

Contending for Invented Space in African Context and Biblical Text: Intersecting Gender, Sexuality, Ethnicity and Economics

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ABSTRACT

The Ujamaa Centre for Community Development and Research, through the work of Sithembiso Zwane, has theorised a continuum of contested space, including invited space (controlled by dominant sectors), invigorated space (whereby marginalised sectors contend for space within invited space) and invented space (as marginalised sectors transform these spaces into space they control). In this article, we extend our conceptualisation of contested space to the biblical text itself, recognising within biblical text these three forms of space, both in terms of socio-historical text and narrative text. We use the book of Ruth as our biblical text, recognising, first, the production of the canonical text as a contestation of space, following the hermeneutic of Itumeleng Mosala by working backwards away from the canonical form towards marginalised textual remnant voices and second, that literary-narrative setting within the book of Ruth can be read as a contestation of space. Socio-historically, we argue that the canonical text co-opts marginalised textual voices (in terms of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and economics). Narratologically, we argue that the Ruth narrative includes traces of both socio-historical contestation and narrative contestation of space through Ruth's struggle for invented space. Alongside this focus on the biblical text, we reflect on how the Ujamaa Centre's community-based work might use these resources for re-reading Ruth with local Southern African communities (in both South Africa and Mozambique) struggling for redemptive invented space in the intersection of gender, sexuality, ethnicity and economics.

KEYWORDS: Ruth, space, Contextual Bible Study, Ujamaa Centre, sexuality, economic, invented space

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A INTRODUCTION

This article draws on the community-based praxis of the Ujamaa Centre for Community Development and Research in our discussion of the contestation of social space.¹ We begin with concepts of community-based participatory development and then move from these theoretical concepts to a re-reading of potentially useful biblical texts. The community-based development theory we draw on is that of 'social space'. Our article begins by explaining how emancipatory forms of 'development' have theorised space as a site of contestation. From here, we then turn in the second section of our article to the biblical text as a site of contestation, in this case the book of Ruth, privileging marginalised socio-historical contexts of production and marginalised literary-narrative characters within narrative spatial setting. We use an intersectional lens to structure our re-reading of Ruth, primarily an intersection between economics and sexuality but taking cognisance too of gender and ethnicity. Having briefly shown the intersection between sexuality and economics within the various theorised 'spaces' of the book of Ruth, we turn in the third section of our article to a more detailed interrogation of three specific economics-sexuality intersected and contested spaces in Ruth. Finally, in the fourth section, we briefly reflect on how we might use these conceptual and textual resources to construct Contextual Bible Studies in which there is an overt intersection between sexuality and economics.

Before we come to the focus of our article, contested space, we briefly introduce here our emphasis on the specific intersection of sexuality and space. The praxis of the Ujamaa Centre emerges primarily from the South African confluence of South African Black Theology and South African Contextual Theology.² Through long associations with the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT), these South African theologies engaged Latin American Liberation Theology,³ which offered another dialogue partner to the Ujamaa Centre's praxis.⁴ Alongside these liberation theologies feminist, womanist and African women's theologies asserted themselves;⁵ these too

¹ This article is based on a paper presented as part of the OTSSA's contribution to the International Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in Pretoria, in July 2023.

² Gerald O. West, "Contextual Bible Study as a Form of Contextual Theology: An Early Conceptual History," *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 48/2 (2022).

³ Kofi Appiah-Kobi and Sergio Torres, eds., *African Theology en Route: Papers from the Pan-African Conference of Third World Theologians, December 17–23, 1977, Accra, Ghana* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1983).

⁴ Gerald O. West, *Biblical Hermeneutics of Liberation: Modes of Reading the Bible in the South African Context* (2nd Revised ed.; Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1995).

⁵ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "Reflections from a Third World Woman's Perspective: Women's Experience and Liberation Theologies," in *Irruption of the Third World:*

becoming an early formative feature of both the Ujamaa Centre's local community-based work and the conceptualisation of its work.⁶

Historically, the work of the Ujamaa Centre began with an economic emphasis, having been forged in the struggle against apartheid's racial capitalism.⁷ However, the summons to work within the women's struggle for liberation followed closely.⁸ Intersecting economics and gender therefore became a significant trajectory within the Ujamaa Centre's community-based work.⁹ A more difficult trajectory, slower to be articulated as a summons by local communities, was the intersection between economics and sexuality. The irruptive work of Marcella Althaus-Reid had made us aware of the absence of intersectional work on economics and sexuality within Latin American Liberation Theology.¹⁰ We were therefore attentive to community-based initiatives which might summon us to this intersection. The alliance with the Uthingo Network (formalised in 2013) in our own home city, Pietermaritzburg,¹¹ was consolidated through the appointment (in 2017) of the queer activist and scholar Charlene van der Walt to the Gender & Religion Programme of the School of Religion, Philosophy, and Classics, at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, our home institution. She immediately became a colleague within the work of the Ujamaa Centre, guiding our work within

Challenge to Theology (ed. Virginia Fabella and Sergio Torres; Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1983); Mercy Amba Oduyoye and Musimbi Kanyoro, eds., *Talitha, Qumi! Proceedings of the Convocation of African Women Theologians 1989* (Ibadan: Daystar Press, 1990); Bernadette I. Mosala, "Black Theology and the Struggle of the Black Woman in Southern Africa," in *The Unquestionable Right to Be Free* (ed. Itumeleng J. Mosala and Buti Tlhagale; Johannesburg: Skotaville, 1986); Sarojini Nadar, "A South African Indian Womanist Reading of the Character of Ruth," in *Other Ways of Reading: African Women and the Bible* (ed. Musa W. Dube; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001); Beverley G. Haddad, "The South African Women's Theological Project in Historical Perspective: Revisiting Our Practices of Solidarity and Degrees of Separation," *JTSA* 145 (2013).

⁶ Gerald O. West, *Contextual Bible Study* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 1993); West, *Biblical Hermeneutics of Liberation*.

⁷ Lebamang Sebidi, "The Dynamics of the Black Struggle and Its Implications for Black Theology," in *The Unquestionable Right to Be Free: Essays in Black Theology* (ed. Itumeleng J. Mosala and Buti Tlhagale; Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishers, 1986).

⁸ Gerald O. West, "Phantsi Patriarchy, Talitha Cum! The Quest for Post-Patriarchal Biblical Resources," in *Religion, Patriarchy and Empire: Festschrift in Honour of Mercy Amba Oduyoye* (ed. Lilian C. Siwila and Fundiswa Kobo; Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2021), 127–128.

⁹ Gerald O. West and Sithembiso Zwane, "Re-Reading 1 Kings 21:1–16 between Community-Based Activism and University-Based Pedagogy," *JIBS* 2/1 (2020).

¹⁰ Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender and Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

¹¹ <https://gaylesbian.org.za/>.

LGBTIQA+ sectors.¹²

Althaus-Reid summoned liberation theologies to engage the “indecent work” of sex work – intersecting sexuality and economics – recognising that sex workers are “workers.”¹³ The Ujamaa Centre has followed her summons, reflected here in this article and in the emerging work of Helder Carlos within the context of Mozambique.¹⁴ We recognise that economic systems and sexuality systems ‘intersect’ or ‘interlock,’¹⁵ constructing intersecting or interlocking systems of oppression.

B CONTESTING SPACE

Drawing on work associated with liberation-related forms of development within the work of Sithembiso Zwane,¹⁶ we conceptualise space in three related terms—invited space, invigorated space and invented space.

Our work on space is situated generally within how local and global orders intersect or interlock in the construction of space, as for example theorised by Brazilian geographer Milton Santos.¹⁷ In particular, our use of this

¹² See, for example, Charlene Van der Walt and Hanzline R. Davids, “Heteropatriarchy’s Blame Game: Reading Genesis 37 with Izitabane during COVID 19,” *OTE* 35/1 (2022).

¹³ Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology*, 2–7; see also Avaren Ipsen, *Sex Working and the Bible* (London: Equinox, 2009).

¹⁴ Helder L. Carlos, “Intersecting Economics and Sexuality in the Book of Ruth and Contemporary Mozambique,” (PhD thesis, University of KwaZulu-Natal, in progress).

¹⁵ We acknowledge the significant conceptual analysis associated with the work on ‘intersectionality’ by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,” *University of Chicago Legal Forum* (1989). However, our particular understanding of ‘intersection’ is closer to the conceptualisation of the Combahee River Collective, which uses the term ‘interlocking’ systems of oppression; Combahee River Collective, “The Combahee River Collective Statement,” *WSQ* 42/3/4 (1977). See the useful overview of such conceptualisations in Anna Carastathis, “The Concept of Intersectionality in Feminist Theory,” *Philosophy Compass* 9/5 (2014); Anna Carastathis, “Interlocking Systems of Oppression,” in *Critical Concepts in Queer Studies and Education: An International Guide for the Twenty-First Century* (ed. Nelson M. Rodriguez et al.; Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

¹⁶ Sithembiso S. Zwane, “Invited, Invigorated and Invented Spaces: A Trans-Development Approach,” in *Faith, Class, and Labor: Intersectional Approaches in a Global Context* (ed. Jin Young Choi and Joerg Rieger; Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2020); Sithembiso Zwane, “Invited, Invigorated and Invented Spaces: An Analysis of the Ujamaa Centre’s Ideo-Theological Conceptual Contribution to Participatory Community Development in South Africa and Beyond,” (PhD thesis, University of KwaZulu-Natal, in progress).

¹⁷ Milton Santos, *The Nature of Space* (trans. B. Baletti; Durham: Duke University

concept draws specifically on the conceptualisation of Andrea Cornwall. Drawing on Michel Foucault's recognition that "space is fundamental in any exercise of power," Cornwall introduces her notion of space as follows: "Spaces," she argues, "come to be defined by those invited into them, as well as by those doing the inviting."¹⁸ Cornwall situates her analysis within the field of participatory development, so she uses theory familiar to the work of the Ujamaa Centre such as James Scott's conceptualisation of resistance.¹⁹ Cornwall recognises, however, that Scott's analysis of the hidden transcript "relies on creating spaces that are at a remove from spaces inhabited by those in authority, even if – as Lefebvre argues – such spaces are never completely insulated from the effects of power." Theorising this spatial trajectory, she locates her conceptual continuum within development theory:

One of the ironies of the efforts of development agencies to foster autonomous spaces for popular organization and self-reliance is that their very presence and agency as instigator may come to affect, rather fundamentally, what these spaces may come to represent to those who participate in them. The very act of soliciting the 'voices of the poor' can all too easily end up as an act of ventriloquism as 'public transcripts' are traded in open view.²⁰

What "invited spaces" have in common, she argues, is that they "tend to be artefacts of external intervention."²¹ These are not the popular spaces of the poor and marginalised. They are the construct of others, even well-intentioned others. Cornwall argues that as such, often "invited spaces are transplanted onto institutional landscapes in which entrenched relations of dependency, fear and disprivilege undermine the possibility for the kind of deliberative decision-making they are to foster."²²

Key to the concept of invited space is that control is maintained by powerful institutions, such as governments and donors, into which local

Press, 2021).

¹⁸ Andrea Cornwall, "Spaces for Transformation? Reflections on Issues of Power and Difference in Participation in Development," in *Participation: From Tyranny to Transformation? Exploring New Approaches to Participation in Development* (ed. Samuel Hickey and Giles Mohan; London: Zed Books, 2004), 80; citing Michel Foucault, "Space, Knowledge, and Power," in *The Foucault Reader* (ed. Paul Rabinow; New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 252.

¹⁹ James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

²⁰ Cornwall, "Spaces for Transformation?," 82. This is why Sithembiso Zwane's PhD research on the Ujamaa Centre's contribution to participatory development is so important; Zwane, "Invited, Invigorated and Invented Spaces."

²¹ Cornwall, "Spaces for Transformation?," 76.

²² Andrea Cornwall, "Introduction: New Democratic Spaces? The Politics and Dynamics of Institutionalised Participation," *IDS Bulletin* 35/2 (2004): 1.

communities are invited. Mechanisms of control undermine participatory deliberations and enabling decision-making processes. Faranak Miraftab, working within feminist theorising, takes up Cornwall's concept and constructs a contrast between "invited space" and "invented space."

"Invited" spaces are defined as the ones occupied by those grassroots and their allied non-governmental organizations that are legitimized by donors and government interventions. "Invented" spaces are those, also occupied by the grassroots and claimed by their collective action, but directly confronting the authorities and the status quo. While the former grassroots actions are geared mostly toward providing the poor with coping mechanisms and propositions to support survival of their informal membership, the grassroots activity of the latter challenges the status quo in the hope of larger societal change and resistance to the dominant power relations.²³

Speaking specifically to women's work, Miraftab highlights "neoliberalism's seeming contradiction," specifically that "it erodes women's livelihoods and access to their lack of access to the most essential services, although at the same time it opens up certain public realms of decision-making from which women had been excluded."²⁴ She notes an example from South Africa where "state decentralization and the promotion of local governments have brought large proportions of women and disadvantaged people into the arena of formal politics through local councils. But policies have, simultaneously, evicted a large proportion of poor households from their shelters and have disconnected them from basic services."²⁵

Miraftab offers a nuanced analysis of the spaces of grassroots' informal politics, "the main arena of poor women's activism."²⁶ "Grassroots collective actions," she insists, "move between them and at different points in their struggles use different sets of tools, and spaces of mobilization." Furthermore, what distinguishes the two spaces is that "actions taken by the poor within the invited spaces of citizenship, however innovative they may be, aim to cope with existing systems of hardship and are sanctioned by donors and government interventions." "Within the invented spaces, however," she continues, "grassroots actions are characterized by defiance that directly challenges the status quo: in one space strategies of survival are sought within the existing structural system and in the other resistance is mounted to bring it

²³ Faranak Miraftab, "Invited and Invented Spaces of Participation: Neoliberal Citizenship and Feminists' Expanded Notion of Politics," *Wagadu: A Journal of Transnational Women's & Gender Studies* 1/1 (2004): 1.

²⁴ Miraftab, "Invited and Invented Spaces of Participation," 2.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 2–3.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

down."²⁷

In-between these two spaces, a conceptual innovation by Zwane, lies overlapping "invigorated space."²⁸ Invigorated space disrupts invited space and offers resources for constructing community-based participatory invented space. Invigorated space facilitates the building of resilience²⁹ among those vulnerable to the invited spaces of domination and control. Invigorated spaces, a concept we have constructed from the experience of the Ujamaa Centre, contend with invited spaces. Invigorated spaces provide much needed capacity to the poor and marginalised to challenge their non-participation and exclusion from development processes. Invited spaces are challenged by the invigorated spaces of resilience, premised on the notion of humanisation and human dignity.

Invigorated spaces contribute to the building of agency within religious and social movements, for example, enabling them to challenge the control of the dominant and their own marginalisation. Furthermore, invigorated spaces facilitate the conceptualisation and construction of invented spaces of resistance that have the potential to lead to humanisation and human dignity through a process of participatory community development. "Invented spaces" are, argues Cornwall, "those arenas in which people join together, often with others like them, in collective action, self-help, initiatives or everyday sociality."³⁰ Partially controlled and manipulated marginalised working-class groups in the community have the capacity to create invented spaces but often require enabling space that is invigorated space.

Enabling such space is an ongoing praxis of the Ujamaa Centre, working with particular marginalised groups within invited spaces, facilitating the invigoration of this space, towards invented spaces of participation. These groups include, specifically in terms of the scope of this article (but are not limited to), the LGBTIQ+ community, unemployed youth, survivors of Gender Based Violence (GBV), migrants and sex workers.

As an interpretive hermeneutic, the concept of space is significant in the work of the Ujamaa Centre. Our analysis of the lived and embodied reality of the poor and marginalised communities of the working class indicates that it is a contested space. Following Henri Lefebvre, we recognise that space is a social product; it is not simply available as a neutral container waiting to be

²⁷ Ibid., 3–4.

²⁸ Zwane, "Invited, Invigorated and Invented Spaces."

²⁹ Gerald O. West, "Contextual Bible Study and/as Interpretive Resilience," in *That All May Live: Essays in Honour of Nyambura J. Njoroge* (ed. Ezra Chitando, Esther Mombo and Masiwa Ragies Gunda; Bamberg: University of Bamberg Press, 2021).

³⁰ Cornwall, "Spaces for Transformation?" 76.

filled but is a dynamic, humanly constructed and contested process of control and domination. Lefebvre contends that space is not readily available to those who need it but is a struggle waged through a structural and system process of coercion, power and control.³¹ The Ujamaa Centre works within contested social space.

Our CBS work focuses on resources which foreground 'voice,' including both the voices of organised communities of the marginalised we work with and the marginalised voices of the biblical text. As Cornwall reminds us, "Having a voice clearly depends on more than getting a seat at the table."³² We will return to this notion of voice in the final section of our article. Here, our focus is on "getting a seat at the table" – the recognition of a continuum of contested social space: invited space, invigorated space and invented space.

In addition to this conceptualisation of space, we add a related spatial notion. Within each of the spatial concepts, we have both "safe space" and "brave space." We draw here on the work of Brian Arao and Kristi Clemens.³³ We have used the notion of 'safe space' often in our work, emphasising space that is invigorated by careful facilitation and enabling emancipatory participation.³⁴ Arao and Clemens deepen our understanding, questioning within educational practice "the degree to which safety is an appropriate or reasonable expectation for ... dialogue about social justice."³⁵ The reality is, the authors continue, that "the pervasive nature of systemic and institutionalized oppression precludes the creation of safety in a dialogue situated, as it must be, in said system."³⁶ Arao and Clemens revise their facilitative pedagogy and we ours, "to emphasize the need for courage rather than the illusion of safety."³⁷ We do not abandon the notion of 'safe space,' given its significance in religious discourse and practice, but we recognise that the notion of 'brave space' may in itself, as Arao and Clemens indicate,³⁸ have the effect of transforming understandings of participatory space.

In the next section, we use these concepts of space to analyse the kinds of space the book of Ruth occupies in its canonical location, in its socio-historical sites of production and in its narrative world.

³¹ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith; Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1991).

³² Cornwall, "Spaces for Transformation?" 84.

³³ Brian Arao and Kristi Clemens, "From Safe Spaces to Brave Spaces: A New Way to Frame Dialogue around Diversity and Social Justice," in *The Art of Effective Facilitation: Reflections from Social Justice Educators* (ed. Lisa M. Landreman; New York: Routledge, 2013).

³⁴ West, "Contextual Bible Study and/as Interpretive Resilience,"

³⁵ Arao and Clemens, "From Safe Spaces to Brave Space," 139.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 140–41.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 141.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 142.

C CONTESTING SPACE IN RUTH

In this section, we bring the resources from Ujamaa Centre's development-based conceptual apparatus into our biblical hermeneutical work. We focus on the book of Ruth, for Ruth has been both a regular dialogue partner in African biblical hermeneutics³⁹ and a regular dialogue partner in the Ujamaa Centre's community-based work in marginalised communities.⁴⁰

Our first interrogation of space has to do with canonical space. In many of our canons, the book of Ruth occupies invited space, canonically. David Jobling has made a persuasive argument for a Deuteronomic "Extended Book of Judges," which consists of Judg 2:11 through to 1 Sam 12.⁴¹ Jobling argues that Judges 1:1–2:10 "belongs more naturally [and narratively] to the book of Joshua" and that the last five chapters of Judges as we have it in all our canons "paint a picture of anarchy and attribute anarchy to Israel's lack of a king." He goes on to argue that, "The effect of the Extended Book of Judges is quite different. It carries us beyond the time of anarchy to the triumphant vindication of judgeship in Samuel's deeds (1 Samuel 7) and words (1 Samuel 12)." ⁴²

The process of canonisation subsequent to the Deuteronomic work, Jobling contends, has recast the particular notion the Deuteronomists had for an acceptable kingship, one which was in continuity with judgeship.⁴³ The first stage of canonisation, which produced the Masoretic Jewish canon, creates and then separates the 'book' of Judges from the 'book' of Samuel, disrupting and reconfiguring this Deuteronomistic "mythic work."⁴⁴ The intended theological and ideological effect of this canonical construction—with a significant economic impact—is to denigrate the leadership and communitarian economic order of judges and to venerate the leadership and centralised tribute-based economic systems of kings by associating the most significant judge, Samuel,

³⁹ Gezina G. de Villiers, "African Biblical Hermeneutics and the Book of Ruth: Some Observations," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 42/1 (2021). See the many African contextual re-readings of the book of Ruth in the work of Madipoane Masenya (ngwan'a Mphahlele); for example, related to the theme of our article, see Madipoane Masenya, "Struggling with Poverty/Emptiness: Rereading the Naomi-Ruth Story in African-South Africa," *JTSA* 120 (2004); Madipoane (ngwan'a Mphahlele) Masenya "A Woman with Multiple Identities: Reading the Ruth Character in Post-Apartheid South Africa," *OTE* 36 (2023).

⁴⁰ Gerald O. West and Beverley G. Haddad, "Boaz as 'Sugar Daddy': Re-Reading Ruth in the Context of HIV," *JTSA* 155/ Special Issue: Sexuality in Africa (2016). "Study Guide: Ruth," *Anglican Communion*, 2016, <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/253738/2-Ruth.pdf>.

⁴¹ David Jobling, *1 Samuel* (ed. David W. Cotter, Berit Olam; Studies in Hebrew Narrative & Poetry; Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1998), 43–76.

⁴² Jobling, *1 Samuel*, 34.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 104.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 105.

with the inauguration of kingship.

The second stage of canonisation, which produced the Greek Septuagint canon and eventually the Christian canon, takes this theological and ideological trajectory a step further by inserting the book of Ruth between Judges and 1 Samuel.⁴⁵ What is particularly significant about this second canonical stage, says Jobling, is how it "tends to make the beginning of 1 Samuel even more of a beginning, and to confirm the tendency to read it [1 Samuel] as the beginning of monarchy." "Both the opening and the closing words of Ruth," continues Jobling, "confirm this tendency."⁴⁶ Put differently, the Jewish canon does not introduce David until 1 Sam 16:13, while the Septuagint and the Christian canons "long anticipate his appearance by naming him already in the book of Ruth."⁴⁷

The book of Ruth is invited into canonical space whose theological and ideological agendas are already set. The book of Ruth is given a seat at the canonical table but its voice is constrained by pro-monarchic, patriarchal and extractive economic theology and ideology.

Our second interrogation of space has to do with the book of Ruth's socio-historical site of production. While there are proponents of both a pre-exilic, monarchic, social location and a post-exilic, restoration, social location, the latter is more likely for the final form of the book of Ruth.⁴⁸ Within this context, the book of Ruth takes its place alongside the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, contending with them for the place of foreign women within a theological and ideological contestation about identity.⁴⁹ The book of Ruth is produced, perhaps using an early folk story, during the period of "the ethnic purges" under Ezra and Nehemiah in about the fifth century BCE,⁵⁰ contending with forms of post-exilic xenophobia and gynophobia. The book of Ruth, Ellen Davis reflects, represents "a social system that makes legal provision for the dignity and the material needs of its weaker members: widows, strangers, the poor."⁵¹ However, we will argue, this economic inclusion of the vulnerable is always within invited space.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 105.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 106.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 107.

⁴⁸ Examples include André LaCocque, *Ruth: A Continental Commentary* (trans. K.C. Hanson; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 2; Peter H.W. Lau, *Identity and Ethics in the Book of Ruth: A Social Identity Approach* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010), 189; Jeremy Schipper, *Ruth: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 22.

⁴⁹ See, for example, Kristin Moen Saxegaard, *Character Complexity in the Book of Ruth* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 35–40.

⁵⁰ LaCocque, *Ruth*, 2.

⁵¹ Ellen F. Davis, *Who Are You, My Daughter? Reading Ruth through Image and Text* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), xiv–xv.

Canonical and socio-historical concerns intersect in a commentary such as that of André LaCocque in which he consistently interprets the book of Ruth in relation to its Hebrew Bible intertexts. He states, for example that, "From beginning to end, this delicious story is based on an interpretation of the Torah in unexpected circumstances" with important details of the book "explained by earlier biblical texts underlying them."⁵² This intertextual reading is attentive to both the economic and sexual dimensions of the narrative and so offers significant resources for how socio-historical canonical space configures the intersection of economics and sexuality.

Our third interrogation of space is more extensive, though preliminary. We have chosen to foreground the narrative contestation of space because narrative offers common ground for the community-based work we envisage in the fourth and final section of the article. The textual entry point in community-based work must be as egalitarian as possible. Narrative lends itself to this kind of egalitarian access. However, in the third section of the article, we will use both socio-historical and narrative resources to probe the intersection of economics and sexuality in the book of Ruth.

Here, we focus on the spatial dimensions of narrative setting. The Ruth novella is driven by dialogue, shaping both our understanding of character and plot.⁵³ However, setting is a crucial component of the narrative world. We follow here the kind of literary-narrative analysis advocated by Dennis Olson⁵⁴ but emphasise narrative setting. What follows is preliminary, sketching the heuristic potential of our threefold understanding of developmental social space and taking up the kind of analysis of social space envisaged within biblical studies by Patrick Schreiner.⁵⁵ The book of Ruth therefore lends itself to this kind of developmental perspective, given its interest in matters of the survival of the marginalised.

1 Moab (1:1–18)

In our identification of narrative setting as space, we begin with Moab (1:1–18). Moab is invited space for the Ephrathite migrant family (1:1–3). Initially, the migrant family remains within the safe space of their own patriarchal family unit. However, the death of Elimelech, their primary male economic resource (1:3), pushes the family from safe space to brave space, activating invigorated space, though remaining within patriarchal space. The sons marry women from the dominant ethnic group, Orpah and Ruth (1:4). These

⁵² LaCocque, *Ruth*, 1–2.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁵⁴ Dennis T. Olson, "Literary and Rhetorical Criticism," in *Methods for Exodus* (ed. Thomas B. Dozeman; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

⁵⁵ Patrick Schreiner, "Space, Place and Biblical Studies: A Survey of Recent Research in Light of Developing Trends," *CBR* 14/3 (2016).

heterosexual relationships imagine the invigorated space of ethnic social acceptance and economic opportunity.

The death of the two sons, leaving a family of women, shuts down the invigorated space of Moab, prompting Naomi to return to the safe, though invited patriarchal, space of her hometown (1:5–7).

The story is ambiguous about how Orpah and Ruth understand their place and space with Naomi (1:7) but it soon becomes clear that Naomi is unable or unwilling to embrace the brave and invented space of an inter-ethnic family of women (1:8–13). The safe invited space of heterosexual marriage within an ethnic patriarchy is Naomi's only possible understanding of the survival of her daughters-in-law. For herself, Naomi can only imagine a non-sexual future (11–13) and so a future with bleak economic prospects.

Orpah, reluctantly, it would seem, lets go of this possible invented space, returning to the relatively safe contested invited space of ethnic-patriarchy (1:14–15). Ruth, however, persists, activating an imagined invented space by moving from the safe space of Moab to brave space with Naomi, imagining an inter-ethnic and inter-religious marriage-like asexual or homosexual⁵⁶ relationship with Naomi (1:16–17).⁵⁷

2 Bethlehem (1:19–22)

Bethlehem is clearly contested invited space, no longer the safe invigorated heterosexual ethnic patriarchal space Naomi left (1:19). Her reception makes it clear that she (and Ruth) are returning now to invited space among the women of Bethlehem (1:19). Naomi's mental space is foregrounded in this unit of the narrative (1:20–21), indicating how mental space intersects with social space.⁵⁸ Contestations concerning space are both social and psychological. As Naomi and Ruth enter Bethlehem, gendered space, sexual space, economic space and ethnic space interlock.

3 Naomi's Home and the Gleaning Field (2:1–23)

The invented space Ruth may have imagined is constrained by the spatial realities of Bethlehem. Ruth enters invited space, both within Naomi's matriarchal home and Boaz's patriarchal field but invigorates both through her economic agency (2:2). Sexuality seems absent in the matriarchal home but is

⁵⁶ Madipoane (ngwan'a Mphahlele) Masenya, "Rebecca Alpert's Lesbian Reading of the Book of Ruth within the Metsoalle Context of Lesotho," *JGRA* 18/1 (2012); Stephanie Day Powell, *Narrative Desire and the Book of Ruth* (New York: Bloomsburg, 2018).

⁵⁷ For the relationship of this text with Gen 2:24, see Megan Warner, "'Therefore a Man Leaves His Father and His Mother and Clings to His Wife': Marriage and Intermarriage in Gen 2:24," *JBL* 136/2 (2017).

⁵⁸ Schreiner, "Space, Place and Biblical Studies," 349–351.

present in the masculine gaze of Boaz (2:5), in his instructions to Ruth (2:8–9), in the meal (2:14) and in his instructions to his male workers (2:15). Ruth's response to this invited sexual space is cautious, using public transcript performance (2:10, 13–14).

There is a hint perhaps of invented economic space in verse 7, depending on the reading of the text, where Ruth might be understood to have pushed the custom of gleaning to its limits, asking to glean "among the sheaves."⁵⁹ However, this hint of invented space is soon constrained by carefully controlled gendered, ethnic, economic and sexual invited space (2:8–23), with Boaz ensuring that Ruth's economic agency takes place within invited space (2:15–16). Ruth seems to invigorate these invited spaces, at least in part; however, though the initial agency is hers, Boaz and his workers (male and female) provide the spatial shape for her economic participation.

4 Threshing Floor (3:1–18)

The end of the barley and wheat harvests (2:23) signals the return to constrained invited economic space. Naomi takes the economic initiative this time, recognising perhaps the ethnic, gendered and sexual contours of local economics more fully than the foreigner Ruth and asserting perhaps her matriarchal mother-in-law authority over the younger woman (3:1–4).

Naomi attempts to invigorate the invited econo-patriarchal space of the threshing floor (3:1–4). For Ruth, this is invited space; she understands that she must do as she is instructed by Naomi, including allowing Boaz to control this invited space (3:5). That Naomi's matriarchal home is invited space is now clear. Ruth is no longer a marriage partner (to either Chilion or Naomi); she is now a foreign female sex-worker entering male controlled sexual and economic invited space. The economic-sexual interactions and transactions between Ruth and Boaz are circumscribed almost entirely by gendered invited space.

Ruth does as she is instructed by Naomi, remaining within Naomi's invited space (3:7, 9), which now overlaps with Boaz's invited space (3:7–9). Naomi cedes control to masculine sexual and economic space (4). Ruth moves within contested space.

Boaz's sexual response is unclear, including possible heterosexual sexual intercourse in a drunken stupor during the night (3:7–8) or heterosexual abstinence (3:8). To these, LaCocque suggests the possibility of sexual impotence⁶⁰ and Brett Krutzsch the possibility of homosexual anxiety.⁶¹

⁵⁹ LaCocque, *Ruth*, 66.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 94–95. See also Charles Halton, "An Indecent Proposal: The Theological Core of the Book of Ruth," *SJOT* 26/1 (2012).

⁶¹ Brett Krutzsch, "Un-straightening Boaz in Ruth Scholarship," *BI* 23/4–5 (2015):

Boaz disrupts safe patriarchal space, shifting to brave space, to some extent by inviting Ruth to understand and perhaps participate in the constrained dimensions of his patriarchal cultural and economic invited space (3:12–13).

This literary unit ends (3:15–18) with an economic transaction. The immediate economic need to survive the period after the harvests are met within invited economic and sexual (see especially 3:15) space.

5 Town Gate (4:1–13)

The town gate is male invited space, which Boaz attempts to invigorate for his own econo-patriarchal economic purposes. We hesitate to use the concept of space contestation here and in 3:12–13 above because it is not at all clear that Boaz is anything other than a dominant economic elite male. We reserve the contestation of space for understanding the agency and actions of the marginalised. However, there are hints, in the fact that Boaz seems to be unmarried (2:1 and 4:6, 9–10), that he perhaps has only a minimal relationship with Ruth (3:13) and that the child is considered to be Naomi's not his (4:14–17a), of a possible queer identity here.⁶² Therefore, Boaz might be considered as a representative of a marginal sexual community, contesting for invigorated economic space within hetero-patriarchy. Within this reading of narrative hints, 4:13 might be considered the performance of a heterosexual public transcript.

6 The Women (4:14–17a)

There is a shift in narrative setting here, for the town gate has no space for women. The place is unspecified, perhaps Naomi's home, but this is clearly the social space of women. The appropriation by the women of Bethlehem of the child and their discourse among each other constitute a narrative social space and indicate the partially invigorated space among women within the invited space of patriarchy. It is partial because Ruth has no direct presence. The women address, in direct speech, not Ruth but Naomi. She is only present partially in the invited ethnic space of these local women. When they do refer to her, indirectly, she is compared to ethnic males (4:15). Ruth's imagined invented space has disappeared entirely. All that remains is contested invited space.

7 Genealogy (4:17b–22)

The patriarchal genealogy, a form of narrative space going beyond the confines of the story and clearly invoking canonical associations,⁶³ is probably a later interpolation.⁶⁴ It demonstrates an explicit form of redactional co-optation of

548–549.

⁶² Krutzsch, "Un-straightening Boaz,"

⁶³ LaCocque, *Ruth*, 147.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 9–12, 147–148.

the book of Ruth, attempting to incorporate its invigorated and invented spatial moments into circumscribed invited male, monarchical, economic space.

This section of our article is suggestive rather than comprehensive, demonstrating the potential our developmental conceptual tools have to offer other ways of interpreting this biblical book focusing on the contestation of social space. In the third section of the article, we identify three particular spatial episodes in the book of Ruth within which to intersect economics and sexuality in more detail.

D INTERSECTING ECONOMICS AND SEXUALITY WITHIN RUTH'S CONTESTED SPACE

With its barley harvests and its rural setting, the novella of Ruth has been described as among the best and most charming stories in the Hebrew Bible / Old Testament.⁶⁵ The narrative, also, we will argue, provides scholars and ordinary biblical interpreters with opportunities to argue for the presence of intersections between economics and sexuality in the Bible. These intersections are presented as contested spaces, including invited space, invigorated space and invented space. Within the limits of this article, we now focus on three contested spaces where economics and sexuality are intersected: in Moab, when Ruth and Naomi are preparing to go to Judah, in Bethlehem, at the threshing-floor and in the town gate. In returning to each of these spaces, we intersect our interpretive methods, utilising socio-historical (including canonical) and literary-narrative analysis.

1 On the Way to Judah (Ruth 1:6–18)

When Naomi hears the rumour of bread now available in Bethlehem, she chooses to return (Ruth 1:6). Male agency begins the Ruth narrative (1:1) but the initiative now shifts to the agency of a woman. However, Naomi's agency is constrained within the invited space of ancient patriarchy.

Before departure, she insistently instructs (1:8–13) Ruth and Orpah to find an invited resting place / space in the home of another husband (1:9). Naomi's initial desire is that Orpah and Ruth each return to "her mother's house" (1:8). This is surprising, for, as LaCocque summarises, "in the ancient Near East, a woman was under male guardianship her entire life – whether her father, brothers, or husband."⁶⁶ Naomi imagines here, perhaps, the momentary safe invigorated space within patriarchal invited space of a mother's kindness (רַחֲמֵי) (1:8). However, as her very next sentence demonstrates, Naomi cannot imagine this as more than an interim invigorated space, for a woman's destined

⁶⁵ Katherine E. Southwood, "Will Naomi's Nation Be Ruth's Nation? Ethnic Translation as a Metaphor for Ruth's Assimilation within Judah," *Humanities* 3/(2014): 102.

⁶⁶ LaCocque, *Ruth*, 44.

space is the invited space "each in the house of her husband" (1:9). Ultimately, the two daughters-in-law should give their bodies to men in order to secure their economic stability. Moab, their safe ethnic space, offers these young women an economic and/ as sexual invited space, controlled by dominant heterosexual economic structures.

When Orpah and Ruth initially confirm their intention to remain with her, Naomi can only use language not found elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible: "Would you refrain from marrying', or 'abstain from being with a man'; literally 'to be an 'ăgûnâ', a woman abandoned by her husband, but not divorced."⁶⁷ It is unimaginable space.

All family members in the Ancient Near East were subordinate to the paterfamilias, to whom belonged the decision-making authority in all matters.⁶⁸ Law was situated within a strict patrilineal principle of inheritance that prevented the transfer of land via the daughter to the clan of her husband.⁶⁹ In sum, women "solely benefited from the ownership and use of productive land through their relationship with a male figure."⁷⁰

As this episode indicates, female bodies were forced by the dominant heteronormative economic structure to transact their bodies for economic survival and not necessarily because they were sexually attracted to men. Naomi's instruction shows that economics and sexuality are interlocked in the book of Ruth. Female bodies inhabited an invited economic and / as sexual space. Women who did not conform to this heteronormative economic structure, like Ruth, entered brave space, a space of "radical insecurity,"⁷¹ a socially invented space (1:16–17).

2 On the Threshing Floor (Ruth 3:1–18)

With the threshing-floor episode, the reader once again encounters the agency of Naomi. Naomi's depression, induced it would seem by the absence of male provision (1:12–13), has lifted sufficiently for her to take economic initiative. Her plan is overtly sexual.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 49.

⁶⁸ Fritz Volkmar, *The Emergence of Israel in the Twelfth and Eleventh Centuries BCE* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 107.

⁶⁹ Ilona N. Rashkow, "'How Much Is She Worth?' A Comparison of Six Ancient Near East Laws Relating to Bride-Price, Dowry, Inheritance, and Divorce," *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 50/3 (2022): 151.

⁷⁰ Ndikhokhele N.V. Mtshiselwa, "Reading Ruth 4 and Leviticus 25: 8–55 in the Light of the Landless and Poor Women in South Africa: A Conversation with Fernando F. Segovia and Ernesto 'Che' Guevara," *HTS: Theological Studies* 72/1 (2016): 2.

⁷¹ LaCocque, *Ruth*, 35.

Naomi takes up the role of Ruth's Moabite mother, seeking security for her in a potential husband's house (3:1). Ruth's earlier refusal to take up this option is ignored. Ruth's imagined invented space in the household of Naomi turns out to be invited space. Naomi assumes that Ruth should transact sexually with her body to secure their economic stability. "The parallel," as LaCoque points out, "with the story of Tamar in Genesis 38 is obvious."⁷²

In biblical law, family issues were considered under the category of property, including viewing women's sexuality as the property of their fathers or husbands, to ensure protection of both family line and property.⁷³ Therefore, Naomi persuades Ruth to use what Naomi imagines are Ruth's remaining assets, her sexuality. She instructs 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 (3:3). This is an instruction to "go and seduce" Boaz.⁷⁴ Naomi instructs Ruth to enter invited space, male space, moving from the safe space of Naomi's invited home space to the brave (from Naomi's perspective) invited space of the threshing floor.

In fact, on the face of it, it seems that Naomi is sending Ruth off to sleep with Boaz as any foreign widow with no family might do to earn some extra cash.⁷⁵ It is not clear what happens at the threshing-floor but some form of sexual activity is suggested (3:7).⁷⁶ Though Ruth and Boaz may have not had penetrative sex, their sharing of private space, sleeping together, sharing the same garments and touching each other may suggest other types of sexual activity.

The threshing-floor episode clearly attests to the systemic interlocking of economics and sexuality in the narrative. This episode functions as a type of informal economic transaction, offering immediate economic benefits: food (3:15). The transaction also offers potential for marriage, land and progeny (3:1, 9, 12–13). As Krutzsch argues, "the night on the threshing floor functions 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."⁷⁷

The threshing-floor is not a safe space for females (3:3b, 14) but Ruth uses her body, as instructed, to enter brave invited space. As a result of the risk Naomi takes with Ruth's economic, gendered and ethnic vulnerability, Ruth

⁷² Ibid., 88.

⁷³ Diane Jacobson, "Redefining Family in the Book of Ruth," *WW* 33/1 (2013): 6.

⁷⁴ Gerda De Villiers, "Ecodomy: Taking Risks and Overstepping Boundaries in the Book of Ruth," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 38/3 (2017): 47.

⁷⁵ Jacobson, "Redefining Family in the Book of Ruth," 9; see also West and Haddad, "Boaz as 'Sugar Daddy'."

⁷⁶ De Villiers, "Ecodomy," 47.

⁷⁷ Krutzsch, "Un-straightening Boaz," 549.

returned home not only with food but also with a promise of a more sustained male-female economic relationship (3:10–15). Ruth emerges “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.”⁷⁸ Ruth remains within Naomi’s invited space; her agency is constrained. Her imagined invented space has proved an illusion. There is only invited space.

3 At the Town Gate (Ruth 4:1–12)

The town gate is an invited space controlled by male characters. It is thoroughly patriarchal space, where women are objects within a carefully circumscribed space within which women do not even have invited space.⁷⁹ Within this patriarchal systemic space, Boaz takes the initiative, inviting other elite economic males (4:1–4).

Boaz constructs this space within an unusual configuration of cultural law, for a ‘redeemer’ “does not have the duty to marry a widow without child, which duty belongs to another jurisdiction: the levirate.”⁸⁰ Within patriarchal constrained space, Boaz constructs juridical brave space (4:5). Ruth, however, remains an object, property to be disbursed.

In this transaction, we find an unusual coalition between two different Israelite laws: redemption of the land and levirate marriage. On the one hand, the law of redemption has an economic dimension because it calls for the nearest relative to redeem the land if someone in the family becomes poor and sells some of his property (Lev 25:25). On the other hand, the levirate law has a sexual dimension because if a man dies without a son, his brother must marry his wife to produce an offspring for his late brother (Deut 25:5–10). This unusual coalition suggests an interlocking of economic and sexuality systems. However, the town gate remains an invited space for female bodies like Ruth who are silenced and have no possibility of participating within and potentially transforming this space. In this sense, the town gate is not even invited space for Ruth; she has no invitation into this space. The story has many examples of Ruth being invited into econo-patriarchal space. The town gate is not invited space for women. They have no seat in the decision-making.

As we have indicated, we are reluctant to use our conceptualisation of contested space to engage this town gate episode, excluding as it does the poor and marginalised. However, prompted by the work of scholars like Krutzsch,

⁷⁸ Danna Nolan Fewell, “Space for Moral Agency in the Book of Ruth,” *JSOT* 40/1 (2015): 92.

⁷⁹ Aida Alvinus, Edward Deverell, and Susanne Hede, “Militarisation, Masculinisation and Organisational Exclusion in the Crisis Preparedness Sector,” *JRR* 24/12 (2021): 1551.

⁸⁰ LaCocque, *Ruth*, 109.

we want to interrogate the "invisibilized hetero-presumptive framework [which] shapes most scholarly interpretations of Boaz in the book of Ruth."⁸¹ Boaz, Krutzsch argues, "complicates the idea that all men are naturally or exclusively sexually attracted to women," discerning "that Boaz's sexuality, based on what is provided in the text, is not self-evident."⁸² Krutzsch then goes on to offer a persuasive account of "the ambiguities of Boaz's sexuality that are present in the text."⁸³ We find here narrative space that should be probed more carefully. Does this significant male-centred episode portray Boaz as a "queer figure"⁸⁴ contending within male invited space for forms of invigorated male economic and sexual space?

Each of these three episodes takes us more deeply into the usefulness of our development spatial concepts. More work remains to be done but we have demonstrated the potential of these spatial concepts for biblical interpretation using a variety of methodological resources. In the final section, we will briefly reflect on how we might use these resources to work within our local Southern African contexts.

E USING CONCEPTS OF CONTESTED SPACE IN CBS WORK

In this final section, we reflect on how we might use the above work to construct potential CBS on Ruth, utilising our concept of contested space within which economics and sexuality are overtly intersected. As indicated, we have used the book of Ruth before in CBS work. The narrative lends itself to African contexts, invoking the lived survival realities of many Africans.

The Ujamaa Centre's praxis is shaped by the See-Judge-Act process.⁸⁵ We begin with lived reality as experienced by marginalised sectors (See). In this case, we would partner with community-based groups in which women, migrants, LGBTIQ+ and unemployed youth have organised themselves, foregrounding realities in which economic and sexuality systems interlock.

Working with such organised formations, we would then discern (Judge) how we might construct a series of two to three CBS on Ruth, focusing on textual units in which we might construct a coherent series of CBS, following the narrative's storyline but identifying episodes in which economics and sexuality have an evident presence in the text. The three episodes we have used in the third section of this article would be potential episodes, engaging as they do with different yet related aspects of the intersection between economics and sexuality.

⁸¹ Krutzsch, "Un-straightening Boaz," 541.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 542.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 545.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 542.

⁸⁵ Gerald O. West, "Reading the Bible with the Marginalised: The Value/s of Contextual Bible Reading," *STJ* 1/2 (2015).

In previous CBS, we have foregrounded narrative setting, inviting participants to recognise literary setting as constitutive of narrative meaning. In a recent CBS, for example, in a collection workshopped by the Anglican Alliance and the Ujamaa Centre, we invited participants to a re-reading of Mark 6:30–34, focusing specifically on narrative setting as social space. Question 4 of the CBS is as follows:

Re-read verses 33–37 and the [socio-historical background] text in the box about the importance of place. Why do you think Jesus chose a place between the city and the villages to feed the crowd? Why do you think Jesus rejected the disciples’ suggestion that the crowd go into the villages to find food? Why do you think Jesus insisted that the disciples give the crowd something to eat?⁸⁶

In an actual virtual workshop using this CBS with participants from around the world on 8 July 2023, we noted that this question was enhanced when we invited participants to draw a picture of this space. This CBS also offered the opportunity for socio-historical resources, offered in a box within the CBS, distinguishing clearly, as the text does, between the ‘city’ (πόλις) (v. 33) and ‘village’ (κώμας) (v. 36), as sites of economic contestation within the ancient “sacred economy.”⁸⁷ In ancient economies, cities established extractive economic relationships with the villages around them. This narrative suggests that Jesus constructs an invented economic space between city and village where communitarian economic practices are established.

Contextual Bible Study is a participatory process and our experience has shown how drawing and drama offer forms of engagement as participants respond to and report on their small-group work. We envisage using both drawing and drama in our Ruth CBS. We have used drawings as a way into the narrative in a series of CBS on Ruth⁸⁸ but in this envisaged CBS series, we would use them to interrogate social space which intersects economics and sexuality within particular textual units of the book of Ruth.

The Ujamaa Centre constructs, through its CBS processes, invigorated forms of social space around a re-reading of the Bible as a potential resource

⁸⁶ “Re-Imagining Our World Together: Contextual Bible Studies on the Anglican Marks of Mission and the Sustainable Development Goals,” *Anglican Alliance*, 2023, <https://files.anglicanalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/05100502/Re-imagining-our-World-Together-Contextual-Bible-Studies.pdf>.

⁸⁷ Roland Boer, “The Sacred Economy of Ancient ‘Israel,’” *SJOT: An International Journal of Nordic Theology* 21/1 (2007).

⁸⁸ Communion, “Study Guide: Ruth”; Nathan Esala, “I Will Gather among the Sheaves! Facilitating Embodied and Emancipatory Translation of the Book of Ruth for Translational Dialogue,” *JTSA* 160 (2018); Nathan A. Esala, “Translation as Invasion in Post-Colonial Northern Ghana,” (PhD thesis, University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2021), 345–346.

for social transformation, "giving people who are so often ignored a chance to have their say."⁸⁹ By intersecting economics and sexuality in a series of CBS using the book of Ruth, we envisage significant community-based engagement.

F CONCLUSION

The distinctive dimension of this article is the use of spatial concepts from participatory development scholarship. We have added to the conceptual continuum of 'invited space' and 'invented space' the concept of social space as 'invigorated space,' as this appropriately describes how we and the communities we work with understand our CBS processes. Contextual Bible Study processes invigorate the invited space of both the Bible and development initiatives, enabling organised poor and marginalised sectors to take control of their own transformation of social space.

Appropriating these spatial concepts by understanding how they are an integral component of our CBS praxis is a significant emerging conceptualisation for us. In this article, we have demonstrated the substantive value of such conceptualisation for our work within biblical hermeneutics. We use the book of Ruth as our biblical resource, recognising both its usefulness to date within African biblical hermeneutics and its apparent capacity to intersect economics and sexuality. The interlocking of economic systems and sexuality systems is apparent in each episode of the narrative.

The Ujamaa Centre is founded on the centrality of economic analysis to African social transformation and has been summoned more recently by local community-based sectors to engage with how the realities of economic systems are interlocked with the systems of hetero-patriarchal sexuality, constructing an interlocking system of oppression. In this article, we have not only demonstrated the resources that the book of Ruth has to intersect economics and sexuality within various literary-narrative and socio-historical social spaces, but begun also an analysis of the book of Ruth which will be taken up in our CBS work.

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⁸⁹ Cornwall, "Spaces for Transformation?" 86.

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