

## Foreignness and Poverty in the Book of Ruth: A Legal Way for a Poor Foreign Woman to Be Integrated into Israel

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Two important topics in the book of Ruth are foreignness and the acceptance of foreigners by Judahite society. In order to integrate a Moabite woman into Israel, the biblical author refers to the laws of the Torah to protect the poor—especially widows, orphans, and aliens—as well as to levirate marriage. Thus, it becomes possible to argue convincingly for the integration of a foreign woman into Israel. This article will take a closer look at the legal status of Ruth, with particular regard to Deuteronomic law.<sup>1</sup> It will show that Ruth as “foreign woman,” a נכרִיָּה, takes the place of an immigrant holding the status of a גֵּר, an alien, in Israel. She, as a woman on her own, as “the wife of the dead,” achieves a legal status that is not applied to any other woman in the OT.

First, I will discuss the status of Elimelech and his family in Moab and then analyze the situation of Ruth in Bethlehem, focusing on four terms that describe her

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<sup>1</sup> For the intertextual connection between Ruth and Deuteronomy, see Georg Braulik, “The Book of Ruth as Intra-Biblical Critique on the Deuteronomic Law,” *AcT* 19 (1999): 1–20. Irmtraud Fischer (*Rut* [HTKAT; Freiburg: Herder, 2001], 89–91) dates the book of Ruth to the second half of the fifth century B.C.E. at the earliest. She follows Yair Zakovitch (*Das Buch Rut: Ein jüdischer Kommentar* [SBS 177; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1999], 62–64), who argues for a date of composition in the middle of the fifth century B.C.E. Both assume that Ruth was written as a response to Ezra and Nehemiah. Both presuppose the authoritative status of Deuteronomy at the time the book of Ruth was written. For the authority of Deuteronomy and its early interpretation within the Ketuvim, see Georg Braulik, “Das Deuteronomium und die Bücher Ijob, Sprichwörter, Rut: Zur Frage früher Kanonizität des Deuteronomiums,” in *Die Tora als Kanon für Juden und Christen* (ed. Erich Zenger; Herders biblische Studien 10; Freiburg: Herder, 1996), 61–138.

status: Moabite, גר, נכריה, and אשת המת. Finally, I will draw some conclusions about the status of a poor foreign widow in Judah.

## I. ELIMELECH AND HIS FAMILY IN MOAB

Two parallel situations with opposite preconditions can be found in the book of Ruth: Elimelech's and Ruth's.<sup>2</sup> The first chapter narrates the story of an Israelite, Elimelech, and his family. Owing to a famine, these people are forced to live in a foreign country—Moab. Later, Ruth arrives as a foreigner in Bethlehem in Judah. Both situations are described in different terms. Even though Elimelech's and Ruth's legal status are not the same, the author of the book tends to relate these two situations to each other. To be sure, everything the book of Ruth tells us about the status of Elimelech in Moab or that of Ruth in Judah is seen from an Israelite perspective. There is no reference to foreigners in ancient Near Eastern legal codes.<sup>3</sup> The book of Ruth reflects an exclusively inner-biblical discussion that relates to the Deuteronomic concept of the גר in Israel and uses terminology to denote a social reality that is not envisaged in Deuteronomy.

Elimelech's sojourn in Moab is presented in only a few sentences (Ruth 1:1–3). The author describes Elimelech's stay in Moab with the Hebrew verb גור. José Ramirez Kidd points out that in the Hebrew Bible this verb most often refers to Israelites who live as strangers in other countries; that is, it refers to emigrants.<sup>4</sup> Therefore Elimelech is not called a גר, because the noun is used only for immigrants who live in Israel. It seems, however, that Elimelech has an assured status in Moab.<sup>5</sup> This suggests that the author of Ruth assumes that what Deuteronomy requires concerning the גר in Israel is equally valid for the Israelite in a foreign country. Obviously, Moab is hospitable.<sup>6</sup> Elimelech's sons marry Moabite women, Orpah and Ruth. The author of the book does not consider this problematic, although such unions are not without problems in other biblical texts. As argued by Irntraud Fischer (and others before), the book of Ruth is written deliberately

<sup>2</sup> Fischer, *Rut*, 64–65.

<sup>3</sup> See José E. Ramirez Kidd, *Alterity and Identity in Israel: The גר in the Old Testament* (BZAW 283; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1999), 111.

<sup>4</sup> Kidd, *Alterity*, 20–21. According to his analysis, the verb גור occurs mainly in narrative nonlegal texts, whereas the noun גר refers to a legal status (p. 15).

<sup>5</sup> According to R. Martin-Achard, the גר who lived in Israel in most cases was poor and thus had the right of gleaning (“גור,” *THAT* 1:410). He was protected by Yahweh, was not to be oppressed but loved (Lev 19:34). He profited from the tithe, the sabbath year, and the cities of refuge. In fact, there was no barrier between *gêrim* and Israelites, neither in everyday life (p. 410) nor in religious matters (p. 411).

<sup>6</sup> The opposite is said about Moab in Deut 23:4–5 and in the Balaam story (Numbers 22–24).

against a certain interpretation of Deuteronomy that can be found especially in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.<sup>7</sup> Deuteronomy 23:4 rules out the incorporation of Ammonites and Moabites into the assembly of Israel (קהל יהודה), and Deut 7:3 forbids marriage between Israelite men or women and women or men of the nations who live in Canaan.<sup>8</sup> These marriages are exactly the kind of relationship that is strictly forbidden by Ezra and Nehemiah.<sup>9</sup> The author of the book of Ruth, in contrast, does not comment on this fact,<sup>10</sup> which shows that the situation of the Israelite family in Moab does not seem to pose a problem for him/her.<sup>11</sup> The men live as aliens in Moab. The women have husbands and sons who provide for their legal status.

However, the situation changes after the death of the male family members. Without a male head of the family the status of the Israelite woman in Moab as well as the status of her daughters-in-law is no longer assured. Therefore, Naomi decides to return to Bethlehem, probably because she has male relatives there who are obliged to help her. Obviously, her legal status in Judah is better than in Moab, where she is alone, on her own, and a foreigner. Now, as a widow without sons, she lacks the legal status that she formerly held through her husband and/or her sons.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Fischer, *Rut*, 61–65.

<sup>8</sup> Deuteronomy 7:1 lists by name “the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations mightier and more numerous than you” (NRSV). The Moabites (and Ammonites) are not among them. Ezra 9:1 explicitly names the Moabites in its list.

<sup>9</sup> This is corroborated by the rabbinic interpretation. For examples, see Zakovitch, *Rut*, 80, and an overview in Erich Zenger, *Das Buch Ruth* (ZBK; 2nd ed.; Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1992), 103–15. Marriage to Moabite women is seen as a sin. The Targum comments on Ruth 1:4–5 as follows: “They transgressed against the decree of the Memra of the Lord and they took for themselves wives from the daughters of Moab. The name of one was Orpah and the name of the second was Ruth, the daughter of Eglon, king of Moab, and they dwelt there for about ten years. And because they transgressed against the decree of the Memra of the Lord and intermarried with foreign peoples, their days were cut short and both Mahlon and Chilion also died in the unclean land” (D. R. G. Beattie, *The Targum of Ruth* [ArBib 19; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1994], 19). Others suppose that the women converted to Judaism (Ibn Ezra and R. David Qimchi).

<sup>10</sup> For the author of Ruth, what happens in the land of Moab obviously does not matter so much. Similarly, the worship of (an)other god(s) in Moab is not a problem. See James A. Loader, “Yahweh’s Wings and the Gods of Ruth,” in “*Wer ist wie du, HERR, unter den Göttern?*” *Studien zur Theologie und Religionsgeschichte Israels. Für Otto Kaiser zum 70. Geburtstag* (ed. Ingo Kottsieper et al.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994), 389–401.

<sup>11</sup> There is an intertextual connection to Gen 12:10 (Abraham and his family live as strangers in Egypt) and Gen 26:1 (Isaac in Gerar), two texts about the unproblematic sojourn of the patriarchs in a foreign land. See Fischer, *Rut*, 47–48.

<sup>12</sup> Regarding the situation of widows, see Willy Schottroff, “Die Armut der Witwen,” in *Schuld und Schulden: Biblische Traditionen in gegenwärtigen Konflikten* (ed. M. Crüsemann and W. Schottroff; Munich: Kaiser, 1992), 54–89; F. Charles Fensham, “Widow, Orphan, and the Poor

Her argument to send her daughters-in-law back to their mothers' houses is that there they would be able to find a new husband. One has to bear in mind that a woman without a husband or son found herself in a precarious situation. In fact, a woman without male relatives was not granted any legal status.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, in Naomi's opinion—which seems quite realistic—it is hardly possible for a woman to come through on her own. A widow (without sons) in ancient Near Eastern society, and thus in Israelite society, was most likely placed among the poor.<sup>14</sup> Poverty and the lack of legal status are closely linked. Therefore, Ruth's case calls for attention, because she proves that it is possible for a foreign widow to obtain her rights, even in Israelite society. Actually, she prepares the ground for a possible new interpretation of the Deuteronomic law, as the Torah itself provides means for poor women to survive. One has to admit, however, that in the end a woman will still have no chance to be accepted into society without a man, as the limits of patriarchy were not exceeded in the book of Ruth.

Elimelech, as an alien, lives in Moab without any further problems, and so do his sons. However, it is impossible for a woman on her own to claim an assured legal status. Therefore Naomi returns to Bethlehem, but Ruth does not go back to her mother's house. She deliberately takes on the role of a single woman alone in a foreign country.

## II. THE SITUATION OF RUTH IN BETHLEHEM

Ruth's legal status at the time of her arrival in Bethlehem is now the center of our attention. Ruth deliberately chooses to accompany Naomi to become part of her people and to accept her God (Ruth 1:16: "Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God" [NRSV]). However, we still do not know if the people with whom she wants to live will accept her.

In view of Elimelech's situation in Moab, one might expect that Ruth would attain the status of a גר, the usual term applied to an immigrant in Israel, according to Kidd. It is a legal term, especially in Deuteronomy, but there is a problem. As Kidd notes, in Biblical Hebrew the term גר exists only as a masculine noun.<sup>15</sup>

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in Ancient Near Eastern Legal and Wisdom Literature," *JNES* 21 (1962): 129–39; and for Ruth, see esp. Fischer, *Rut*, 56–57.

<sup>13</sup> For instance, she obviously could not claim the status of a גר, which is important for Ruth in Bethlehem. Although the perspective of the narrative seems to be that of a woman, it remains within the limits of a patriarchal society.

<sup>14</sup> Not only in the Bible but also in Mesopotamian, Egyptian, and other documents widows and orphans are often mentioned in the context of poverty. See Fensham, "Widow, Orphan."

<sup>15</sup> Kidd states: "It is interesting to note that the noun גר does not occur at all in the book of Ruth. . . . The book opens with the verb גור, it tells a story of Israelites abroad (i.e. emigration).

Consequently, a foreign woman cannot live on her own in Israel, as she does not enjoy the same legal status as a man. Therefore, Ruth cannot be called a גר. If the author nevertheless wishes to argue for a legal status for Ruth as a foreigner in Israel, he/she has to find a way to ascribe to her the status of a גר without explicitly using this term. So the author describes the circumstances of Ruth's sojourn in Judah and her actions according to what Deuteronomy stipulates for the גר. Readers familiar with the Deuteronomic law would understand that Ruth should be regarded as a גר. Nonetheless, the term itself is never applied to Ruth. Instead, the author uses three different terms to describe her status: "Moabite" (מואביה), "foreign woman" (נכריה), and "the wife of the dead" (אשת המת).

Ruth is often called "Moabite."<sup>16</sup> This term expresses clearly what she primarily is: a woman from Moab. Some hostility against Moabite women has to be presupposed, although this is never stated explicitly in the book of Ruth. Knowing all relevant biblical stories and laws concerning Moabites, one might not be surprised.<sup>17</sup> Deuteronomy 23:5 gives reasons for and explains the refusal of the Moabites in the story of Balaam (Numbers 22–24) and during the events on Israel's way from Egypt to the promised land when the Moabites do not meet Israel with bread and water. However, now they actually do: Elimelech's family obviously receives bread and water during their sojourn in Moab.<sup>18</sup> Another problem is addressed in Gen 19:30–38, when the daughters of Lot lie with their father and give birth to sons called Moab and Ammon, who are the ancestors of the peoples of the same names. So the writer traces the origin of these peoples to incest. Furthermore, Num 25:1–5 accuses the Israelites of having illicit relationships with Moabite women. These women seduce the Israelites into worshiping the Moabite gods. The reader needs to bear in mind all these connotations when coming across the word "Moabite." Only in Ruth 3, in the scene of the threshing floor of Boaz, which is full of erotic allusions,<sup>19</sup> the name "Moabite" is not mentioned. One can conclude that the author wants to avoid creating the image of the Moabite woman having illicit sexual relations. The author tries to dissociate the Moabite Ruth from the bad reputation of her fore Sisters. This is accomplished by the legal solution of the marriage between Ruth and Boaz mentioned in ch. 4. Unquestionably, Ruth as a particular Moabite in no way corresponds to the Moabite women depicted in the texts of the

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This excludes, consequently, the use of the noun גר which presupposes the Israelite law. The noun גר *could* have been used in the case of Ruth during her sojourn in Bethlehem . . . but the noun גר designates a legal status and is, therefore, restricted to *men*" (*Alterity*, 24). See also Fischer, *Rut*, 58.

<sup>16</sup> This designation of Ruth appears six times in the book: 1:22; 2:2, 6, 21; 4:5, 10. The term "Moabite" (feminine form) appears seven times in Ruth (see Braulik, "Ruth," 5–6).

<sup>17</sup> Although Israel's relations to Moab are ambivalent (see Braulik, "Ruth," 7), all occurrences of female Moabites have negative connotations.

<sup>18</sup> Fischer, *Rut*, 62; Braulik, "Ruth," 10–11.

<sup>19</sup> Braulik points out the allusions to Deut 23:1, where incest is prohibited ("Ruth," 14–15).

Torah. It is the intention of the book of Ruth to neutralize these negative connotations.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, the texts of the Torah referring to Moabite men and women cannot be applied to Ruth, as her behavior seems to be rather different.<sup>21</sup>

To conclude, Ruth is called Moabite in the text, but this designation does not indicate a legal status for her. On the contrary, this name evokes a lot of negative connotations that the author wishes to refute. He/she tries to convince the readers that it is in fact impossible to reject Ruth as being an incestuous and idolatrous Moabite.

### III. A POOR FOREIGN WIDOW IN JUDAH

Ruth speaks about herself as a “foreign woman,” נכריה. When Boaz approaches her in the field in a friendly manner, she answers him, “Why have I found favor in your sight, that you should take notice of me, when I am a foreigner?” (2:10 NRSV). Ruth recognizes and acknowledges her status as a foreigner and wonders why Boaz even takes notice of her.<sup>22</sup> By falling down on her face and bowing before the older man of higher social status she expresses her own inferior position. While this behavior is a form of social convention of communication in the ancient Near East, it realistically depicts Ruth’s situation.<sup>23</sup> Obviously, she herself is aware of it. She is a woman, young, poor, and foreign. But the only term she actually uses in regard to herself is נכריה, “foreign woman.”

Therefore, the overall use of the term נכריה in the Hebrew Bible has to be considered. Although גר very often occurs in connection with widows, orphans, Levites, and the poor, נכריה never does.<sup>24</sup> A נכריה is at no time defined as poor in

<sup>20</sup> See Fischer, *Rut*, 61.

<sup>21</sup> Moreover, “Moabite” does not designate a legal status within Israel at all. But the book of Ruth annuls the reasons for her possible exclusion from Israel.

<sup>22</sup> Jack M. Sasson interprets the term “foreigner” in the speech of Ruth to Boaz as her wish to be accepted by Boaz’s family (*Ruth: A New Translation with a Philological Commentary and a Formalist-Folklorist Interpretation* [Biblical Seminar 10; 2nd ed.; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995], 51). According to Sasson, “foreigner” in Ruth 2:10 refers to someone who does not belong to the family.

<sup>23</sup> Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., writes: “The statement betrayed Ruth’s strong feeling of vulnerability as a non-Israelite. Her survival was totally dependent upon the goodwill of Israelite farmers” (*The Book of Ruth* [NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988], 163). The author of Ruth actually stresses, on the one hand, the legal status of Ruth as one who has certain rights (gleaning) and, on the other, the generosity of Boaz beyond any legal commandments.

<sup>24</sup> Bernhard Lang describes נכר as a term expressing a relation (“נכר,” *ThWAT* 1:454–62). Foreigners hold the most inferior status of all groups in biblical Israel. For example, they are excepted from the sabbath year and the prohibition against lending at interest (Deut 15:3; 23:21; see *ibid.*, 457). Kidd remarks that the term גר in the Hebrew Bible never occurs synonymously with זר (“different”) and נכרי (*Alterity*, 28).

biblical texts, whereas the גר and the widow are. It is remarkable that Ruth is characterized as a poor foreign woman in this story. "Foreign woman" has a negative meaning in most biblical contexts.<sup>25</sup> Two particular groups of texts that use this term several times have to be mentioned. The first one is the discourse about the adulterous foreign woman in Proverbs. In these texts "foreign woman" clearly has negative, especially sexual, connotations.<sup>26</sup> Another context is the discussion about marriage between Israelites and foreign women in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.<sup>27</sup> These books show very clearly that foreign women are a danger to post-exilic Judahite society and therefore have to be rejected. Ruth, on the contrary, is not rejected. Her story is told to convince the reader that a Moabite woman is not dangerous at all, but can be a valuable member of Judahite society. Thus, the book of Ruth is an answer to Ezra's and Nehemiah's politics of demarcation against foreigners and their interpretation of Deuteronomy.<sup>28</sup> As a result, Israelite identity is not endangered by a Moabite like Ruth.

How can this line of argument be in accordance with the Torah? How can a foreign woman attain a positive legal status in Israel that incorporates her into Judahite society? The author of the book of Ruth provides a possible solution: Ruth must be treated as a גר, although she is a woman. There are no laws referring to a foreign woman in a positive way. The story of Ruth provides two parallel situations: in the same way that Elimelech lives as a sojourner in Moab, Ruth has to be accepted as a sojourner, a גר, in Israel. She, being a woman alone in a foreign country, actually is in the situation of a גר and therefore has to be treated as a foreign man living in Israel would be treated. This is the first step toward her acceptance in Bethlehem.

One can further notice that Ruth and Naomi are never addressed as אלמנה, "widow," or described by any term meaning "poor."<sup>29</sup> This is due both to the narrative character of the book and to its focus on foreignness. The author wants to define נכריה in a new way. He/she ascribes the status of a גר to Ruth, the נכריה, in a narrative manner, without stating it explicitly. Chapter 2 views Ruth as a foreigner,

<sup>25</sup> See Fischer, *Rut*, 58–59.

<sup>26</sup> Christl Maier, *Die "fremde Frau" in Proverbien 1–9* (OBO 144; Fribourg: Universitätsverlag, 1995). Lambertus A. Snijders states concerning Prov 23:27: "It seems to us that *nokriyya* . . . hints at the particular place which a *zona* occupies in society. . . . Not so much her origin but her position viz. outside the normal order will be indicated by the term *nokriyya*" (*The Meaning of נכריה in the Old Testament* [Leiden: Brill, 1953], 67–68).

<sup>27</sup> נשים נכריות are mentioned in Ezra 10 (six times) and Neh 13:27.

<sup>28</sup> Fischer, *Rut*, 61–65.

<sup>29</sup> Deuteronomy itself does not denominate widows, orphans, and aliens as "poor." They are protected by special laws and thus are singled out from the poor. Laws in favor of widows, orphans, and aliens are found in Exod 22:21; Deut 10:18; 14:29; 16:11, 14; 24:17, 19–21; 26:12–13; 27:19. Nevertheless, widows' poverty is presupposed. None of these laws is explicitly limited to Israelite widows, so they could be interpreted as applicable to foreign widows as well.

specified by the use of the term נכריה in 2:10. Ruth has the right of gleaning,<sup>30</sup> and, according to Deut 24:19, the alien (גר), the orphan, and the widow are the ones entitled to this right. Ruth therefore benefits from this law as a גר.<sup>31</sup> The parallel situations of Elimelech in Moab and Ruth in Bethlehem strongly suggest that Ruth should attain the status of a גר. Nevertheless, the text is ambiguous, since it does not use the term explicitly.

There is another term for a widow that is applied to Ruth (Ruth 4:5): she is called אשת המת, “the wife of the dead.” This term occurs in only two passages in the Hebrew Bible: Ruth 4:5 and Deut 25:5. The latter text contains the law relating to levirate marriage. Thus, the term אשת המת marks the turning point of Ruth’s legal status. Finally, the author refers to a law that can be applied to a woman exclusively. Through levirate marriage Ruth gains an assured status within the Bethlehemite society.

אשת המת is the first expression in the book of Ruth that explicitly ascribes to her a secure legal status in accordance with Deuteronomic law. She is never referred to by any other Deuteronomic legal term, such as אלמנה or גר or any term for “poor.” But as “the wife of the dead” she can claim her rights. This is the second step of her incorporation into Israel. Chapter 4 of the book of Ruth, dealing with levirate marriage, supposes that from now on Ruth’s relevant status is that of a widow, particularly that of “the wife of the dead.” She is portrayed not as a poor widow but as one who is entitled to levirate marriage. This is the reason why she is never called “widow” or “poor.” The author chooses a legal term that was not a priori connected to poverty. The creative connection between the laws on redemption and levirate marriage has often been discussed,<sup>32</sup> and there is no need to repeat the information here. Strictly speaking, although this legal construction is not in full accordance with the law, it does not contradict it either.<sup>33</sup> However, this

<sup>30</sup> Kidd gives the following examples of the rights of a גר: “the rest during the day of atonement (Lev 16,29); the right not to be oppressed (Ex 22,20); the right to gather fallen grapes (Deut 24,21); the right to benefit from the communal meal during the offering of the first fruits (Deut 26,11); the right to make use of the cities of refuge (Num 35,15); the right to receive the protection of the law (Deut 1,16); the right to benefit from rest during Sabbath (Deut 5,14); the right to receive free meat (Deut 14,21) and the tithe of the third year (Deut 14,29)” (*Alterity*, 16).

<sup>31</sup> Braulik notes that “[a]lthough Ruth is a foreigner and a widow, she obviously cannot naturally make use of the right to glean the ears” (“Ruth,” 13). The problem is that she is a foreign woman. The gleaning law apparently has not been naturally applied to a נכריה. Braulik obviously does not see a difference in the legal status between גר and נכריה (“Ruth,” 13–14).

<sup>32</sup> See, e.g., Frederic W. Bush, *Ruth, Esther* (WBC 9; Waco: Word Books, 1996), 6–248; Braulik, “Ruth.” For a critical view, see James A. Loader, “Gerste, Bullen, Land und Levirat,” in *Begegnung mit Gott: Gesammelte Studien im Bereich des Alten Testaments* (Wiener alttestamentliche Studien 3; Frankfurt a. Main: Lang, 2001), 167–83.

<sup>33</sup> According to Deut 25:5–10 (see also Gen 38:12–26) Elimelech’s brother, who lives in the same house, would have had to marry Naomi. But that makes no sense in this case because we do



new interpretation is a halakah in favor of the two women without husbands. The newborn child is related to Naomi by the women of Bethlehem (4:14–17). Thus, ch. 2 deals with Ruth's status as a foreigner, and ch. 4 with Naomi's and Ruth's status as widows, with Ruth as "the wife of the dead" in particular.<sup>34</sup> Naomi, too, is a "wife of the dead," but she is old. She can no longer bear children. Ruth has to take her place in the levirate marriage.

This sophisticated description of the situation of these two women is due to the fact that they enjoy different legal statuses. Both are widows; Naomi, however, lives in her hometown, whereas Ruth is seen primarily as a Moabite and thus as a "foreign woman." The author of the book of Ruth has found a way to provide a legal status for both of them—an old widow without sons and a foreign woman—namely, as "the wife of the dead." This is the point where they are brought together and at the same time the starting point for the author's conclusive solution to their (legal) problems. The close association between the different laws corresponds to the close relationship of the two women and their vital needs. In the end, both gain a secure legal status, yet again with a husband and a son.<sup>35</sup> They are no longer the "wives of the dead" but of the "strong" Boaz.

The implicit application of the status of a גר and the explicit application of the levirate marriage to Ruth both provide the possibility of her being incorporated into Israelite society. Ruth's foreignness and poverty are overcome by attributing a legal status to her in the context of the Torah. This is possible because of the sophisticated narrative presentation of her double status as a widow and a foreigner. In Israel there is no law to support a Moabite woman such as Ruth, but there are laws protecting the גר and the אשת הגמל. By ascribing the status of a גר to the Moabite woman, the exclusion of Moabite women practiced by Ezra (Ezra 9–10; cf. Deut. 23:4–5) is actually overruled. Evidently, the author of the book of Ruth has shown that it is possible to interpret the Torah in favor of a foreign woman. As a גר, this Moabite woman is a part of Israel in everyday life. Moreover, she has become a worshiper of יהוה, at least according to her actions.<sup>36</sup> Ruth willingly endures the situation of foreignness and lack of a husband in order to become an integrated

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not know anything about such a brother and Naomi is too old to bear children. The situation around the redeemer who buys Naomi's field is anything but clear.

<sup>34</sup> Chapter 3 talks about the critical situation of transition: the foreign woman meets the Israelite on the threshing floor at night and prepares the legal solution for her and Naomi.

<sup>35</sup> This solution shows that in the end women will depend on men in the patriarchal society of Judah. Even if Ruth and Naomi manage their lives without male help for some time (a tough time, indeed), their final aim is to gain a "rest," מנוחה, for themselves (see Ruth 3:1).

<sup>36</sup> Loader points out that Ruth's principal concern is to accompany Naomi and not to convert to another faith: "Ruth does not follow Naomi in order to become Judean, but becomes Judean as a consequence of following her mother-in-law. Then this applies to the statement on religion as well" ("Yahweh's Wings," 398).

member of Judahite society, the society to which her beloved mother-in-law belongs. In the end, she is an accepted member of Israelite society and no longer a foreign woman or widow.

The book of Ruth argues that this foreign woman is not primarily a dangerous subject who seduces Israelites sexually and religiously. The narrative shows that a נכרייה obtains the legal status of a גר in Judahite society because she is “the wife of the dead” and has a legal claim to protection in Israel. Although the book of Ruth never mentions poverty, it is a fact that Naomi and Ruth are poor. The author of Ruth and the author of the Deuteronomistic material know that poverty is a consequence of lacking legal status. The author of Ruth is aware that the Torah provides the means of both integrating a Moabite woman into Israelite society and guaranteeing the survival of poor women, and so he/she refers to Deuteronomistic law to address Naomi’s and Ruth’s situations.<sup>37</sup> The book of Ruth tells readers that the Torah is able to transform even a poor foreign woman without a husband into the great-grandmother of the most famous king of Israel.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>37</sup> The author of Ruth uses the same biblical text for his/her arguments as his/her opponents do in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, namely, the Deuteronomistic law.

<sup>38</sup> This story, of course, is told from an Israelite perspective. It neglects any question about Ruth’s Moabite identity, which she completely changes for an Israelite one. It is not possible to live in Judah and adhere to a Moabite identity and faith. On this, see Bonnie Honig, “Ruth, the Model Emigrée: Mourning and the Symbolic Politics of Immigration,” in *Ruth and Esther* (ed. A. Brenner; FCB, Second Series; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 50–74.

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