ujamaa Centre praxis has been used to construct CBS from the biblical book of Ruth for contexts of economic and religious exclusion and the silencing of queer people in current Mozambique. In this last aspect of the study, it has been concluded that the CBS resources constructed in this research have the potential to enlighten and resist aspects of marginalization of indecent queer people in Mozambique, suggesting alternative and inclusive communities in terms of sexual diversity. These CBS resources can be expanded, edited, and used in different contexts, depending on the specific struggles of the groups. Those who will hear or read this embarrassing story of Ruth in these ways will be forced to change towards the construction of alternative and inclusive communities in terms of sexual diversity. The CBS process is a form of resistance in disguise, where people discover their struggles and look for alternative solutions, but without exposing themselves to the existing oppressive system (s) that might cause more harm to them and spoil the process. Having presented the conclusions of this thesis, it is also important to suggest some recommendations (in the following section) for future research and/or work within communities of faith (including my post-PhD work).

7.2 Recommendations

Though this research has been conducted within the scope proposed, it opens room for further studies and/or works within communities. Therefore, this study recommends that:

1. The Contextual Bible Study resources produced in this thesis reflect a deliberate post-PhD attempt to engage directly with LGBTIQA+ people in Mozambique (and the Southern African region). This means that they must be used for future analysis and reflection, in terms of both academic and communitarian work with the biblical text of Ruth. These are suggestive biblical resources that can be used to resist interlocking systems of oppression and marginalization of indecent communities (including ambiguous or non-conforming sexualities). These CBS resources can be expanded or edited to meet the specific needs of the struggling communities or groups and/or of the research interest (including my post-PhD work).
2. The CBS resources constructed in this research reflect the experience of the researcher (an heterosexual ally and a religious leader) in working with LGBTIQA+ people

through Contextual Bible Study and Theological Education by Extension. For future community-based research and praxis, a direct engagement with LGBTIQA+ people in Mozambique and beyond is recommended to draw their direct voices into this work so that their struggles, feelings and challenges are expressed throughout this process of advocacy towards construction of alternative and inclusive communities.

3. Future studies must expand the exploration of African language use in terms of sexuality. This research has indicated that sex talk in Africa is an assumed taboo, but this does not mean that African (and specifically Mozambican) people do not talk about sex and sexuality. Therefore, future research on how African people talk about sex and sexuality is recommended. In other words, the question of the language used by African (and particularly Mozambicans) to talk about sex and sexuality is needed for future research and praxis in Mozambique and elsewhere in the region.
4. Some further investigations must be done on the imperial legacy on the economic and religion exclusion and/or silence of ambiguous and non-conforming sexualities in Mozambique as well as in the biblical book of Ruth. This research has described the belief systems of the imperial context in which the biblical book of Ruth has been produced as well as the imperial ideologies that shape the sexual, economic, and religious exclusion and/or silence in Mozambique. Nevertheless, further investigation is needed on how these imperial realities contribute to the economic and religious marginalization of ambiguous and non-conforming sexualities.
5. Biblical scholars and theologians in general must also include the struggles of LGBTIQA+ people in their reading of the scriptures (especially the book of Ruth). This study has presented the difficult economic and religious trajectories that sexual minorities are going through in contemporary Mozambique. But this is one of the pioneering studies in this area (intersection between economics and sexuality) which requires more supporting research to collectively address the plight of LGBTIQA+ people in the country and beyond. Thus, more research (done by Heterosexual allies and religious leaders) is recommended on the intersection between economic struggles and sexual struggles as well as religious struggles of indecent queer people in Mozambique and elsewhere in the region.
6. The CBS resources produced in this research must create a platform of dialogue between different sectors of the Mozambican society (including the Church and other religious manifestations) so that people and communities understand that different

sexualities are not forms of illnesses or a problem to worry the Church and the society in general. And this aspect requires further research and praxis through CBS process.

7. This research has highlighted some progress in terms of LGBTIQA+ terminologies developed by African queer scholars. Therefore, it is recommended that for future community-based research and praxis (including my post-PhD work) these African queer terminologies are taken into consideration to honor the agency of those who feel the pain of exclusion and marginalization due to their condition of being sexually different, in the Church and society in general.

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