READING RUTH ALONGSIDE INDIGENOUS HISTORIES IN THE UNITED STATES

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ABSTRACT

READING RUTH AS AN INDIGENOUS AMERICAN

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This thesis is an analysis of the Book of Ruth in conversation with the history of indigenous citizens of the United States as a comparison between the Book of Ruth the struggle of the indigenous tribes with the United States helps develop a critique of assimilation and provides a deeper understanding of the identity and culture politics at play within each story. The majority of each chapter is an analysis and a re-reading of Ruth's story so as to re-negotiate how the story functions. I read Ruth as a story about a woman that is caught in the patterns of assimilation and finds herself giving up her independence and her old culture so that she might survive in a town which is hostile to her foreign-ness. After analyzing the chapter, I then describe an aspect of how Indian communities either read the text or *could* read to the text in light of various historical events. Each chapter contains a focus on a different aspect of that conversation, though the connections exist throughout the whole book of Ruth. This is used to criticize notions of assimilation, analyzing how assimilation damages both communities and individuals. These include the usurpation of power, removal of children from their families, forcing people to move from their ancestral lands, and many other issues that arise. However, despite the ways that assimilation covers over difference, both Ruth and the tribes find identity in story. Ruth continues to be a powerful figure, and tribes continue to fight for their sovereignty.

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INTRODUCTION

This paper is written in light of the historic and ongoing history between of indigenous people and the United States Government. If I am to be fully honest here, it is instead through the lens of a boy who grew up knowing that he lived on stolen land. I grew up in the Ozark mountains in the far eastern side of Oklahoma. I was a short 30-minute drive away from Tahlequah, capital of the Cherokee nation (we rarely visited, though I went thrice during college). The road there was carved into the side of a mountain. When I looked out my back door, I saw nothing but a massive wall of dirt and trees. The mountain itself had an incline well over 45 degrees, and we took to climbing up by using the trees as anchors, then sliding down by throwing ourselves from tree to tree to keep us from moving too quickly. We played cowboys and Indians, as many children do, but we had the luck of moving through an actual forest. My father told us that we were part Indian, as many throughout Oklahoma claim (I do not claim so because I have not checked my genetic history and such claims are often myths in Oklahoma). Everyone wanted to be the Indian, nobody wanted to be the cowboy. We would collect cheap bows and arrows, or just pretend with sticks. In class, we learned to call them Native Americans (I have since learned that different individuals prefer different names) and we learned how the United States pushed the native peoples into smaller and smaller parcels of land. We learned about the Trail of Tears and how many died along the way, about the division of tribes during the Civil War, and how many hoped for a reconciliation after the war so they could receive a fair deal. The tribes attempted to split Oklahoma in half whenever it became a state, but there was no deal.[1] In short, I grew up

[1] Crooked Media, *This Land*, Episode 4: "The Treaty," June 24, 2019, hosted by Rebecca Nagle, podcast, https://crooked.com/podcast/this-land-episode-4-the-treaty/.

knowing that I lived on stolen land. My whole class of five or six students would rant about it and found it unfair, but the deed was done. So now, I sit here at my computer, more than ten years later, attempting to understand how and why people would just take this land and push another group into smaller and smaller spaces. The NoDAPl (Dakota Access Pipeline) movement made ground under President Obama, but it fell apart as soon as a man praised for his business acumen took command. A federal judge ruled that the permits violated the National Environmental Policy Act, so the process continues.[2] It is better for business to blast through sacred land rather than care for the water supply and the people who hold that land sacred. Oklahoma and the Cherokee nation are going toe-to-toe in the Supreme Court, with the tribe claiming that they still hold a significant portion of Oklahoma under their jurisdiction, and Oklahoma claiming that no reservations exist any longer.[3] The level of disinformation that has gone into the case is bewildering, particularly regarding how tribal governments work.[4] I had a better understanding of Native American sovereignty and government at the age of twelve than most adults do now, and in Oklahoma, that must be deliberate. The information is there for all to see, it was in my childhood textbooks and we learned about it in the required Oklahoma history course in high school.

The Bible also presents several stories of shattered culture, lost land, and cultural struggles between two groups of people, forming a helpful confluence of the stories. The Tanakh in particular presents a people that struggle with their identity as one kingdom or

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[2] "Standing Rock Sioux Tribe Prevails as Federal Judge Strikes Down DAPL Permits," Earthjustice, March 25, 2020, https://earthjustice.org/news/press/2020/standing-rock-sioux-tribe-prevails-as-federal-judge-strikes-down-dapl-permits.

[3] Crooked Media, *This Land*, Episode 3: "The Opposition," June 17, 2019, hosted by Rebecca Nagle, podcast, https://crooked.com/podcast/this-land-episode-3-the-opposition/.

[4] Crooked Media, *This Land*, Episode 6: "The Postponement," July 8, 2019, hosted by Rebecca Nagle, podcast, https://crooked.com/podcast/this-land-episode-6-the-postponement/.

empire after another takes control and enforces their own laws, culture, gods, etc. The tribute system, whether from the Hebrew people upon surrounding nations or other nations upon the Hebrew people, resonates with the story of indigenous people and how the United States forced its will over and upon them to spread its power and people throughout North America. The people in the Levant lived in individual villages in a subsistence-survival[5] world. They took what they needed and tried to survive while also taking care of the surrounding land and animals. Their survival depended upon the surrounding ecology, so they did their best to maintain everything, much like indigenous tribes.[6] The people of the Levant lived in harmony with the land and animals, becoming nomadic or sedentary as was necessary for their own survival.[7] The kinship-household[8] power structure provided a sense of safety for the villages, but also created other problems in terms of acceptance. People who journeyed from village to village had to play with their genealogies to prove their "family history."[9] In this way, they gained acceptance in a new land and the genealogical history changed. These refugees, nomads, thugs, and other people without a specific land, often had to assimilate into new communities if they wanted to survive in those communities. The connections that I draw here between indigenous people and the Levant are meant to illustrate that the two systems are similar enough that connecting the two is a useful tool for examining and

[5] Roland Boer, *The Sacred Economy of Ancient Israel* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2015), 56.

[6] Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Milkweed Editions, 2015), 4.

[7] Boer, *Sacred Economy*, 59.

[8] This is the term Roland Boer (*Sacred Economy*, 85) uses to describe the dynamic structure that connects the people and the land upon which they live.

[9] Boer, *Sacred Economy*, 89.

understanding both groups. The similarities also allow for the history of indigenous tribes and the book of Ruth to reframe each other.

The story of Ruth, the Moabite woman, and her transfer of identity from Moabite to Israelite, presents a story of a refugee that had to give up her clan, tribal, and national identity to survive in Bethlehem, but never truly gained full acceptance. Her story resonates with the encroachment of the United States upon native tribes. Ruth promised to give up her gods, her language, and everything else that tied her to Moab, before Naomi ceased urging her to go home. In the same way, native peoples were required to learn and speak English instead of their tribal language, cease their spiritual practices (and, in many cases, become Christian), and give up their communities, if they wanted to become a full part of the United States community.[10] By the end of the Book of Ruth, she gives away her land and the women of the town take her son away and give him to Naomi, cutting her off from her descendants as well as her son away from his ancestors. This also happened to indigenous people, their land taken away by broken treaties, their children taken away to boarding schools for assimilation, and marriages given and taken just to survive. Laura Donaldson, a scholar that uses her indigenous heritage to sculpt her reading of the text, analyzes Orpah, Ruth's sister-in-law, and her decision to return home and retain her heritage.[11] Donaldson also struggles with the nature of choice, and analyzes how the US government removed that choice for her ancestors. She reads Orpah as a person that had the choice that they did not. It is important to note that the author of Ruth presents her as making a choice to give up her people and heritage,

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[10] Roger L. Nichols, *Indians in the United States and Canada* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2018), 203.

[11] Laura E. Donaldson, "The Sign of Orpah: Reading Ruth Through Native Eyes," in *Ruth*, ed. Athalya Brenner, A Feminist Companion to the Bible (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001).

whereas indigenous tribes had many decisions thrust upon them. This disparity limits the ability to use the Book of Ruth in relation to Native American struggles, but does allow for some useful space.

The purpose of this paper is, first and primarily, to analyze the story of Ruth the Moabite woman through a new light. Rather than the wonderful, loving woman that many scholars have presented, I will read Ruth as a woman trying to survive in a world that did not have the same safeties and amenities that many people, especially white men in technologically advanced countries, have in the modern era.[12] The text never reveals what her life was like before or after she met Mahlon and Chilion, only what she did after they died. Many wedding vows contain Ruth's speech to Naomi,[13][14] reading them as loving and demonstrating the hesed for which many praise Ruth within the text. Jewish scholars and Rabbis have often read her speech as a story about becoming a Jew, an ideal convert.[15] I would like to read Ruth as somebody who has no other choice but to give up her old life and start anew. Rather than a woman who remains loyal to Naomi or the Hebrew people, I would like to present a woman that is forced to live out a new identity to find security. The author of the text reads this desire as hesed, loyalty, in much the

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[12] I would like to note that there are many millions of people throughout the world, in every country, that do not have the same safeties and amenities that myself and my readers do. These people struggle with food insecurity, wars, corruption, bandits, and so forth. An assumed aspect of my argument is that I and most who read this do not and cannot fully understand Ruth because we do not live in fear of drought, bands of raiders, or other such perils that the characters and author did. The relationship between indigenous people and the text is meant to bring out some assumptions that I and others maintain to reveal a more faithful (if I may be so bold) reading of the text and indigenous history.

[13] Jennifer L. Koosed, *Gleaning Ruth: A Biblical Heroine and Her Afterlives* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2011), 50.

[14] Some scholars have also read this speech as a demonstration of Ruth's love for Naomi, demonstrating a mother-daughter level of care for each other. Others read their relationship as something more akin to a potentially sexual and erotic relationship. I do not deny the power or veracity of these readings, but instead wish to bring out the nuances that the text provides for cultures within cultures.

[15] Kristin Moen Saxegaard, *Character Complexity in the Book of Ruth*, Forschungen Zum Alten Testament (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 133.

same way that the United States created assimilation programs to develop and maintain loyalty among indigenous groups and refugees, making them easier to control.[16] A comparison between the Book of Ruth and the struggle of the United States against indigenous tribes helps develop a critique of assimilation and provides a deeper understanding of the identity and culture politics at play within each story.

RUTH[17]

Author and Date of Ruth

The date in which the story of Ruth takes place is stated within the text, "In the days when the judges judged."[18] Thus, it takes place sometime during the events described in the book of Judges (or, at least, is intentionally linked to that time). This is because David, Israel's second king, is the titular character's great-grandson and the surprise star appearance at the end of the book. The text is therefore implicitly tied to the shifting power structures that created the kingship itself and relays some information, whether positive or negative, about David heritage.[19] However, the positive or negative reading of David's heritage relies upon the author's intent and the message relies upon the time when the author wrote their story. There is no consensus as to when the book

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[16] While I will work thoroughly to refrain from essentializing the struggles of indigenous people, I am untrained in the history of every tribe. There are a great preponderance of tribes with different stories of marginalization and with different histories that guided their interactions with other groups, especially the United States government. I will only use connections where I can name specific tribes, attempting to maintain their distinct identities. I will mainly focus on tribes with which I am previously familiar. These include the Cherokee Nation, the Osage Nation (both whom have significant property and reservations in Oklahoma), and the tribes mentioned by Robin Wall Kimmerer in *Braiding Sweetgrass*, following her lead in how I discuss them.

[17] The Book of Ruth is a part of the Megilloth, the five texts read during Jewish holy days. Ruth's holiday is that of Shavuot. As somebody who is not a part of the Jewish community and knows little about their traditions, I will refrain from commenting about how that celebration does or does not affect my reading of the text.

[18] Ruth 1:1 (NRSV).

[19] Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *Ruth*, Interpretation (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1999), 1.

was written, and the estimates range over a period of several hundred years. This messiness allows for a reader to use multiple historical periods to shine light on how the text operates in each period, allowing for different connections that all work simultaneously.

The date and geographical region where the author wrote Ruth is in debate. The author mentions David, which places the earliest date about three thousand years ago, in 1,000 B.C.E.[20] That is the estimated date of David's reign. Several Rabbinic sources maintain that earliest date, reading the story as an apologetic for David's ascension as told by Samuel.[21] If David had Moabite ancestry, his anointing and later coronation would be challenged because he had foreign blood.[22] In this telling, Samuel shows that David's lineage is perfectly fine because Ruth was such an upstanding member of society and gave up her old people for the Israelites. Whether or not Samuel wrote the book, the author was clearly highly literate.[23] Robert Hubbard believes that the book was written during the reign of Solomon by somebody with access to the royal archives,[24] possibly also as an apologetic attempt to maintain the family claim on the kingship after Saul.[25] Some other scholars believe that a woman may have written the book. It is, after all, one of the few books in the Tanakh written about a female member of society and from a feminine perspective. [26] If one uses the early date, then the text becomes a story about David, particularly one along the lines of the Rabbinic tradition: proof that David's

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[20] Tamara Cohn Eskenazi and Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *Ruth,* The JPS Bible Commentary (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2011), xvi.

[21] Eskenazi and Frymer-Kensky, *Ruth,* xvi.

[22] Nielsen, *Ruth*, 28.

[23] Eskenazi and Frymer-Kensky, *Ruth,* xvi.

[24] Nielsen, *Ruth*, 29.

[25] Koosed, *Gleaning Ruth*, 12.

[26] Edward Campbell, Robert Hubbard, Adrien J. Bledstein, and Fokkelien van Dijk-Hemmes. Eskenazi and Frymer-Kensky, *Ruth,* xvii.

lineage is acceptable. An early date to these texts would allow one to read the book as a gathering together of kingdom-focused identity, the Israelite identity, over a tribal identity. This reading would turn the story of Ruth, a Moabite, into a story about how to give up an old identity and work under a Davidic identity. This story could also function as a story about joining under one god.

Despite Rabbinic claims of early authorship, the textual evidence points to a much later date, one in the Persian or post-exilic period (around 700-600 BCE).[27] The specific textual evidence which arises from the text is that of its Aramaisms and Persian loan words.[28] Aramaic exists mainly in books which are specifically dated during or after the exilic period (the books of Esther, Daniel, Ezra, and Nehemiah).[29] The text also contains several archaic forms more reminiscent of standard biblical Hebrew.[30] The author mentions stories in Genesis and laws which are also mentioned in Leviticus and Deuteronomy, which points to a date where the author could retrieve copies of those scrolls.[31] However, the text may have also been written in answer to Ezra and Nehemiah's polemic against marrying Moabite women.[32] If so, then the appearance of David at the end ties Moabite women into the history of the kingdoms and the monarchy. Even if the text was not written to critique a polemic, it could also function as a persuasion peace that the newly returned exiles should work with their neighbors.[33] I

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[27] Sakenfeld, *Ruth,* 3.

[28] Eskenazi and Frymer-Kensky, *Ruth,* xvii.

[29] Ibid.

[30] The archaisms are used exclusively by Naomi and Boaz, possibly pointing to their older age. Tod Linafelt, *Berit Olam: Studies in Hebrew Narrative & Poetry: Ruth and Esther* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1999), 9.

[31] Though I use this, I am also aware that the origin story of Israel might have been common, particularly the stories about Judah and Tamar or Jacob, Leah, Rachel, Bilhah, and Zilpah. Eskenazi and Frymer-Kensky, *Ruth*, xviii.

[32] Sakenfeld, *Ruth*, 2.

[33] Eskenazi and Frymer-Kensky, *Ruth,* xix.

prefer the later date and will build my analysis using a post-exilic frame. This is because the later date allows for different struggles to arise. The later date would function around the time that the Hebrew people were returning to their ancestral homeland. Only the most powerful were taken into exile. They had just lived for several decades, a generation or two at least, in a world operated and controlled by another, more powerful group. They are struggling to understand how they can survive when some foreign ruler is in command. This relates greatly to the lack of choice and lack of control that indigenous groups experienced. The story of Ruth that I am telling is one where the author is struggling with how one should relate to others outside of one's society.

The Levant

The story of Ruth takes place before the people formed a kingdom, specifically in the time of the Judges (before 1,000 BCE). At that time, the people of the Levant lived together in kinship-household communities. Each community named itself based on a mythical, real or not, ancestor that gave a feeling of connectedness,[34] encompassing a close-knit community of around 75-150 people.[35] These communities existed in several different forms: agricultural, nomadic, and anywhere in between. Most communities would change their lifestyle to accommodate the needs of the community and the needs of the land.[36] Whenever a drought, band of raiders, or any number of other factors, made agriculture inhospitable, the community would leave their houses and become nomads for a time, however long they needed.[37] Some communities would sow their fields then leave

[34] Ibid., xxvii.
[35] Boer, *Sacred Economy*, 87.
[36] Ibid., 76.
[37] Ibid.

to escape taxation or bands of raiders.[38] Nomads would change their lifestyle as well, depending on their need for sustained, consistent produce and the needs of the community.[39] This ever-changing, close-kinship model created a need for the communities to protect themselves. Refugees or outcasts from other villages would appear and request help, but the community could only sustain a small community and trust among communities was rarely high.[40] Sedentary communities used the land about one kilometer out from their village as farmland, and villages were often two or more kilometers apart.[41] There was little trade between communities, each being able to subsist on their own, so communities more than a few kilometers away from each other had little interaction.[42] Therefore, wanderers had to "prove" that they were related before they could find acceptance within the community, often by recreating their genealogy to connect with the clan, tribe, or national patriarchs that gave communities identity.[43][44] These genealogical stories also revealed what one nation thought of another. For example (and pertaining to the story or Ruth), Abraham, the patriarchal father of Israel, had a nephew named Lot. Lot's daughters got him drunk and had sex with him to bear children and continue their familial line. Moab, the nation from which Ruth comes, is the child of

[38] Ibid., 77.
[39] Ibid., 76.
[40] Ibid., 89.
[41] Ibid., 74.
[42] Kirsten Nielsen, *Ruth : A Commentary*, The Old Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 22.
[43] Laws often forbade marrying outside of one's tribe or national identity. Boer, *Sacred Economy*, 90.
[44] The families were typically a subset of a clan, which itself made up the village. Clans, in turn, made up the tribes that lived in a specific area and were related. Each clan and tribe derived their identity from an ancestor. Eskenazi and Frymer-Kensky, *Ruth*, xxvii.

that union (Genesis 19:37). Thus, in the mind of Bethlehem's citizens, Ruth is a descendant of incest, but still family.[45]

Each member of the community saw themselves as a part of the greater whole, and this identity shaped how everything else in the community functioned. A council of elders led the community, typically with a headman leading their choices.[46] The council decided how the community responded to crises, distributed land, and presided over conflicts, among other important decisions that guided the community. The land itself was also held communally, changing hands and being repurposed based on the needs of the land (allowing the ground to lie fallow for a season) and the community.[47] A family that could only support a small amount of land (and only needed a small amount of land) would receive a smaller portion of available space, whereas more capable families would receive a greater proportion.[48] However, these lands were intentionally changed so that no one family could own the land.[4950] In addition to land ownership, the social aspect of the community also fed into the subsistence-survival economy. The gender division of "man in the field and woman in the house" did not reflect the best use of labor. There were certainly gendered spaces, but they overlapped in order to fill the needs of the community.[51] The chief example of this is that women often worked in the fields and

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[45] Jennifer Koosed challenges the idea that such incestual relations were taboo for the people at the time. Instead, she questions, such a story might hold a sacred place for the people. Koosed, *Gleaning Ruth*, 34.

[46] Boer, *Sacred Economy*, 75.

[47] Ibid., 76.

[48] Andre LaCocque, *Ruth : A Continental Commentary*, trans. K.C. Hanson (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 22.

[49] Boer, *Sacred Economy*, 72.

[50] The exception to this rule is that of the patron, typically the leader of a family that became able to influence the council through indebtedness, threat of violence, or other such uses of power. See Boer, *Sacred Economy*, 106.

[51] Ibid., 101.

among cattle, both to provide for their families financially and to ensure the planting, growth, and harvesting of crops or the growth and culling of animals in their time. In addition, women were also able to inherit land and sell it.[52] Despite this, men were expected to provide for their relatives who became widowed, whether that meant through (levirate) marriage or redemption (go'el).[53] The social and economic aspects of the Levant are important to the understanding of the book of Ruth because they play into the relational dynamics that the author uses within the text.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

It is necessary for me to limit the scope of my analysis within this paper when discussing the historical context of indigenous peoples in the Americas. Their history stretches over the rise and fall of several civilizations in the course of thousands of years. The colonization of the American continents began more than five hundred years ago and problems continually arise. My ability to research these topics is limited, so I must limit myself in several ways. The primary limit that I will place is that I will focus on events that specifically relate to my home state of Oklahoma, except in the case of Braiding Sweetgrass, which has provided several insights for me in both my life and this paper. I choose Oklahoma both because it is my home state (thereby providing a feeling of connection to the land and its inhabitants) and because Oklahoma was once "Indian Territory."[54]

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[52] Eskenazi and Frymer-Kensky, *Ruth,* xxix.

[53] Fewell, Danna Nolan and David Miller Gunn, *Compromising Redemption: Relating Characters in the Book of Ruth*, Literary Currents in Biblical Interpretation (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), 89.

[54] Katherine Ellinghaus, *Blood Will Tell: Native Americans and Assimilation Policy* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press and The American Philosophical Society, 2017), 24.

As the original settlers, Indians lived all over both North America and South America. Several civilizations rose and fell before Europeans stumbled across the civilizations and destroyed what was left. There were the Olmec, Mayan, Incan, Mississippi Valley, and many other groups.[55] The tribes hunted, fished, and grew several different types of plant. Much like the people in the Levant, some tribes would move to another area whenever a drought or other such catastrophe took place.[56] The inhabitants of the Mississippi Valley would move to another site every 30-40 years whenever the soil lost its virility.[57] There were also more nomadic communities, following herds of buffalo or other animals over the plains, especially in the early millennia of settlement when mastodons still roamed the continent.[58] However, as the larger animals died off, the people of the area turned to a more agriculture lifestyle, attempting to live in harmony with their surrounding environment to take care of the land that cared for them.[59] Robin Wall Kimmerer describes one particular harmonious agricultural style that harnessed the strengths of three different plants: Corn, Squash, and peas. Corn grows up and provides a stalk for the beans to climb, the beans help bring nitrites into the soil, and squash covers the ground to protect the roots. This is a similar mindset as that of the people in the Levant, doing much with little land and a small labor force, working to survive. However, these are just analogous, and very different groups.

The different tribes struggled to find an identity within the United States. They lived as smaller nations within an overall larger community that they had no control over.

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[55] Judith Nies, *Native American History : A Chronology of a Culture's Vast Achievements and Their Links to World Events* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1996).

[56] Ibid., 19.

[57] Ibid.

[58] Ibid., 21.

[59] Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, 129.

Though many among the tribes learned to converse with the European people, the colonists took advantage of them. European conceptions of identity were hard to define among the tribes, as such concepts were more ambiguous. The identities were not more simple, they were actually much more complex. The Anishinaabe had a very open identity structure that allowed members of other groups to join.[60] Identity often focused on relations between grandparents and great grandparents, how one family helped or cared for another. After the General Allotment Act of 1889, the tribe(s) had difficulty defining who was a member and who was not.[61] That ingroup-outgroup divide was foreign to their own identity, which played into the government's hands and resulted in the loss of ever more land.[62] This is largely because, while the tribes were willing to allow half-bloods,[63] the United States government eventually removed them from the roles and refused them their rights to the land.[64] Unlike earlier in colonization, when the indigenous people did not have guns and were susceptible to European diseases, some tribes were able to fight back, and many did.[65] The solution for the government of the United States was to force indigenous people off the land and onto other land. In many cases, this land would later become Oklahoma. Governmental attempts to move indigenous people were peaceful compromises, moving the tribes out west to generally

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[60] The book, *Blood Will Tell* uses specific cases to describe how the United States treated tribe members and "half-bloods." These specific cases are applicable to treatment around land as a whole, though the specific cases are mentioned so as to refrain from tokenizing any group. In keeping with the author's intention, I will mention the specific group discussed at the beginning, and use that group as a discussion about relations as a whole. Ellinghaus, *Blood Will Tell*, 1.

[61] Ibid., 2

[62] This is due to the Dawes Act in 1887, which broke the land into allotment portions. Any open allotments were given away. Nichols, *Indians in the United States and Canada*, 328.

[63] The term half-blood is carefully covered in the book, *Blood Will Tell*. There is a whole separate conversation here that I will attempt to discuss towards the end of the paper, as Ruth and Boaz gave birth to a half-blood.

[64] Ellinghaus, *Blood Will Tell*, 6.

[65] Jodi A. Byrd, *Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 123.

unknown or unwanted land.[66] In some cases, the government slowly whittled away at the land, removing "half-bloods" from the role and taking that land. Whenever a reservation was moved, some members of some tribes moved willingly, often with payment for their lands, but many remained. The Trail of Tears is one example of this, where more than 16,000 people were forced to walk hundreds of miles to live on a parcel of land much smaller than their own.[67] The Osage, also, were forced off their land. They originally lived around the Arkansas and Missouri rivers, were then moved to a reservation in Kansas, and ultimately bought their own land on an unwanted piece of property in what would become Oklahoma.[68] The tribes were forced to make their own way and constantly fight for their peoples while their ability to speak for themselves was slowly taken away.

These two tribes, along with others, lived on a series of reservations in Indian Territory. The tribes held their own land in common, rather than individually, for a period of time. However, the Dawes Commission convinced many to allot their lands to individuals, who could then sell that land to white citizens.[69] These governments, which exist in their own rights, remain. There have been several problems, particularly in Oklahoma, in regard to their sovereignty. The land, originally owned in whole by the tribe, was forcibly divided and split among members by the United States government.[70] There are also questions of crimes committed, lands taxed, and other jurisdictional issues. My brother, who lives in Noble, OK, is a firefighter and their station has special agreements with the local governments to enter the reservations and help the residents.

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[66] Nichols, *Indians in the United States and Canada*, 178.
[67] Julia Busiek, "Where They Cried," *National Parks* 89, no. 4 (Fall 2015): 62-63.
[68] David Grann, *Killers of the Flower Moon: The Osage Murders and the Birth of the FBI* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2017), 41-57.
[69] Ellinghaus, *Blood Will Tell*, 25.
[70] Grann, *Killers*, 56.

However, a person not on civil duties could enter and exit the reservation without knowing they had crossed any sort of boundary and without any issue. The big issue is that of mineral rights, which has played a role in many murders, broken treaties and promises, and the loss of almost all rights by the individuals of the tribe.[71]

The main issue that arises between Ruth and the Indians is that they both live in a land controlled by another group. This requires certain concessions, forced upon them by the group in power. These concessions, accepted or forced, require one to gradually lose their separate sense of identity and give up their former culture. Native Americans were forbidden from learning their native language and were often taken to boarding schools as children.[72] Many gave up their spiritual practices and took on other religious practices and beliefs. Early on, some women played themselves off as white so they could marry a European and escape from the racist treatment of their people.[73] Ruth, also, gave up her land to survive in Bethlehem. She married Boaz, where he took on the role of benevolent benefactor. Ruth swore to give up her people, her gods, and her family so that she might survive in Bethlehem, but she could not escape the author's repetitious descriptor, "the Moabite woman." It is my hope that, in comparing these two stories, I can analyze how, as a member of the dominant group, I and others take part in the dismissal and silencing of other cultures that exist within the United States and search for a better or different method of existing.

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[71] This continues today, where some tribal citizens have lost the right to vote, even in 2007. Byrd, *Transit of Empire*, 125.

[72] Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, 255.

[73] Ellinghaus, *Blood Will Tell*, 23.

RUTH 1

Ruth chapter 1 plays a key role in the connection between the story of Ruth and indigenous peoples in the United States. The text begins by setting up a move, a shift from one's own community to another for reasons of survival. Elimelech takes Naomi and their family away from Bethlehem. However, the author shifts quickly, changing the reader's attention and jumping a decade forward in time, rushing through all of the backstory so that the real story can begin. The author skips over marriages, lifestyle transitions, and deaths until only women are left, without husbands (and therefore caretakers) or children (a future). Giving up hope, Naomi returns home with her two daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth. Along the way, she sends them both home and they all weep. Yet, Ruth refuses, promising to give up her people and her gods to follow Naomi. Her reasons are her own, but Naomi ceases to speak until they reach Bethlehem and the women greet them. The structure of this first chapter narrows the characters down until just two remain.

CHARACTERS

The plot of Ruth revolves around how the characters interact with each other, so it is necessary to understand their relationships to each other and develop through the text. Characters die almost as soon as they are named, with the exception of the three women. Even so, one of the women leaves and another goes silent for much the of time between the verses. The first character of some import it Elimelech, whose name means "My god

is king" (אלימלכ, אל=god, י=my, מלכ=king). [12] This man lives in Bethlehem and is an Ephrathite, his clan affiliation, and Judahite, his tribal affiliation.[3] He has land in Bethlehem but decides to leave during a famine, as was common at the time.[4] He takes his wife and two sons. Naomi is his wife, and she outlives him and both of her sons. Her name comes from נעמ, which means pleasant,[5] but by the end of the chapter she calls herself Mara, meaning bitter, because "Shaddai has dealt much bitterness…" (Ruth 1:20). Yet, she becomes a leading and acting character during and after her grief, making her own choices. The couple has two sons are Mahlon and Chilion, whose names mean, "Weak/sick" (חלה) and "cease/fade away" (כלה) respectively. And, as previously stated, they both fulfill their names and die quickly. Next come the two women, one of whom leaves while the other is the titular character. After Elimelech dies, Chilion marries Orpah and Mahlon marries Ruth.[6] Orpah's name means, "nape of the neck" (ערפ)[7] while Ruth's means, "satiation" (רות).[8] These two women are Moabites, and their marriage creates a conundrum. The author frequently mentions their ancestry time and again throughout the text (1:22; 2:2, 6, 21; 4:5, 10). Their names and identities play a key role in how they relate to each other, how the original author and audience read them, and how they will be interpreted.

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[1] Saxegaard, *Character Complexity*, 61.

[2] It is possible that this name is a reference to God as ruler instead of a human. In that case, then, his name would be a political statement. If the text is early, the statement could be against the kings of Israel or Judah. If the text is late, the statement could point to the idea that the people need no king except God, who possibly speaks through his priests, particularly Ezra.

[3] Ephrathah is the wife of Caleb, thereby inserting another woman into the text. The name is also connected to the place where Rachel, Jacob/Israel's wife, is buried. Eskenazi and Frymer-Kensky, *Ruth,* 6.

[4] Saxegaard, *Character Complexity*, 64.

[5] Ibid., 76.

[6] The author does not reveal who married whom until 4:10, which is only used then as a way to frame the Go'el/Levir relationship.

[7] Eskenazi and Frymer-Kensky, *Ruth,* 7.

[8] There is no definite meaning for Ruth's name, only affiliated words that share a similar root. Saxegaard, *Character Complexity*, 106.

The Moabites and the Israelites have a convoluted, entangled history with each other. According to Genesis, assuming the author had access to that text, the Moabites had disreputable ancestry.[9] Ancestry, as previously stated, was everything to the communities where people lived. Genealogies provided connections between and among members of a village and the various travelers they might meet along the way. Israelites and Moabites connected at one of the earliest possible points for Israel, Abraham and Lot. Lot was Abraham's nephew and traveled with him from Mesopotamia to the land of Canaan. They each became rich and maintained large herds, which eventually became so large that they had to split ways. While Abraham continued his travels, Lot became sedentary and lived in the city of Sodom. Whenever YHWH came to Abraham swearing to destroy both Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham tried to protect the city's residents for Lot's sake. Though YHWH burned the city anyways, two beings helped Lot, his wife, and two daughters escape with a command to refrain from looking back. Lot's wife did so and promptly became a pillar of salt. Lot took his two daughters into some caves, terrified. While there, the two women feared that their line would become broken. Their solution was to make Lot so drunk that he did not know when they had sex with him.[10][11] They each became pregnant, and one gave birth to Moab (מאב), "From the father" (מ =from, אב= father). Thus, the Moabites were descendants and partakers of incest, in the Israelite mindset.[12] Beyond this genealogical connection and identity, the Moabites also

[9] Koosed, *Gleaning Ruth*, 29.

[10] This story is corroborated in the Mesha stone found in Moab. Eskenazi and Frymer-Kensky, *Ruth,* 5.

[11] There is much to be said here regarding male rape and the cursory glance many give this story outside of conversations regarding incest. However, that paper is for another time.

[12] Danna Fewell and David Gunn present this as an important factor in the relationship between Naomi and Ruth. Naomi, for them, believes that there is something to these stories and believes the stereotypes. Fewell and Gunn, *Compromising Redemption*, 72.

play a role in other aspects of Israelite and Judahite stories. The most immediately salient connection to the characters is that the Moabites had ransacked parts of Israel, possibly even their own lands. Israel also subjugates Moab soon after that period, creating tension between the two groups.[13] Ezra and Nehemiah both write about Moabite women as evils which can and will corrupt men (Ezra 9:1; Nehemiah 13:1). Deuteronomy also alleges that the Moabites refused to provide food and water for the Israelites when they left Egypt and forbids them from entering the congregation (Deut. 23:4). The tension between the Israelites and Moabites rose and fell depending on what was happening between the two nations and in the wider world. The texts reflect that, as do the relationships within the text. Ruth is hardly an insider when she follows Naomi to Bethlehem. This tension is where I will draw many connections to indigenous people, as such tensions and superstitions often lead to problems between communities.[14]

MOVE TO MOAB (Ruth 1:1-5)

The text begins with a famine, particularly a famine in Bethlehem. Maintaining the importance of names, this initial statement is a play on words. Bethlehem means, "house of bread/food," [בית=house, לחמ=bread/food],[15] so there is no food in the "house of food." The previously unnamed "man" had to make a choice, remain in his place or

[13] Eskenazi and Frymer-Kensky, *Ruth,* 5.

[14] Despite the connections which I draw between Native Americans and Moabites, it is important to note that the eras were different and the oppression was in no way racially motivated. The Moabites and Israelites were neighboring peoples and had a complicated history, such as any neighboring countries might. The purpose of this essay is to analyze Ruth *in* Israel, in Bethlehem, and how she works within a different space for survival. Jennifer Koosed makes an excellent point when she states out that post-colonialist readings do not map well onto the Israelite-Moabite divide. Koosed, *Gleaning Ruth*, 29.

[15] The etymology of this village is actually the house of Lahmu, a Canaanite god. However, the Hebrew lehem means bread. As the text is Hebrew, the play on words seems evident and possibly intentional. The village is also David's hometown, already connecting the story to the king that is not mentioned until the end. Eskenazi and Frymer-Kensky, *Ruth,* 4.

become nomadic for a time. The drought made agriculture difficult and plant life slow to grow. If he stayed, he might lose his means of subsistence, but leaving would require a separation from his tribe and ancestry, forcing him to play with his genealogy and find connections elsewhere, with a different clan.[16] He decides to wander in the fields of Moab with his family (Ruth 1:1). He moved his flock and whatever seed he had and traveled to a land that was not under a drought. The fields of Moab are around fifty miles away from Bethlehem, at the closest point.[17] There was pastureland in some parts of Moab, providing ample space for the family and their animals to wander and eat.[18] Sometime after the family's arrival in Moab, Elimelech dies, leaving Naomi, Mahlon, and Chilion with whatever resources they had. The text itself makes no claims regarding why Elimelech died or how his death came to pass. Rabbinic scholars have read his death as a punishment for leaving his people and living with another.[19] Danna Fewell and David Gunn follow the Rabbinic lead, but insert their own characterization of Naomi. Rather than stating for sure that her husband's death came from YHWH, they use this moment to depict her as superstitious and racist.[20] Their depiction uses the story of Lot along with imagined gossip, incorporating the repeated phrase, "Ruth the Moabite woman." The xenophobia seems present in related texts and appears whenever one reads and studies this text deeply.

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[16] Koosed, *Gleaning Ruth*, 29.
[17] Eskenazi and Frymer-Kensky, *Ruth,* 5.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid., 6.
[20] D.N. Fewell and D.M. Gunn follow the Rabbinic lead in their retelling of the book of Ruth. They emphasize how Naomi might have felt about leaving her own people and living among Moabites known for their incest. She blames YHWH for this death and blames Elimelech for leaving Bethlehem. Fewell and Gunn, *Compromising Redemption*, 28.

Elimelech does not see his sons marry and his only role becomes that of a connection, an ancestor. The sadness subsides for a moment when Naomi's sons find wives among the Moabite women, bringing both Ruth and Orpah into the story. The family lives together for about ten years until tragedy strikes the family again. Both Mahlon and Chilion die from unstated causes, leaving the women alone. The Targum reads their deaths in much the same way as Elimelech's death: punishment from God.[21] However, rather than leaving their people, they married women from another people. Fewell and Gunn build out Naomi's character even further in examining this part of the text. For them, Naomi was afraid when her sons married the two women and warned them against it to no avail.[22] The reader experiences a decade in seconds, the losses come one after another, leaving Naomi and her daughters-in-law without any men within a patriarchal society. This leaves Naomi as the head of the household, she has freedom to choose where she travels and what might happen with her familial land allotment in Bethlehem.[23] Luckily for them, Bethlehem once again had bread, thanks to YHWH, re-inscribing the village's name. The women all made their way back, hoping for some relief in Naomi's hometown.

LEAVING MOAB (Ruth 1:6-18)

After the deaths of all the men in their family, the women try to move on with their lives in some way. Upon hearing that "The LORD had considered his people and

[21] Koosed, *Gleaning Ruth*, 31.
[22] Fewell and Gunn, *Compromising Redemption*, 26.
[23] Ancient Israelite tradition allowed women to become head of the household when all men that could become the head of the household are dead. (As an aside, I smell murder here. But not actually, because the text later shows how deeply she grieves for their deaths). Eskenazi and Frymer-Kensky, *Ruth*, 8.

given food to them" (Ruth 1:6), Naomi and the two women leave Moab and begin their return to Bethlehem.[24] Somewhere along the road, Naomi turns to her two daughters-in-law and tells them to return, "each to her mother's house" (1:8),[25] hoping that YHWH may deal hesed with them as they did with her and with the dead. She also sends them to find new husbands, as she cannot provide them with others. Hesed is a tricky word, most often meaning some sort of covenant loyalty or translated as lovingkindness, but is more than would normally be expected.[26] In this case, the word has a connection to their position as her daughters-in-law and their traveling with her, maintaining their loyalty to her family. Fewell and Gunn depict this loyalty as nothing more than an attempt to try something new on the part of Ruth, and a desire to rid herself of the Moabites that may have been the cause of the men's death on the part of Naomi.[27] Others, like Koosed, depict somebody who genuinely cares for her mother-in-law.[28] Some scholars draw a sexual-romantic relationship between Ruth and Naomi.[29] These different readings demonstrate the ambiguity within the text and different attempts to understand why each of the characters make the decision they did. Naomi does try to send the two home. After she says this, the three women grieve with each other.

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[24] The text says nothing about the crops or flocks that the family might have taken with them from Bethlehem to the fields of Moab. The author reveals nothing about the livelihood of the women after the deaths of their partners, which leaves the reader to assume what happened. Seeing as there are only three members of the household left, they were likely unable to care for an entire flock.

[25] This phrase, "mother's house," is a rarity in the Bible, appearing only two other times. This female orientation has served as a helpful tool when analyzing the text through a feminist lens. The phrase also lends some connection to often matriarchal indigenous tribes, though I will not delve into that aspect for this thesis.

[26] Linafelt, *Ruth*, 11.

[27] Fewell and Gunn, *Compromising Redemption*, 74.

[28] Koosed, *Gleaning Ruth*, 51.

[29] Rebecca Alpert, "Finding Our Past: A Lesbian Interpretation of the Book of Ruth," in *Reading Ruth*, ed. Judith A. Kates and Gail Twersky Reimer (New York: Ballantine Books, 1994), 91.

Despite their grief, the two daughters-in-law tell Naomi that they will remain with her, maintaining their hesed. After all, they were with Mahlon and Chilion for ten years, there is little hope that they will find other husbands. Returning to their family would be shameful, they had nothing except their lives. The cultural practice was that they should marry Naomi and Elimelech's next son and maintain Elimelech's lineage, but that was impossible now. The three women were in a bind. Naomi continues to push them, explaining that there was nothing for them if they remained with her. She had no sons, and if she immediately found a husband and gave birth soon after, it would be foolhardy for the two daughters-in-law to wait until the boys were old enough to marry and procreate. This practice was common in the Ancient Near East and can be found throughout the Hebrew Bible.[30] The act is known as Levirate marriage, and the characters themselves draw an allusion to the story of Tamar, which I will draw out when the time comes. For now, the general practice was to maintain the lineage of the brother who died by having their wife marry the next brother in line.[31] After Naomi explains why the two women should leave her, Orpah obeys and returns home. Many scholars have harangued Orpah's decision to leave, to remain with her own people, although the text itself reveals no reading either way.[32] However, several more recent scholars have praised her decision.[33] Up until this point, they essentially acted as the same character, undifferentiated by the author and always mentioned together.[34] For Orpah, it is a wise choice to leave: she is more likely to survive with a family that can care for her than a

[30] Nielsen, *Ruth*, 47.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Linafelt, *Ruth*, 14-15.
[33] Koosed, *Gleaning Ruth*, 29.
[34] Linafelt, *Ruth*, 13.

family that cannot (assuming that her family can care for her). The decision to ignore or forget Orpah comes because her double, Ruth, chooses to stay with Naomi and is the main character in the book.[35] Laura Donaldson reads Orpah's decision to remain with her family as a heroic act.[36] She reads this through her ancestors' attempts to retain their own culture, as opposed to taking on the culture of the United States. Ruth chooses to leave her people and follow Naomi, giving a grand speech that has become common at weddings.[37] Naomi responds to this demonstration of hesed with silence.

Ruth's speech is a perfect example of conversion and hesed for her mother-in-law. She swears to give up her people, her gods, and to die where Naomi dies. The speech is extreme, to say the least. Ruth continues her show of hesed throughout the rest of the book and receives praise from Boaz and others. She is an honorable daughter-in-law that goes above and beyond to provide for herself and Naomi, ultimately marrying Boaz. However, the author never reveals the intentions behind Ruth's decision. She may truly care for Ruth, which lends itself to a reading of their relationship being positive beforehand.[38] However, Fewell and Gunn read Ruth as choosing something new and different, tired of Moab. In their reading, Ruth's choice has nothing to do with loyalty or love.[39] There are other potential choices, ranging from Ruth's fear that her family would abuse her, sell her off, marry her to a cruel man, or a fear that she was barren.[40] She might have lost her place in the family after marrying a foreigner, the family severing their relationship after she leaves.[41] Whatever her reasons, she takes on the role of a

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[35] Koosed, *Gleaning Ruth*, 28.
[36] Donaldson, "The Sign of Orpah," 137.
[37] Sakenfeld, *Ruth*, 30.
[38] Nielsen, *Ruth*, 49.
[39] Fewell and Gunn, *Compromising Redemption*, 30.
[40] Linafelt, *Ruth*, 11.
[41] Sakenfeld, *Ruth*, 34.

convert in scholarship over the centuries and is praised for her actions.[42] She is better than Orpah because she gives up her own people, joins the Hebrew people, and follows YHWH. This conversation is where several chief connections between the book of Ruth and the history of indigenous people relate to each other.

RETURNING "HOME" (Ruth 1:19-22)

The final pericope of Ruth 1 is the shortest, bringing the sojourn in Moab to an end while introducing the new community within which Ruth must find acceptance. Its focus is grief, particularly the grief that Naomi had after the deaths of her husband and sons. It is important to note that Ruth is largely unimportant here, mentioned only in the last verse and only in relation to Naomi. Naomi has struggled along her path from Moab back to her hometown, ten or more years later. She has changed and she has lost everything except Ruth, whom she had sent away once already. She likely did not look forward to the crowded gossip of the small village she once called home. On top of that worry, there was no food and nobody to care for them.

Whenever Ruth and Naomi finally arrive in Bethlehem, the town, "is stirred because of them" (1:19). Naomi had been gone for a decade or more. The people of the town did not know what to expect. However, they would have immediately seen that she was without a husband or sons, all alone. The town must have wondered greatly about what had happened to her along the way, the terrible tragedies that must have taken place. The women of the town, as noted by the feminine gender of the verb, wonder aloud, "Is this Naomi?" (1:19). Whatever else they thought is left out, though Fewell and Gunn

[42] Eskenazi and Frymer-Kensky, *Ruth,* 10.

imagine the gossiping of the women in much the same way that they imagined Naomi before: superstitious and slightly racist.[43] They picture the women talking about how Naomi's family left the town to live among the Moabite people, incorporating disgust and surprise at their choice. And, to make matters worse, Naomi has returned with a Moabite woman. The women of the town had perhaps heard of the marriages between Mahlon, Chilion, Ruth, and Orpah, but they certainly knew for sure. The arrival of Ruth could have easily been a scandal and may explain why Naomi initially sent Ruth and Orpah away.

The women succeed in breaking Naomi's silence through their questions, and Naomi answers their unspoken questions by revealing her grief. She says,

> Call me no longer Naomi,
> call me Mara,
> for the Almighty has dealt bitterly with me. I went away full,
> but the LORD has brought me back empty;
> why call me Naomi
> when the LORD has dealt harshly with me,
> and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?[44]

Naomi's grief is overwhelming for her, changing her entire identity, as symbolized by her name change. For her, everything that happened in Moab created more emptiness within her. She even discounts Ruth's hesed by refusing to mention her at all, instead saying that she comes back empty. I think it would be safe to say that Naomi is struggling with

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[43] Fewell and Gunn, *Compromising Redemption*, 28.
[44] Ruth 1:20-21.

depression at some level. Her grief is deep and all-consuming. She has nothing left when she returns, and she returns in shame with an extra mouth that she cannot feed. Compromising Redemption presents a particular view of this grief that outlines just how deeply rooted Naomi's depression remained. The authors depict her as just going about her old house, cleaning, sitting, and waiting to die. The neighbors come by to provide food, but she sends them away and does not eat. At the end, the author sets the time: the barley harvest, presenting the setup for the next section, where Ruth begins acting to make up for Naomi's inaction.

CONNECTIONS

The text's gloss over the background leaves everything ambiguous, open for questions and connections that a reader might find. Why did the men die? How well or poorly did they live? The open nature of the introduction allows a reader to insert some of their own ideas into the text, making connections that are not always apparent. For the purposes of this paper, I will take a short aside to articulate the manner that this pericope connects to indigenous people. There are the initial connections between the text and the indigenous people, primarily that each occasionally became nomadic and migrated to better land whenever necessary and that each group found community and tribal affiliation important. However, those connections are more superficial and do not challenge the text without probing and prodding.

The question and connection to indigenous peoples is, how were the two Moabite women, "taken up?" If one were to read the Old Testament, implying the Christian canonized order, then they would discover that, less than ten verses before, the book of

Judges tells the story of how Benjamite men "took wives" for themselves from among the other tribes at a festival. Judges 21 details how the tribes of Israel sought to keep the tribe of Benjamin from extinction, having killed their women and sworn to give them no women for marriage. The final decision regarding the continuance of Benjamin was to tell them to lie in wait outside the annual festival to YHWH until the women came out to dance, and to carry them away. The Benjamites did this, and their action is described through three different verbs, חטף (seize), נשא (carry off), and גזל (tear away). The middle of these verbs is the same used in Ruth to describe what Mahlon and Chilion did. This does not mean that they acted in the same manner as the Benjamites, but the reference to the "time when the judges were judging" (Ruth 1:1), does lend such a reading, or at least creates a relation between the two texts. [45] Naomi's sons might have also traded for their two wives or performed some other act. This "taking up" leaves many questions regarding the morality of Mahlon and Chilion and also may relate to how the Israelites and Moabites interacted. It also relates to several practices taken up by white settlers upon reservations.

Naomi's family seems to just settle among the peoples of Moab, expecting things to work out, possibly ingratiating themselves early on. They move into somebody else's land and Elimelech almost certainly changes his genealogy to find acceptance among the nomadic or sedentary communities the family finds. After his death, the two boys find women to marry, ingratiating themselves in other ways. The Midrash emphasizes their mixed marriage by stating that employing נשא instead of לחק is a sign of mixed blood. Mixed blood also became important to the Office of Indian Affairs, who created tribal

[45] Sakenfeld, *Ruth*, 18.

roles and divided families (and removed familial inheritance) based upon how what percentage of a race a person was (around 75% white, or any percentage black, was grounds for rejection). In a fashion similar to the two sons, white men married Indian women for various reasons. The vast majority did so as a means of gaining land, as several tribes would adopt people who married into the community.[46] These tribes considered such adoptees as full members of the tribe, allowing them to take part in the communal land ownership.[47] Many men became wealthy through this practice, especially among the Osage people when they discovered oil on their land.[48] Some men, it is sure, genuinely loved their wives, as some women who married into the tribe loved their husbands. However, as demonstrated through the actions of white men in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (and before) and through the actions of Mahlon and Chilion, marriage is an easy way for one to ingratiate themselves with a community and gain some level of financial success and land.

The differences between the reactions of Ruth and Orpah to Naomi's speech provide an interesting divide that gets to the heart of "The Indian Problem." The Indian problem was the concern about how the United States should "deal with" the Indians: assimilation or isolation?[49] Isolation was not the actual term used, but it represents the concept behind pushing indigenous people onto reservations. Another key factor was that the indigenous tribes often refused to assimilate. While Europeans brought many goods (commercial) and tools with them, they also brought a separate culture and religion, one of dominance and destruction. The tribes lived in harmony with the land, maintaining a

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[46] Ellinghaus, *Blood Will Tell*, 65.
[47] It is important to note that not all tribes adopted.
[48] Grann, *Killers*, 58.
[49] Donaldson, "The Sign of Orpah," 137.

balance in the ecology of their homes, the Europeans destroyed everything in the name of progress.[50] In an attempt to maintain and "better" the Indians, the general attitude of the government for a long period of time was assimilation. Some Indians believed that it was better to assimilate and become citizens of the United States.[51] Others thought that they needed to remain with their tribes and their traditions. Ruth and Orpah are these two positions.

Orpah is the woman who remains with her tribe. She has seen what Israel's god has to offer and rejected it. She returns to her own people, and Laura Donaldson finds in Orpah a fellow spirit, a person that chooses to stay with her own people.[52] She compares both Ruth and Orpah to the story of Pocahontas, demonstrating how her story has been used to promote assimilation and the view that indigenous people are there to serve and save the European colonists.[53] The legend of Pocahontas, how she sacrificed herself for a colonist and later married one, provides a different perspective on Ruth, primarily because the true story of Pocahontas is much less heroic and pro-European than the legend (and movie) portrays.[54] Ruth is the Pocahontas that gives up everything to live among the "correct" people: giving up her gods for monotheism, giving up her language for Hebrew, and renouncing her people to join the more "enlightened" way of life. That is, at least, the way that Midrashic scholars have described Ruth's conversion.[55] Orpah, on the other hand, has received little to no coverage among scholars. She is forgotten and left as soon as she leaves the story, or the authors choose to describe her as evil and

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[50] Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, 85.
[51] Nichols, *Indians in the United States and Canada*, 319.
[52] Donaldson, "Sign of Orpah," 141.
[53] Ibid., 140.
[54] Ibid., 140.
[55] Ibid., 141.

deserving of punishment. In the midrash, Ruth Rabbah, Orpah is punished for leaving by being gang raped by one hundred men and a dog.[56] Some authors also describe her as the grandmother of Goliath, with whom Ruth's great grandson fights and wins.[57] Orpah becomes the resistor, the one that creates challenges for the Israelites, simply for refusing to assimilate. This mirrors how most citizens of the United States view the indigenous tribes: background, side-characters that are forgotten and ignored.[58] Indians were considered savages, murdering, living only on what grew in the forests, and scalping their prisoners. Yet, these pictures were inaccurate, promoting a falsified picture of Indians that served to dehumanize them, allowing for people to move in, take over the land, and kill them whenever one pleased.

The pictures drawn for both Native women and Orpah are false and promote negative stereotypes. This connection is apparent for Cherokee women, where "Orpah connotes hope rather than perversity, because she is the one who does not reject her traditions or her sacred ancestors."[59] Ruth, on the other hand, represents those that gave up their tribe. She is the woman that married outside the community and brought trouble upon herself. I would like to tweak Donaldson's reading a little, instead placing Ruth among the many women that tried to blend in with the culture of the United States for their own survival. The indigenous people were often denied the right to control their own land, particularly after the government decided that indigenous people were incapable of selling or renting their own land. That, or the government simply decided to overlook their existence if they were unable to reach the commission from the office of

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[56] Koosed, *Gleaning Ruth*, 36.
[57] Ibid., 36.
[58] Donaldson, "Sign of Orpah," 142.
[59] Ibid., 143.

Indian Affairs in time and with the proper documentation. There is a possibility that Ruth had little to nothing to return to, thereby forcing her to continue on and assimilate into an entirely new society. It is, after all, difficult to live among a people who share a different culture and a different language.[60] Ruth, also, may have tried to find a balanced line between her own culture and that of Bethlehem,[61] as did many Indian people. The book, Killers of the Flower Moon, shows how the Osage tribe tried to live in harmony with the white people that entered their lands. They lived in good houses, drove cars, and traded, but tried to teach their separate identity, culture, and language to their children. Living as a minority, a separate culture overshadowed by another, is a difficult path to travel.

Ruth and Orpah's relationship, then, can also be read as different reactions, two different women who respond to death and upheaval in different ways, representing immigrants, refugees, or people living in territory controlled by a different group. Those who follow Orpah's example stay true to their ancestry and their heritage. They bring their culture with them and teach that culture to the next generation. The culture within which they live may portray them as something deviant, something to be avoided. Living such a life can become difficult, especially in the United States. Assimilation is the assumed goal for all migrants, as portrayed by the Great American Melting Pot.[62] It is hard to maintain one's identity in such a culture, but it can be valuable. Ruth, on the other hand, can be read as an immigrant or refugee that adapts to the new culture. Ruth's life becomes easier, although there may be some underlying tensions, just as there are among immigrants in the United States. In fact, the tensions are in no way hidden, but more on

[60] Koosed, *Gleaning Ruth*, 32.
[61] Sakenfeld, *Ruth*, 32.
[62] Jodi, *Transit of Empire*, 134.

that later. Neither Ruth's choice nor Orpah's is negative, only different methods of understanding and responding to attempts at assimilation.

CONCLUSION

The first chapter of Ruth presents a family of immigrants that struggle to find their way in a new and different land. They struggled with the same problems that any family of refugees might. They had to learn a new language, culture, family, and place to live. The author of Ruth spends little time discussing the struggles that happened for the Israelites as they settled into the fields of Moab. However, when read alongside indigenous peoples in the United States, some themes emerge. There is the struggle about whether to take on a new culture, language, and family, or to remain with one's own customs. There is no single best course of action, but the choice should not be forced. Many people have suggested one best method throughout history: assimilation. Thomas Jefferson and many other people before and after him suggested assimilation for the Indians. Scholars and spiritual leaders have praised Ruth for her decision to follow Naomi and the "one true god," forgetting or denigrating Orpah. However, there is something to be said for Orpah's choice to stay true to her own people. Those same people that praise Ruth would become angry if a member of their "tribe" left and joined another group. That struggle is one with which the Indians also struggled. Some chose to reject assimilation, some accepted it, and others tried to find a balance. Each method has drawbacks, each choice brings some grief out.

Modern readers need to take the grief and choices into consideration when discussing the problems of refugees, immigrants, and other minority groups within the

larger culture. There are benefits on each side, but forcing a person to assimilate can and often does lead to the dehumanization of the minority. Multi-cultural societies struggle with these issues constantly, the different communities clashing. Memories over generations are not often long or well-kept, so many people forget or never learn what it was like living as a minority with little power in a larger culture. Respect for difference is important. Stereotypes and forced choices do not create the best societies, but can lead to the destruction and removal of many powerful cultures, languages, and people

RUTH 2

The second chapter of Ruth reveals the lives of Ruth and Naomi after their return to Bethlehem, how they survive and take control of their life in the face of poverty. The two women have little to no capital, no seed, no flock, and, it seems, nobody helping provide for them in their hometown. Ruth, who has recently come into a new world and promised to give up her own culture so that she could assimilate and follow Naomi into her world, must go out into an unknown world, among people with a different culture, and make her own survival. This is analogous, though not the same, to the struggle which many tribes underwent as they were moved around and as the United States government took advantage of them, allowing, even encouraging, white settlers to use violent force to take over. People were separated from the lands and practices they knew and many struggled to survive in new lands where few people were able to help provide for them. Some were lucky enough, like the Osage, to discover oil on their lands, while others had to found new methods of survival.

CHARACTERS

There is a dramatically reduced number of named characters in the second chapter of Ruth. Elimelech, Mahlon, and Chilion do not make another appearance in this chapter (except in connection to Boaz), instead replaced by the presumably wealthy and powerful Boaz.[1] The three men are replaced by a much stronger symbol of the patriarchal culture that passes land from father to son, where men gather and make decisions for everyone. Orpah does not make an appearance and Naomi takes a large step back in her agency.

[1] Koosed, *Gleaning Ruth*, 52, describes Boaz as a "paragon of patriarchal power in the Bethlehem community."

Naomi barely talks to Ruth unless her own health and safety is in doubt. Instead, Ruth takes on the primary agency in the story, going out among the fields to gather food for her own and her mother-in-law's survival. There are passing references to the male and female fieldworkers and to an overseer, particularly in reference to Ruth's safety. Both men and women worked in the fields to provide for their families and provide necessary hands to finish field work in time.[2] These passing references can reveal something about the culture of the time and can help illuminate some similar problems prevalent with indigenous peoples.

The first person to make an appearance in the chapter is Naomi, whose role is not the one of lead agent, but one of connection. This connections moves through her late husband to Boaz, a relative. She does almost nothing in this chapter until the end, maintaining the silence toward Ruth as much as possible.[3] Fewell and Gunn read this silence as a sign of grief: she has given up on life and is ready to die, she just wanted to waste away and die in her own home, not the fields of Moab. They make her apathy especially apparent, having her clean the house and just sit around all day, ignoring Ruth and everyone else.[4] She says nothing until Ruth tells her that she intends to go gleaning in the fields. Even then, all she says is, "Go, my daughter" (Ruth 2:2). She perks up, however, whenever Ruth brings home a significant amount of barley and extra food which Boaz shared. She suddenly cares and becomes protective of her daughter-in-law. Ruth lies to her about Boaz's instructions (he tells her to follow after the women, she says he said men), and Naomi immediately corrects her. This can be read as true care about

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[2] Boer, *The Sacred Economy*, 101.
[3] Fewell and Gunn, *Compromising Redemption*, 76.
[4] Ibid., 35.

Ruth's life and future, or as care about Naomi's future care. Ruth has become Naomi's hope.[5] If Ruth is raped, she is unlikely to find a new husband. If Boaz looks after Ruth, perhaps his status as go'el could be used to their advantage. The dynamics are open-ended, but create new relational lenses for the reader.

Ruth, in contrast with Naomi, is especially active for this chapter. She grows tired of Naomi, who just cleans and sits. Ruth refuses to wait on her death, and decides to go out and glean of her own accord. She also goes with a plan, to find favor in the eyes of a field's owner (Ruth 2:2). This phrase could mean that Ruth intends to find favor in the owner's eyes so that she could find somebody that would help her and Naomi, but it likely means for the purposes of marriage. Marriage was on Naomi's mind when she sent her daughters-in-law away and remains on her mind throughout the story, which ends in a marriage and a birth. Ruth knows that their survival depends on marriage. She stumbles upon Boaz's field, who is already established as a go'el. She takes charge of her situation and asks the overseer for permission to glean among the fields. This is important, because she was already allowed to glean by the law of tradition (and the Torah).[6] She goes above and beyond, presenting herself before the owner and receiving special privileges above and beyond others. She is ultimately called up to sit with the owner and his male workers. She has earned a special status, despite her status as a Moabite woman (which is repeated throughout the chapter).

Boaz, finally, is a go'el for Elimelech, though likely a somewhat distant go'el, as it is revealed that there is somebody closer. A go'el has no duties which they must fulfill. However, Naomi later calls him a go'el, or kinsman-redeemer, which does come with

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[5] Saxegaard, *Character Complexity*, 97.
[6] Eskenazi and Frymer Kensky, *Ruth*, 28.

many responsibilities for the care for their relatives, especially those that cannot care for themselves (Lev. 35:25-34). As far as this chapter is concerned, Boaz is a man that has enough produce that he needs to hire several workers, both men and women, to harvest it, and he had the means to pay them. He is well-known and important in the community. He enters by giving his blessing, and he is kind to Ruth, instructing his workers to leave extra grain behind and not harass her. He brings her in and gives her food. The previous conversations about marriage, along with knowledge of the end of the story, seem to place his actions within a context of courtship. He is helping her, but he may get something extra out of it. Perhaps he is merely hopeful. He may be already married, perhaps with a barren wife, or he could be single for an unknown reason.

The relationships in this chapter revolve around gleaning, which was a method of survival used by those who were unable to provide for themselves. One of the chief reasons was the death of the patriarch, the one who provided for the family. Foreigners were also allowed to gather grain. This is welfare at its most basic, the command to let spare, un-gathered grain lie. Several texts within the Torah relay some rules concerning gleaning (Lev. 19:9-10, 23:22; Deut. 24:19-22). Though the people who lived in the time which Ruth is set might not have those documents, an author writing at a later date would have.[7] These laws instruct the people to leave the edges of the fields unharvested, allowing those in need to go in and harvest the field for themselves.[8] While the system is not perfect, it would allow for people to survive a little if they could not work their own fields. In theory, nobody needed permission, it was assumed. However, as is

[7] LaCocque, *Ruth*, 71.
[8] Sakenfeld, *Ruth*, 39.

demonstrated in the story and Boaz's commands, there is a chance that the people were not following those instructions as they should have.

The difference between the go'el and the levir becomes an increasingly important part of the story as the relationships develop. The two terms are often conflated,[9] as both refer to methods of caring for the family of deceased relatives. In addition, the characters misuse and misrepresent the two terms within the story, further complicating the issue.[10] It is important to not the difference at an early juncture, especially as the terms become important in Ruth 2. The chief difference is which action a living relative must take to care of their relatives. The levir must be a younger brother of the husband of the widow, the next in line for an inheritance. This duty only matters if the widow has not yet had a child, produced an heir, for her husband. A levir's duty is to impregnate the widow, and provide for her care, so that his elder brother will have an heir. This act also transfers the elder brother's inheritance, the larger inheritance, to the child of that union, cutting the biological father out.[11] The go'el, on the other hand, is the relative closest to the deceased. The duty of the go'el is to provide for the family of the deceased. This could mean buying their land to provide financial help, providing financial resources for free, or buying land for the family to work.[12] The go'el has no duty to marry anybody, only maintain their life in some way. This difference is important for the purposes of the paper because the marriage between Ruth and Boaz, so often portrayed as love, leads to an increase in Boaz's wealth and power. Boaz does not need to marry Ruth, he could provide for her in other ways. The misunderstanding concerning the two terms has led to

[9] Fewell and Gunn, *Compromising Redemption*, 89.
[10] Ibid, 89.
[11] Linafelt, *Ruth*, 75.
[12] Ibid, 75.

misrepresentations about the power dynamics and a belief that their union was required by law. Native American women took similar steps, marrying men for protection and survival, though the men only married them for their land rights. I will explore the marriage dynamics more in Ruth 3.

SPLITTING UP (Ruth 2: 1-3)

The introduction to Ruth 2 is short, but creates connections that become more important as the story progresses. The section begins by re-inscribing a masculine presence upon the two women, a presence that will come to dominate their lives. Boaz is a prominent rich man in the city (2:1), somebody that almost anybody would desire to care for them and a very promising husband. At minimum, he is a go'el.[13] His role as go'el should be to help care for the two women, either buying their field (as happens in Ruth 4), or providing for them in some other way. [14] However, he and everyone else ignores that duty, instead choosing to ignore and gossip about the two women (2:7). The relationship has been severed in some way. This separation is connected to Ruth's identity as a Moabite woman, which is once again mentioned in the second verse. Naomi's grief is also apparent, as she merely lets Ruth go and says little. Grief is a powerful emotional state and leads people to act in certain ways that are far from helpful. Naomi's decision to do nothing forces Ruth to take on a new and different role: provider.

[13] According to ancient rabbinic scholars, he is Elimelech's nephew and Naomi's cousin. Eskenazi and Frymer Kensky, *Ruth*, 27-28.

[14] It is important to note that he is a *kinsman*, but not redeemer. The words are different, though many English readers assume that his status is that of redeemer, which would be "go'el." Sakenfeld, *Ruth*, 38.

Rather than sitting around and waiting for her mother-in-law to stop grieving, Ruth takes her life into her own hands. She goes to her mother-in-law and says, "Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain, behind someone in whose sight I may find favor" (2:2). She is not asking for permission to go, the Hebrew more accurately translates to intention, like "Let's go," but singular.[15] If the two women have begun starving, Ruth would certainly need to go out, with or without Naomi's permission. She also adds that she will follow behind somebody with whom she would find favor. This is an attempt at marriage, gaining somebody's favor.[16] This could happen either through seduction of some kind (Ruth has already been married once), or through enticing somebody to have sex with her, through rape or consent, and then force them to marry her. Though the second method seems cruel, it is important to note that the ladies of the town mention Judah and Tamar (Ruth 4:12). That story ends with Tamar tricking Judah, her father-in-law, into impregnating her (and the people of Bethlehem come from that trick).[17] Ruth is therefore willing and able to use her body as a tool for providing for herself and (possibly) Naomi. Naomi, hearing this, gives no advice or blessing, instead just allowing Ruth to leave.

Luckily for Ruth, she stumbles upon Boaz's field first. She does not know what his relation to her is, but the reader does. This creates a sense of dramatic irony for the reader. The narrator repeats that Boaz is a relation to Elimelech so that the audience clearly understands their connection. Boaz has a responsibility to her, to provide for

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[15] Ibid., 39.

[16] This is my interpretation, although I have found no evidence among my sources. Most scholars either ignore this phrase or read it as an attempt to gain the *owner's* favor so that she might glean in his field. Eskenazi and Frymer Kensky, *Ruth*, 29.

[17] That is, from the line of Perez, the son of Tamar and Judah.

Naomi and Ruth. In addition, there is some latent idea that he might marry her. She needs something from him, and he has every ability to provide for her.

BOAZ'S BENEVOLENCE (Ruth 2:4-16)

This pericope begins with Boaz's entrance into the narrative as a full character, the only one besides Ruth and Naomi. YHWH had obviously blessed him since the famine in Bethlehem ended, having already been described as rich. He is therefore thankful to YHWH for the provision of gain and people to help work his field. He must have been visiting to see how his workers were, and enters with a blessing, "May YHWH be with you" (2:4). The workers reply in kind, "And may YHWH bless you" (2:4). Linafelt reads this as a greeting that reinforces Boaz's dominance and power. If YHWH is with the workers, then Boaz, the owner of the field, will also receive that same blessing and reap ever greater benefits.[18] Gunn and Fewell depict Boaz riding upon something, likely a horse, and noticing Ruth immediately.[19] The two portray Boaz as immediately sexually interested, analyzing each line through the eyes of both himself and Ruth.[20] He turns to his overseer and asks, "To whom does this young woman belong?" (2:5). The patriarchal overture is clear to the audience: Ruth belongs to nobody, but Boaz assumes she belongs to somebody.[21] This lack of ownership is the reason that Ruth is in poverty. That is why she is starving and asking to glean. The overseer answers by immediately establishing her relation to Naomi and defining her as a Moabite. She is not even identified through Naomi, but as the Moabite that accompanied Naomi, reinforcing her

[18] Linafelt, *Ruth*, 31.
[19] Fewell and Gunn, *Compromising Redemption*, 35.
[20] Ibid., 42.
[21] Koosed, *Gleaning Ruth*, 73.

outsider status. In addition, the Targum adds that Ruth came back with Naomi, "as a proselyte."[22] This reading once again ignores other possible desires which Ruth had, instead focusing on assimilating outsiders. This desire to make Ruth, "one of us," ignores the difficulty of her situation and eventually leads to trouble for her later.

Boaz proceeds to speak to Ruth, instructing her to glean only in his field, and not go to others. He promises to look out for her well-being and tells her to stay near his female servants for protection and specifically mentions that she should avoid the male workers, except to grab water which they have drawn. Though he commands them not to touch her, he obviously does not trust them to follow his word. This command is in opposition to what Ruth had originally intended, to follow the men and potentially find a husband. Boaz, then, is separating her from her ability to find a husband among the workers. There are any number of reasons for this: saving her for himself, protecting her for the sake of their mutual relation to Elimelech, and other reasons. The Moabites are portrayed as sexually promiscuous throughout the Hebrew Bible and there are many instructions to avoid them. There is a chance that the men in the village would have viewed Ruth as open to their advances, or just available for the purposes of their own pleasure: rape.[23] Ruth was open to something, but such "behind the haystack" liaisons might not have been what she had in mind. This is where I will focus my analysis and connections to indigenous-US relations later. However, the pericope continues further, so that will wait.

Ruth asks Boaz why he, a leading member of the community, chose to care for her, a foreigner. Ruth had, potentially, suffered from the biases and prejudices of the

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[22] Eskenazi and Frymer-Kensky, *Ruth*, 32.
[23] LaCocque, *Ruth*, 67.

community, or perhaps she knew how the village systems worked and was wary of any help. She may have even been awaiting some response from Boaz in return for her loyalty to him.[24] Boaz's response reveals that he had heard the gossip about her. She returned with Naomi and stayed beside her, even after their husbands' deaths. She gave up her own people and joined Naomi's. Boaz recognizes what she has done and decides to reward her for it, much as YHWH had rewarded him. She had barely spent any time among them, three days, so she needed all of the help which she can get. Some scholars have read this as Boaz taking on and acting in place of YHWH, choosing to reward her for her hesed if nobody else would. There is also, perhaps, a feeling of guilt that he is not helping the widow of his kinsman as he should. After explaining this, Boaz provides Ruth with a blessing as well, hoping that YHWH might take her under his kanaph: wings or skirt.[25] Boaz, then, tentatively accepts her decision to join the community and hopes that YHWH does as well.

During the meal, Boaz takes further notice of Ruth and provides something more for her. He invites her to sit among the men and provides food and wine for her. This act of kindness further steps outside what others in the town did, more than what was expected.[26] He could be courting her, hoping that she might take an interest in him.[27] Fewell and Gunn depict him as a widower whose wife and son died long ago.[28] She was

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[24] Sakenfeld, *Ruth*, 44.

[25] Kanaph has two distinct meanings in the Hebrew Bible. The first one is "Wings," and is often used when describing YHWH's protection of a person or group of people. However, kanaph also means skirt, often giving it a more sexual meaning. It appears as "skirt" when David cuts off the edge of Saul's clothing in a cave, as well as later on in Ruth 3, when Ruth asks Boaz to cover her with his skirt.

[26] Sakenfeld, *Ruth*, 45.

[27] He is getting closer to her both physically and emotionally. That could be kindness, I myself have done such things just for kindness. However, for the purposes of this paper, I am reading some deeper desire into the text.

[28] Fewell and Gunn, *Compromising Redemption*, 40.

available, and many commentaries assume Ruth's beauty (though there is no evidence in the text).[29] His actions here, and elsewhere, are part of what make the story of Ruth sound like an enjoyable romance, where a (probably) older man is kind and the two fall in love. However, the text reads more as two people who can gain from each other. Boaz's gain has not yet been revealed, but it is Ruth's land, which he gains when the two marry. Ruth, on the other hand, does not yet know that Boaz is a kinsman (go'el) and sees him as somebody willing and able to help. Her stated goal, to get food and find a husband, is working out well for her. She eats until she is satisfied, and there is a prominent man showing interest in her. The end of the section contains Boaz's instructions to the young field workers. He gives her extra special treatment. Not only does he tell the men to let her glean among the sheaves (which are specifically not for gleaning), but he also instructs them to take handfuls of grain and lay them out. This final act of good will helps Ruth gather a significant amount of grain, which will surprise Naomi when she sees it. Boaz is going above and beyond what is commanded regarding gleaning, showing hesed to the widows of his kinsman and, potentially, moving him closer to marriage.

RETURNING TO NAOMI (Ruth 2:17-23)

The second chapter of Ruth ends with her return to Naomi, an act which begins to turn Naomi's grief and hopelessness around. Ruth had spent a long day at work, further establishing herself as a good worker. She gleaned until the sun went down, making it hard to see and gather the grain. Then she beat it out and gathered everything up, along with what she had left over from the meal. She had an ephah of barley which, after being

[29] Linafelt, *Ruth*, 30.

separated, is five times more than the two women needed for the day.[30] She takes it home to Naomi, where they would presumably turn the barley into flour. The barley itself would not provide more than bread, but the excess food which Ruth brought from Boaz would have provided a fuller and healthier meal. Ruth's decision to give food to Naomi is meant to demonstrate her hesed to Naomi.

Naomi, surprised and shocked that Ruth brought home so much food, asks where she had been. Up to this point, only the audience has been aware that Ruth was in Boaz's field and that they were kin. Naomi had not shared any information with the hapless Ruth, who had to make her own way. However, upon finding out that Ruth had worked in Boaz's field, Naomi perks up even more.[31] Naomi had shared no information about Bethlehem with Ruth, except possible stories they shared in their ten years together. Ruth had taken the initiative to go out on her own, but now that Naomi knew that Boaz had acted kindly towards Ruth, she would begin taking initiative. If Ruth also revealed to Naomi that Boaz had become wealthy, that might have also played a part in Naomi's newfound hope.[32] Naomi reveals Boaz's connection to them, but this time, she uses the term go'el, invoking his duty to provide for them.[33] Ruth's response is to lie once again. She tells Naomi that Boaz commanded her to stay among the men, to which Naomi, presumably, becomes afraid. One Rabbi, Hanin bar Levi, says that Ruth does not know that "men and women are not meant to inhabit separate social spheres."[34] That is, she is stupid and doesn't understand how God meant for things to be. Or, perhaps, the Moabites

[30] Eskenazi and Frymer Kensky, *Ruth,* 42.
[31] Sakenfeld, *Ruth,* 47.
[32] Ibid., 48.
[33] Ibid., 49.
[34] Eskenazi and Frymer-Kensky, *Ruth,* 45.

did not live by the same social codes and are therefore condemned. This is another interpretation that condemns Ruth and immediately interprets her as worth less, uncultured, and taboo. In the end, Naomi tells Ruth to stay among the women, fearing that the young men might take advantage of her.[35] If Ruth stays away from the young men, and keeps herself pure (as much as she can), then Boaz might take a greater interest. Naomi's welfare is linked to Ruth's now, so if Boaz and Ruth end up together, Naomi's life would be that much better. The two women continue remain, with Naomi hoping and Ruth working, until the end of the barley and wheat harvests. The narrator gives no hint as to what Naomi does with all her time, though it seems as though the two would have worked together.

CONNECTIONS

Ruth 2 works as a whole unit, and the connections to indigenous people cannot be split into individual sections. The whole of Ruth 2 is about how Ruth begins her struggle for survival. Food is a necessary resource for one's health. Many people in the world are starving, all while those of us (myself included) who live in relative wealth have to work to cease overeating. The constant desire for more has pushed many people to the edge of death and starvation, and many over it. The Trail of Tears, the Trail of Death, and many other Trails have forced people off of their homeland and onto a new part of the continent without knowledge or tools necessary for survival. As they were forced off the land, the tribes sought several different means of fighting back. Some went to the US government, some fought through physical force, and some hid their ancestry and married. This was a

[35] The verb which Naomi uses is more akin to violent action than something bothersome, further inferring rape. Sakenfeld, *Ruth*, 50.

common tool for Native women. Many women were light-skinned enough to pass off as white, especially those that came from mixed marriages. These women would marry and have children.[36] There are many examples of women marrying white men so they could regain control of their land, which the US government had taken from them. That is, the government took away their rights to control the land, claiming that the Indians were incompetent. A white person, especially a white man, was automatically competent. The other choice, and the only available to indigenous men, was to have an agent take care of one's finances. Those agents often took advantage of that role and squandered the money on their own desires. Husbands were not flawless either, though the women would often benefit by proximity through marriage, even if the husbands were not a sure choice. Ruth shares this with Native women: marriage to the right man could remove or overshadow doubt about one's heritage. Marrying was like becoming part of the community, just as it was with Mahlon and Chilion. The wife's identity is subsumed into the husband's.

Robin Wall Kimmerer discusses the pain of moving to an entirely new and unknown land in her book, Braiding Sweetgrass. Her tribe was moved around the country several times and had to relearn how to live in harmony with that land each time. Her grandfather grew up in Indian Territory, what would become Oklahoma.[37] Their tribe began near Lake Michigan, but the settlers there forced them down to what would later become Kansas at gunpoint. Many died along this journey and they named it the Trail of Death.[38] Their traditions and daily practices, which were centered around the lake and the ecology which surrounded it, no longer worked in Kansas, which was flat and devoid of

[36] Ellinghaus, *Blood Will Tell,* 131.
[37] Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, 12.
[38] Ibid., 13.

large bodies of water. The nut trees which they used to survive and supplement their food were gone, but they discovered the pecan trees (pigan, in their language), which served the same purpose.[39] As settlers continued pushing the tribe to new areas, the tribe carried their butternuts, black walnuts, hickories, and pecans with them, planting them along the way. They eventually settled in Oklahoma, and I am a beneficiary of their decision to carry their memories and their nuts with them. I grew up in a children's home where my parents worked. Once a year, the on-campus school would cancel classes and everybody would gather black walnuts for a day or two. At the end of our gathering, we would transport them to a local merchant that would buy them from us, shell them, and sell them to a larger corporation. My family moved into my grandparents' old house after my eighth-grade year, and their house had a pecan tree. Whenever pecan season came, we would once again gather the nuts, but this time we shelled them with a hammer and ate them ourselves. The tribes that moved into Indian Territory suffered death, starvation, and disease as they were forced from one land to another, but they brought their memories along with them and provided sustenance and joy to myself and countless others who benefitted from the plants they brought along.

Even whenever the government attempted to provide food, money, and land for people as they settled into new reservations, the process often failed. One of the reasons for this food insecurity was that the posts where the government and traders set up their services were often far away from the people who needed them most.[40] The process towards these failures began in the Supreme Court Cherokee v. Georgia decision, which

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[39] Ibid.
[40] Nichols, *Indians in the United States and Canada*, 178.

established the United States as ward over the tribes, rather than as equals.[41] This is similar to the way that the Levant functioned. The role of the go'el was often similar, a man looking after the finances and land that belonged to widows. Boaz does this in Ruth 4, making deals with Ruth and Naomi's land without their permission or presence. After the Supreme Court decision, the United States gained power over the tribes and tribal sovereignty began to wane.[42] The US became responsible for the management of the tribe, to an extent. This limited how the tribes could control themselves and allowed the government to move the tribes how they saw fit (often with force, military or local). Tribes continued to sign treaties and fight for their rights, but their bargaining position changed. The effects of this decision are broad and many suffered. For example, many Plains Indians survived by trapping beavers and muskrats. The decision of the US government to ignore them and their dietary needs led them to over-trap the animals, hoping that selling more would lead to more money and food. However, this over-trapping destroyed the population: the beaver dams holding their marshes together fell apart and their whole livelihood fell apart.[43]

Many reservations cut native people off from supplies and food which they need to survive. Many reservations in the modern time do not have the resources necessary to maintain a healthy lifestyle. Though many tribes have used casinos, oil fields, and other mechanisms, to make themselves rich, other tribes have had less luck. Starvation, unhealthy food, and other such issues arise among modern reservation lands whenever

[41] Ibid., 216.
[42] Jodi A. Byrd, *Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism* (Minneapolis, UNITED STATES: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 127.
[43] Ibid., 325.

proper food choices are unavailable.[44] There are many cases where reservations are used for farmland, the residents work the land, but the food is shipped off-site and the residents get little recompense or food for their work.[45] Instead, they must rely on the convenience stores near them, which typically contain unhealthy foods. Whenever they travel further to attend farmers' markets and shop abroad, they receive stares and are brushed off.[46] Their condition is unsustainable and unhealthy, leading to massive problems in their community. The chief problem that stems from unhealthy food choices is diabetes (and here I emphasize that the choices available are unhealthy, not the choices they make).[47] They could leave the reservation, but that choice requires finances that many do not have. Not every reservation has this problem, far from it, but some do.

CONCLUSION

Whenever a person or a group of people is moved from one land to another, whether by their choice or not, they often struggle to survive. The people indigenous to the United States had a difficult time surviving in the changing world and power dynamics. They sought to make treaties to provide for their survival, rather than being overrun by colonists. However, each new treaty pushed the tribes onto worse and worse land. Some, like the Osage, happened to end up on oil-rich land which they could use to make themselves wealthy. Others had no luck. Many attempted to survive by renting or

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[44] Valarie Blue Bird Jernigan et al., "Addressing Food Insecurity in a Native American Reservation Using Community-Based Participatory Research," *Health Education Research* 27, no. 4 (August 1, 2012): 645.

[45] Gwen M. Chodur et al., "Food Environments around American Indian Reservations: A Mixed Methods Study," *PLoS ONE* 11, no. 8 (August 25, 2016): 7.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Nicolette I Teufel-Shone et al., "Food Choices and Distress in Reservation-Based American Indians and Alaska Natives with Type 2 Diabetes," *Public Health Nutrition* 21, no. 13 (September 2018): 2367.

selling their land, although that rarely worked out well for them. This is partially because many were not considered competent and therefore could not even control their own finances. The inability to provide for oneself caused mass starvation in many communities. On top of that, many tribes lost several people along the trail to their new reservation, often traveling hundreds of miles, many with guns pointed at them. Death became common.

Modern reservations often have the same problem: an inability to maintain health. Many tribes that had lived in harmony with the land, protected it, and received food consistently from it, can no longer perform the same rituals or harvest the food. Even when they do, the food goes elsewhere and the residents receive little compensation for their work. Such is also the problem with the circumstances that migrants and refugees encounter. They both travel to a new land and search for food. There is little opportunity for them to do much except menial labor. This is due to a language and cultural barrier, along with racism present within the United States. Many minorities face discrimination that creates a dehumanizing effect. The best way to reduce that effect is to assimilate fully, and pass as white whenever possible. However, that also undermines the unique cultural differences that connect them to their past. Such forced assimilation, present in the United States since before its founding, stems from racist attitudes about non-white, non-English people that live as citizens. The focus on assimilation forces people to decide between their families and history or their own survival. That leaves little choice to the newcomer. In addition, racism and stereotypes can make it impossible for full assimilation to happen.

RUTH 3

Compared to the previous chapters in Ruth, there is little action in chapter three. The first chapter rushes through ten years quickly, then rushes through a journey from Moab to Bethlehem, including a split amongst the three women. The second chapter slows down and encompasses a whole day, the meeting of Ruth and Boaz, in addition to Ruth's long day of work and return home. The end of the second chapter rushes to the end of the harvest, where chapter three begins. The whole of chapter three takes only a night, with the main plotline focusing in on a single conversation with Boaz, surrounded by conversations with Naomi. In this chapter, Naomi urges Ruth to go before Boaz in some way and gain his help. The harvest is over, and therefore so is her ability to glean. The conversation is, in fact, a midnight rendezvous on the threshing floor, where Ruth startles (a potentially drunk) Boaz awake. He promises to fulfill his duty as a go'el, as long as a closer kin gives up his right. Ruth must give up her independence for her own and Naomi's survival. She must marry into the clan to find acceptance and the help that this previously unmentioned go'el should have provided.

The connection between Ruth and Indian women in this chapter is the sexualization of "foreign" women and their need to marry into a separate culture to find acceptance and survival. Indian American women have been sexualized repeatedly throughout history. Thomas Jefferson wrote about them as strong and independent, needing strong white men because the Indian men were not forward enough.[1] Even recent history contains this same issue, where movie portrayals of Indian women are often sexualized more than their white counterparts. One instance that springs to mind, and

[1] Donaldson, "Sign of Orpah," 135.

relates directly to this chapter, is a movie where a cowboy is taken in by a tribe. He stays the night, but wakes up with the chief's daughter's head between his legs, sleeping. The chief had tricked him into taking her as a wife. I do not recall the movie, but that imagery has stuck with me. Ruth lies in the same position for Boaz, guiding him into marrying her in the next chapter. She has faced the threat of rape by the men in the field and must find protection through marriage.

CHARACTERS

The characters in chapter three are the same as in chapter two, although their interactions change somewhat. Naomi, who has presumably been relying on Ruth's hesed throughout the entire harvest season, decides to start acting regarding her and Ruth's future. Ruth obeys Naomi for the first time in the story and begins pushing Boaz into taking more interest in her and Naomi's lives. She goes before him and lies at his "feet" until he wakes, and goes above and beyond what Naomi tells her. Boaz finally decides to take steps to take care of the women more than extra helpings of grain. He reads Ruth's action as a marriage proposal, of sorts, and chooses to take her as his ward and wife if the closer kinsman (go'el) gives up his right to the women's land. The interpersonal actions are more important in this chapter, perhaps, than any other.

Naomi has not been silent throughout the narrative, but the majority of her words came in chapter 1. She barely spoke at all at the beginning of chapter two, merely "permitting" Ruth to go out and gather food. This is, presumably, because she was grieving over her lost husband and sons. She had given up already and begun counting herself as among the dead. However, when Ruth brought food home at the end, she

perked up and saw hope for their survival. If Ruth could go out and take care of them, then they might not be a lost cause. The author does not reveal what happened in the months between chapter two and three, but one would presume that the two talked some. However, the end of the harvest meant the end of their ability to survive. Nobody but Boaz had deemed to help them out.[2] Naomi, then takes it upon herself to push Ruth to ask Boaz for more help. Fewell and Gunn read this as a final act of desperation to get somebody to marry Ruth, who nobody else would marry because she was a Moabite.[3] The rendezvous between Ruth and Boaz was not the plan of either, but Naomi's. Though she might set the night up for Ruth's survival, her own survival was also at stake.[4] She was too old for marriage by this time, presumably having gone through menopause, so she could provide no heirs. Ruth, on the other hand, still had the prospect of a marriage before her. In addition, Naomi's referral to Boaz as a go'el means that she had some idea of how to get Ruth and him together. She played with the meaning of the word, but it worked in her favor. She sends Ruth out to him and, upon her return in the morning, assures her that Boaz will do everything as quickly as possible.

Ruth listens to and obeys Naomi for the first time in the story. Her only words in chapter one are specifically refusing to follow Naomi's orders to return to her mother's house, instead vehemently promising to join Naomi on her journey back to Bethlehem. In the second chapter, Ruth tells Naomi she is going out to the field to glean, and upon her return, relays to Naomi what had happened. She even lies to Naomi about Boaz's command about following the women rather than the men. Either something in their

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[2] Eskenazi and Frymer-Kensky, *Ruth,* 48.
[3] Fewell and Gunn, *Compromising Redemption*, 51.
[4] Lacocque, *Ruth,* 89.

relationship changed in the intervening months, or Naomi's instructions fit what Ruth had already planned. Ruth lies to Naomi again at the end of the chapter, so the greatest likelihood is that Ruth already had something in mind. Ruth's connection to Boaz, however, strengthens. She lies at his "feet" and tells Boaz to spread his kanaph over her. Kanaph, here, is more often read as "skirt" than wings, as it is translated in chapter 2. This "skirt" imagery is both a sexual and forceful in its reinterpretation of Boaz's blessing.[5] The blessing wherein he asks that YHWH spread his kanaph over Ruth. She pushes him to take on the role of a go'el and spends the night with him, leaving early in the morning. She brings food for Naomi, potentially a sign from Boaz about what he will do, a bride-price of sorts.

Boaz, on the other hand, seems to just go along with Ruth and Naomi's plan. He might not have ever meant to marry Ruth at all, assuming she would instead go with another man. However, he is rich and has power within the community, so he does make sense as a husband when the goal is survival. He is harvesting, a time where drinking and parties were common. The men stayed the night on the harvest floor, so Ruth's appearance surprises him. He keeps her presence secret, but does ask her to stay the night. Upon waking, he gives her the grain and sends her to Naomi, promising to do as he promised that night. Yet, his goodness might not be all that many make it out to be. Ruth may be a business proposition for him, a way to procure her land, the land that formerly belonged to Elimelech. She also could provide an heir for him. Or, he could simply be a kind man that will take care of them and is genuinely honored that she is going to him over the younger men.

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[5] Eskenazi and Frymer-Kensky, *Ruth,* 48.

NAOMI'S PLAN (Ruth 3:1-6)

Ruth and Naomi have been surviving on the food that Ruth gathers at Boaz's fields for several months, assuming that they did not arrive in Bethlehem towards the end of the harvest. This also leads to the assumption that the two have had several chances to speak and make plans for the future, knowing that the harvest would eventually finish and they would be left to starve once again, having little to show for Ruth's hard work. There is also the assumption that, while Ruth was going out to glean every day, Naomi had been alone in the house. There are a variety of reasons for this, the most likely being that Naomi is older and unable to do the hard work of gleaning, which requires bending down and staying low for long periods of time to pick up what was left on the ground. Therefore, Naomi likely had time even more time to think alone about what the two should do. She had already revealed her hope in Boaz as a go'el and would have pursued that topic in her plans.[6] She might have even discussed Ruth's future with Boaz, having gotten nowhere or having laid out a plan about which Ruth knew nothing.[7]

Naomi reveals her plan for Ruth with the words, "My daughter, I must find a home for you, where you will be well provided for" (3:1). The term, "home," is not actually home, but rather "resting place." This is important, because home or house is a different word, this is not like, "your mother's house." Instead, this word emphasizes a place where Ruth can rest from working. Ibn Ezra adds to Naomi's words, "for a woman

[6] Naomi would have spent a great deal of time thinking about what role Boaz would play in their lives. She could have discussed a marriage between Ruth and Boaz with him before sending her, with the rendezvous serving as a symbol for her agreement. Nielsen, *Ruth*, 67.

[7] Sakenfeld *Ruth*, 55, denies this possibility on the grounds that Boaz owed the family nothing because he was not a *go'el*. However, I still put this possibility forward because I see nothing wrong with Naomi being forward as she was in the first chapter.

has no rest until she is married."[8] Though she says, "for you," Naomi also means for her. Ruth's promise in chapter one, to "go where you go" has been flipped on its head. Ruth is the provider now, though Naomi knows the people. Without Ruth, Naomi is nothing and cannot take care of herself, so she would certainly die of starvation. Now that Naomi no longer counts herself as dead and wants to keep living, she needs to assure her own resting place as well.[9] Naomi proceeds to provide Ruth with important information regarding how she will find that security. Boaz and his young men would be winnowing the barley that day and night, and possibly the next few days. The threshing floor was a place where the cultural norms and taboos held less control over the workers.[10] Winnowing meant partying, or rather, lots of food, beer, and potentially prostitutes.[11] Boaz would be at his most pliable at that time, full of alcohol and having a good time celebrating the harvest. Therefore, Naomi tells Ruth to wash, put on her clothing and perfume, and go to the threshing floor. The Midrash for Ruth reads this washing as a purification from idolatry, another part of the long assimilation and conversion narrative history of Ruth.[12] There she should wait until everyone goes to bed and Boaz falls asleep. Ruth should then uncover Boaz's "feet" and wait for him to tell her what to do. Ruth promptly promises to do everything Naomi told her and then does them.

An important element in the story is the reason I keep putting quotation marks around "feet." This is an idiomatic issue and a "Christian virtue" issue. In fact, many ancient translators or commentators translate "uncover his feet" as "cover yourself,"

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[8] Eskenazi and Frymer-Kensky, *Ruth,* 49.
[9] Ibid., *Ruth,* 50.
[10] Ibid., *Ruth,* 51.
[11] Linafelt, *Ruth,* 49.
[12] Eskenazi and Frymer-Kensky, *Ruth,* 51.

which is a wildly inaccurate, though more virtuous, reading.[13] The Hebrew language is full of idiomatic phrases for sex and sexual acts. One of those idioms is "feet," which often means the person's genitalia.[14] When paired with the term for uncover, גלת, also has strong sexual connotations.[15] Therefore, when Naomi tells Ruth to uncover his feet, she is actually telling Ruth to uncover his penis and lie there. Boaz could read this any number of ways, most of which were good for Ruth and Naomi when planning their survival. The first is that he and Ruth had performed coitus, therefore forcing Boaz to marry Ruth, or hope that she does not become pregnant and act as Tamar did with Judah. Another is that Ruth is open to him, sexually, and might "do what he says," like Naomi suggested.[16] The third is the way that he eventually understands it, that Ruth is open to him and willing to marry him.[17] Each of these uses Ruth's body and sexuality as a tool for seducing Boaz and providing safety for the two women. That is not a condemnation, but simply a statement of how Ruth continues to use her body for survival. The women used their bodies to survive in a patriarchal society.

MIDNIGHT RENDEZVOUS (Ruth 3:7-13)

This section begins focused on Boaz, who has just spent a significant period of time "eating and drinking." This, as previously mentioned, meant that he was drinking beer and eating lots of food.[18] He would have been tired after the festivities, and slightly

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[13] Nielsen, *Ruth*, 69.
[14] Koosed, *Gleaning Ruth*, 91.
[15] Eskenazi and Frymer-Kensky, *Ruth,* 53.
[16] Linafelt, *Ruth*, 49.
[17] Nielsen, *Ruth*, 69.
[18] The terms used imply feasting, rather than eating a normal meal; see Eskenazi and Frymer-Kensky, *Ruth,* 56.

drunk.[19] The text says that "his heart became good," which, in Esther and elsewhere, means that Boaz was drunk.[20] After Boaz goes to sleep, Ruth walks over to him, uncovers his "feet," and lies down there. This is where I draw the image of the chieftain's daughter lying with her head directly next to the cowboy's genitals, a sign that clearly demonstrates sexual desire and, quite possibly, that they performed a sexual act.[21] Some commentators add that Ruth also uncovers herself, further creating a sexual atmosphere.[22] In addition, the word for "softly," which describes how Ruth went, is בלט (balot). Linafelt claims that this is an intentionally reference to Lot on the part of the narrator, as the same word can mean "in/as Lot." (ba-lot).[23] This is, she, like Lot's daughters, went into a drunk person for sexual purposes, or allowed him to go into her. At some point in the night, after Ruth positions herself, Boaz wakes, having been startled by something, which was likely Ruth. He could have turned in his sleep or awoken to use the restroom, alcohol does that to a person. When he wakes up, he sees Ruth and immediately asks for her identity. She responds, once again calling herself his servant and naming herself. She proceeds to ask him to spread his kanaph over her, referencing his blessing over her that YHWH might spread YHWH's kanaph over her. The translation this time, however, clearly means skirt or garment, rather than wings. The spreading of one's kanaph is also associated with marriage, particularly when it is a man doing so for a woman.[24] She continues calling him the go'el for their family.

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[19] Linafelt, *Ruth,* 51.

[20] Rashi and other rabbinic scholars, read that "Boaz's heart was made 'good' by his study of Torah." Eskenazi and Frymer-Kensky, *Ruth,* 56.

[21] Fewell and Gunn, *Compromising Redemption*, 5**5.**

[22] Eskenazi and Frymer-Kensky, *Ruth,* 57.

[23] Linafelt, *Ruth,* 52.

[24] Eskenazi and Frymer-Kensky, *Ruth,* 58.

It is important to note, one final time, that Boaz was a go'el, not beholden to levirate marriage. A go'el was supposed to take care of the children and widows when their father/husband died. This could be done through a variety of means, though in this story it is through the buying of the deceased's land from the women who cared for it. As far as levirate marriage goes, the requirement for somebody to become beholden to such marriage limited. The whole process can only begin if an elder brother dies, especially the eldest brother, and his wife had not yet bore him a child. In that specific case, the next oldest brother would take her into his home and impregnate her, if he could. The inheritance of the eldest brother, the one who received the most, would be passed onto the son of a surrogate father, with the widow/mother being the link between the two. Boaz was not Mahlon or Chilion's younger brother, he was older than both of them and only vaguely related to Elimelech through an unknown means. At best, Boaz was fulfilling his duty by providing extra food to Naomi and Ruth and protecting Ruth while in his field. Ruth, then, was pushing him to go further, to fulfill the blessing he gave her when she met. Boaz was to take on the role of YHWH's hand, doing YHWH's will.

Boaz decides to respond positively, thankful that she had chosen to be with him (and possibly thankful that he had done nothing that could damage his reputation). He again calls YHWH's blessing upon her and thanks her for not going after younger men, rich or poor. Sure, he was a rich man, but he was much older.[25] This is where Boaz's feelings toward her show a little. It seems as though he had secretly been interested in her the whole time, and perhaps that is why he had ordered special treatment for her in his

[25] The Jewish tradition is that Boaz was 80 years old; see Lacocque, *Ruth*, 98.

field.[26] She had no responsibility to choose him, as he was not a levir.[27] She was free to marry whomever she chose. The romance of the story quickly appears as he thanks her, if it was not apparent already. Although, it is important to note that she never offered marriage to Boaz, his actions in that regard are his own and build from his own assumptions. The act of lying next to a man's genitals seems pretty obvious, but there is no evidence that Ruth desired Boaz at all.[28] She came from another land and swore to become a member of Naomi's community and tie herself to Naomi forever. She obeyed Naomi's command about what to do regarding Boaz, but that does not mean she understood the full import. Even if she did, which was likely, she might have done so simply out of her own survival instincts. The love story seems one-sided, with Boaz wanting Ruth and Ruth making the best decision for her continued survival.

Boaz continues with his speech, telling her to not be afraid and that he will do as she asks. That is, he will redeem her even though it was not required of him. He says, "All the people of my town know that you are a woman of noble character" (Ruth 3:11), reminding her once again about what he had said at their first meeting. However, much to his chagrin, there is a redeemer who is closer. That is, and I repeat intentionally, not somebody who needed to marry her, but somebody who should buy her land and provide for her livelihood. Yet, if that person gave up his right as a go'el, then Boaz would gain in both aspects. He would not only marry Ruth, but would also acquire her field, legally. In acting out his role as a go'el, he could make himself look better by taking on a poor woman that the other man would not. This would both bolster his reputation and provide

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[26] Linafelt, *Ruth,* 57.
[27] Eskenazi and Frymer-Kensky, *Ruth,* 62.
[28] Koosed, *Gleaning Ruth,* 90.

a wife. However, that is a discussion for Ruth 4. He asks Ruth to stay with him for the night and promises to work the whole issue out in the morning. His last request, that she spend the night with him, is somewhat alarming and might damage his reputation. If anybody saw them, his reputation would be shattered. He had been kind to her the whole harvest season, the town would have good reason to talk if they found out that the honorable Boaz had slept with a Moabite woman. Another interpretation is that it was dangerous for her to travel at night, especially because she was a Moabite woman.[29] This reading would further present Ruth as somebody that, even though the whole town knows is honorable, would find acceptance difficult. The men still do not respect her position within the community, though they respect her actions. In the end, she is still a Moabite.

This scene plays on the idea that Moabite women were sexually deviant and would lead men astray and into sin. The chief story is that of Lot and his two daughters, who get him drunk and then have sex with him. This whole scene is a repetition of that scene, though the narrator never mentions any sexual activity. Just like Lot's daughters, Ruth waits until the man is fast asleep. He is drunk and less likely to notice the movements of a woman getting near him and up under his kanaph. Like Lot, he might have even had sex with her unknowingly, his mind clouded in a stupor that damaged his ability to process what was happening. The sexual wiles of the Moabite women are clearly a theme. The author might have intentionally left out any mention of sexual activity as an attempt to show that Ruth was a Moabite that was pure and would not lead Boaz astray. In that case, Boaz and Ruth simply sleep together, no idiom intended. This seems to be the narrator's purpose, especially whenever read in light of David's

[29] Eskenazi and Frymer-Kensky, *Ruth,* 64.

genealogy at the end. Yet, even the play against stereotype reinforces the stereotype. In order for Ruth to be different and special, the other Moabite women had to fit into the stereotype. This sexualizes and dehumanizes them. Orpah has historically suffered the same literary fate as the other Moabite women. The whole process sexualizes foreign women.

RETURNING TO NAOMI (Ruth 3:14-18)

The final pericope of chapter three ends the same way as chapter two, a conversation where Ruth tells Naomi what had happened in her time away. This acts as a sort of book-end for the night and creates the dynamic between the two women. Naomi has taken the place of Ruth's mother and, possibly, Ruth's father. Ruth comes home and shares her day with Naomi. Naomi looks after Ruth's welfare and provides advice for her future. However, this section does not begin with the two women, but instead begins when Boaz and Ruth wake up. They must wake up early so that the men around them are still asleep or too hungover to notice that Boaz and Ruth were together that night. They were lucky that nobody got up to use urinate during the night, otherwise there might have been an issue. Boaz realizes, perhaps even more when he woke up than when he invited her to join him.

Boaz gives Ruth six measures of barley as she leaves. There are any number of reasons why he does this, though three stick out to me. The first is that Boaz was trying to be kind again, giving out of his abundance to people in need, especially the woman who would one day become his future wife. The second reason derives from his warning that nobody should see them together. Boaz gives Ruth the barley so that it looks like she had

gone to Boaz for help, early in the morning. That would explain why she was walking through town so early and, if anybody saw them in the morning, why they were together. The third and final reason was as a sign to Naomi about what his plan was. The text never reveals his plan to marry Ruth, only his plan to redeem her. The redemption could take many forms, although the author has been hinting at marriage the entire time. The three women are all widows and Naomi sends them back to find husbands because she cannot provide one for them. Later, Ruth says that she will try to find favor in the eyes of somebody whom she will follow after. Boaz is especially kind to her in every interaction they have, and they sleep together. Ruth even went so far as to lie next to Boaz's genitals. The grain, then seems to be connected as well: a bride price or a symbol of things to come for Naomi and Ruth.

When Naomi asks Ruth how everything went, Ruth explains everything. The Midrash reads Naomi's question as, "Are you still a virgin or a married women," to which Ruth replies, "A virgin."[30] This, again, steers the Midrash away from reading any sexual activity between the two, while also pushing for Ruth's assimilation into the society. Ruth explains that Boaz gave her the grain, and lies to Naomi telling her that Boaz said, "Don't go back to your mother-in-law empty-handed" (3:17). Ruth wants Naomi to think that everything went according to plan and that Boaz specifically meant for the grain to go to Naomi, though he said no such thing. And who knows, maybe Naomi had planned things with Boaz and Boaz did actually mean for the grain to go to Naomi. Yet, after receiving the barley, Naomi is assured that Boaz will take care of

[30]Eskenazi and Frymer-Kensky, *Ruth,* 67.

everything as he said he would. In fact, Boaz left to go do so as soon as Ruth left the threshing floor.

CONNECTIONS

The connection I would like to focus on in this chapter is one that is repeated throughout the book of Ruth: the sexualization and dehumanization of women from other peoples. The specific act that ties them together in my mind is the movie I have mentioned before and how it replicates the same actions taken by Ruth. Ruth needs a protector and Boaz would be a kind enough husband with plenty of money. For the chieftain's daughter, she wants to leave the tribe and explore. In addition, she is a kind of gift to the cowboy, though I cannot remember why. He spent the night partying and smoking something with the tribe, whereas Boaz drank beer with the men who worked for him. Both men wake up to find a woman's head next to their genitalia and are startled. The Indian woman calls the cowboy her husband, but he angrily asks the chief how it happened. Apparently he never had sex with her, but she crawled into his bed while he slept off his high. Ruth, also sneaks in and forces Boaz into a corner, calling him her go'el. Ruth's actions can be read through the lens of survival, though the Indian woman's cannot. Yet, each plays upon stereotypes that are already present in the culture. Ruth is a Moabite woman, the descendant of an incestuous relationship. The Indian woman in the movie plays upon the same stereotypes.

Ruth's connections go back even further, to Ruth 2, where there is a fear that the men working in the fields would molest her in some way. She was a foreigner, so they thought of her as something less. Indian women have had the same problems throughout

time, often depicted as somebody that needed to be shown how to act and submit to white men. Thomas Jefferson explicitly used the Moabites to describe the American Indians, connecting Ruth to Native women.[31] The general consensus of the time was that Indian women were especially sexually forward. He blames the Indian male for being too submissive to them, specifically thinking about the matriarchal tribes. Women in these matrilineal tribes had a variety of means for finding their independence. They could own homes, take part in tribal decisions, and perform various tasks that European colonists considered male-only activities.[32] Even in most patrilineal communities, the women had the ability to own property and lived mostly in equality with their male counterparts.[33] Many tribes maintained that tradition through to the modern day, and I had friends growing up whose grandmother is a chief. Other than the story of Lot, the Hebrew Bible contains other stories of problems relating to Moabite women. These women are known to lead men astray and away from YHWH. They are hypersexualized and threaten to ruin Israel.[34] Indian women were the same, women that needed to be tamed and brought into European culture. The government took various steps to force assimilation upon them and marriage was just one way that white men could gain control. In combination with this stereotype, and the undecidedness as to their status as human, or people, led to the rape and oversexualization of many women.

The rape of Indian women is a main theme in many films in the western genre, especially in the 50s-70s and other films that copy those plots. Many of the white male

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[31] Donaldson, "Sign of Orpah," 135.

[32] Maryann Oshana, "Native American Women in Westerns: Reality and Myth," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 6, no. 3 (1981): 46.

[33] Ibid., 46.

[34] Donaldson, "Sign of Orpah," 134.

heroes begin their hero's journey in an attempt to gain revenge for the rape of an Indian woman, either their wife or just random women.[35] The Indian women depicted are usually devoid of agency, either working as a slave or simply meat for men to rape as a plot point. They are often compared to animals because they are "savages," and conquered savages at that.[36] In other portrayals, such as Little Big Man, they are extremely promiscuous and the main character must have sex with his wife's sisters to please everyone.[37] Movies often portray these women as dumb, something akin to animals, and something that needs a white man's touch to learn and become better.

Despite the movies, many Indian women and their descendants suffered from marriage to white men or rape by white men. Many Indians and white people believed that for Indians to survive, they needed to intermarry.[38] As soon as the women left their reservation, they were placed in the care of the men. If they learned how to read, write, and fully assimilated, they were deemed not Indian enough to receive any government funds paid to their tribe. If they remained with the tribe, they were considered incompetent and were not allowed to take care of their land or their own finances.[39] There was no way for these women to win. The best chance for many of them was to stay in their own tribe where they could find more equal treatment. In addition to the problems the women faced, their children faced even more. The concept of blood quanta came into use and defined what "percent Indian" one was. If a person was 50% or less Indian, they were not considered Indian. Many were even considered not-Indian at 75% or more,

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[35] Oshana, "Native American Women," 49.
[36] Ibid., 48.
[37] Ibid., 49.
[38] Nichols, *Indians in the United States and Canada*, 201.
[39] Grann, *Killers of the Flower Moon*, 246.

depending on the officer in charge. These people were ineligible for the role, but I have explained that process already. An extra point of emphasis here is that the children of raped women were often unable to name their father, and so were immediately taken off the role. Naturally, the rape was terrible, but the addition of cutting off the children of that rape from any financial assistance in the future made the entire situation worse.

Indian women that managed to maintain their tribal affiliation and marry white men had other problems with which to contend. The book, Killers of the Flower Moon tells the story of the Osage Murders in the early 1900s. The Osage, having bought their land rather than take government land, were able to maintain hold of their property no matter what the government did.[40] They found large reservoirs of oil on the property, and though they sold the land rights in many cases, they maintained the mineral rights to the land.[41] This made them wealthy and the envy of the country. Many white men decided to live among them and marry the women if they could, thereby gaining the ability to control the money. Several developed a conspiracy to slowly kill Osage women related to Molly Burkhart, whose husband was in on the plot.[42] As her relatives died off, their mineral rights all went to Molly, who was also poisoned by the doctor. Her husband, his relatives, and their friends, were all found out in the case that established the FBI as a permanent institute. Yet, the issue went deeper than her family. The FBI only came in because almost every other person in the area was corrupt or forced out of the area. The judges took bribes to hide crimes, as did the police. The banks and trading posts took bribes and slowly took custody of almost every Indian person's finances because the

[40] Grann, *Killers of the Flower Moon,* 44.
[41] Ibid., 59.
[42] Ibid., 240.

government deemed them incompetent for being Indian. White people would lie about their debts to and from Indians, and the banks would change the record to fit the story. Above everything, there are innumerable women that were murdered by their husbands for their money, and by innumerable, I mean that their deaths were covered up and many records erased, so counting them is literally impossible. Though Boaz seems like a kind person, and may well have been, he still had Ruth's property in mind. When he marries her, he receives the property and the wealth that might develop from its cultivation. Boaz was a business-minded man, after all, being honorable and capable of paying several workers to harvest his fields. However, it does not seem that he would stoop as low as the men who took land and rights from their indigenous wives.

CONCLUSION

Sexualization and dehumanization of Indian women was and is deeply embedded into the culture of the United States. Even the founding story of Pocahontas is built upon misconstrued notions that happened hundreds of years ago. The rape of Indian women has been a part of culture since European colonists began interacting with the tribes. They looked upon Indians as less than themselves, as savage beasts that needed correcting. Ruth also likely suffered a similar issue during her life in Bethlehem. Sure, she would eventually go on to be the great grandmother of David, but she didn't live to see his ascension to the throne, and if she had, it doesn't lessen how terrible such treatment would be. Yet, she persisted in her work and became known as an honorable woman. She had to give up her gods, her culture, and almost everything that formerly identified her to do so. Yet, whenever Indian women did that, they found only more problems waiting for

them. They were cut off from their tribe and their independence. They often needed white men so they could have any hint of independence due to the policies of the government. They also, like Ruth, lost many of their children to the community they willingly moved into. Their children grew up cut off from their own past and they had to act as though they did not come from "savages."

Many women that come from a minority group in the United States, especially migrants, have similar struggles. If they cannot speak the language, they have difficulty finding a job. If they have different cultural practices, such as wearing a hijab, they face discrimination from many. The sexualization and dehumanization of women runs deep in culture of the United States, both foreign and not. Rape is used as a plot device and a tool of entertainment. Movies throughout the 1900s depicted heroes, lawmen, and bandits all finding pleasure in sexually abusing non-white women. The women were conquered people, and would be conquered over and over both physically and in the media.[43] The view of Indians and other groups as savages creates a culture of hostility and degradation.

[43] Oshana, "Native American Women," 50.

RUTH 4

Despite the heavy emphasis on the dynamic between Ruth and Naomi throughout the first three chapters, the focus on Ruth promoting herself and reaching out for the survival of both herself and her mother-in-law, Ruth 4 silences both of the women. Neither of them speaks, neither of them acts. Instead, everything is done to or for them. They have been the focus throughout the book, their relationship to each other has ended and begun both Ruth 2 and 3, and is a major focus in the first chapter. Yet, now that Boaz has decided to extend his hand and accept Ruth (and therefore Naomi), they are subsumed under his identity. They no longer have a choice in the community, they are a part of Boaz's family. In exchange for his help in their assimilation into the community, he receives their land (as a go'el), Ruth maintains her promise to give up her people and her gods to travel with Naomi, and Ruth loses her son to the community. Ruth's one action, which is a particularly passive action, is that she gives birth to Obed. However, upon his birth, the women of the town take him and give him to Naomi as his nurse, so that he might suckle at the breast of a non-foreign woman. Ruth must give up everything to survive in this different land. She lost her son to the community, lost her independence, lost her land, her agency, her speech, and must submit to Boaz.

Native Americans also lost much of their independence as the United States encroached upon their territory and forced governmental decisions upon people who had little say in those decisions. The Indians found it best to work within the system and try to establish treaties to protect their land, but the US government consistently broke those treaties or tried to establish new treaties and laws to gain further control. What was once tribally-owned land became privately-owned land. Many Indians that owned that land

were kept from controlling it or renting it out for their own benefit, with white agents taking control of those assets for their own gain. Many children from the tribes were taken from their families and placed in boarding schools hundreds of miles away so they could receive an English education. For those students who remained in their home town, speaking and learning in their native languages was illegal and punished. This created the modern problem of dying tribal languages. Many communities are now actively teaching their native languages to the younger generations and those who were cut off in various ways. The decisions made by the government split up families and cut people off from their land and their culture. This is analogous to Ruth's life, just trying to survive while playing by somebody else's rules. Eventually, Ruth loses her land and her child to the assimilation project in Jerusalem, and the Indians lost their children and land to the assimilation project in the United States. It is important to note that Ruth had a choice and the Indians did not, their struggles remain similar.

CHARACTERS

The two main characters upon which the story focused throughout the story thus far have become relegated to minor roles, much like the overseer in Ruth 2, only they no longer speak. The story is no longer about them, but about Boaz and how he gains land and a marriage to Ruth. The two main characters are Boaz and an unnamed person that has a closer kinship connection and greater responsibility than him. There are also the elders of the village that gather around for the contract that passes between the two men. At some point, the women of the town make another appearance, taking the child from Ruth and giving him to Naomi, saying that the child is hers and is a replacement for her

lost sons. Obed, the boy, plays no part in the story except at the end. Obed is the conduit that connects Ruth to David, who is ultimately the final major character in the story. David also does nothing in the story, but his actions and existence outside of the book of Ruth are read through the genealogy that connects them.[1] The genealogy explains the reason the author tells the story. That is, Ruth does not matter on her own, nor does Naomi or Boaz. They only matter due to their connection to the king of both Judah and Israel, whose descendants ruled Judah until the time when Babylon and Assyria came and brought them into exile. This final chapter covers over everyone.

Boaz is the main character in Ruth 4, and his actions help the reader understand how he had become such a great and well-respected man in the community. He is both cunning and caring, seeking to help Ruth and Naomi while also bringing Ruth in as his wife.[2] He goes before the elders and actively respects the law, calling the closer kinsman (go'el) to him and showing him the duty, which had been neglected by both. Boaz had done some of the other man's job by helping Ruth and Naomi with their food, news which had likely gone around. So, Boaz calls out the man and asks him to help. This man, whom Fewell and Gunn depict as in debt and struggling, begrudgingly accepts the responsibility that Boaz lays out before him.[3] They also portray Boaz as somebody gifted in public relations, knowing how to move and control a crowd to make himself look the best.[4] Then, after accepting the responsibility, which is more land in return for payment,

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[1] Saxegaard, *Character Complexity*, 72.

[2] It is important to note there that Boaz showed no interest in Naomi or the land until the night Ruth approached him. This could either be because he was waiting for a good opportunity or because the land was a good way for him to work out a marriage to Ruth. Linafelt, *Ruth*, 69.

[3] Fewell and Gunn, *Compromising Redemption*, 58.

[4] Ibid., 91.

Boaz reveals that he would marry Ruth.[5] This upsets the kinsman because the marriage would hurt the go'el. When Boaz marries Ruth, which is something that neither have to do, and the two have a son, the land which the go'el paid for would revert to the son's portion. Boaz would gain that land to add to his own. In addition, the money paid for the land would enter Boaz's possession as the new husband of Ruth. Boaz's use of the law makes him look clever, whereas his marriage to Ruth, a foreigner in need, makes him look kind. He cleverly adds to his own land holdings, and all the elders agree.

BOAZ TAKES ACTION (Ruth 4:1-12)

Ruth 4 picks up with Boaz after he and Ruth split up in Ruth 3. He had just awoken and sent Ruth away with six measures of grain. They had slept together and formulated a plan for Ruth and Naomi's survival. Perhaps her use of the term go'el sparked an idea in him for how to move forward. He may have genuinely loved her,[6] or maybe he just saw an opportunity to expand his land holdings. Naomi was correct: he did not rest until he settled the matter. He leaves the threshing floor, where his hired men are presumably in a drunken slumber or slowly waking, and heads to the city gate. The city gate is a place of male power, where major contracts were made. It was also where people were welcomed into the city.[7] This is where the individual families connected with each other and decided matters that would affect the whole clan.[8] The men who had means spent much time at the city gate, talking about whatever they felt like and make

[5] The root letters create the sense that Boaz would marry Ruth, but the Masoretic vowel pointing make the word look like Boaz is saying the kinsman will marry Ruth. I follow the root letters in my reading of the text.

[6] Saxegaard, *Character Complexity*, 101.

[7] Linafelt, *Ruth*, 64.

[8] Eskenazi and Frymer-Kensky, *Ruth*, 70.

deals for their products with each other. Boaz sits to wait on his kinsman, who would surely show up to the town gate to do some business and to show up as a member of the town. Just as Boaz sits, the go'el walks up, in the same manner that Ruth just happened to stumble onto Boaz's field.

Boaz calls the go'el over to him and also calls for ten elders.[9][10] Boaz tells the kinsman that Naomi is going to sell her plot of land which belonged to Elimelech. It is important to note that Naomi has said no such thing throughout the story. Boaz is already using her land as though it were his, choosing to take a chance and sell it without her permission.[11] It is also important to note that the land should have been Ruth's. When Elimelech died, the land passed onto his eldest son, Mahlon or Chilion. When they died, the land passed onto the brother and then to the brothers' wives. Orpah left, which meant that Ruth had control over the land, rather than Naomi, who possibly never knew about the land at all.[12] Despite Boaz's praise of Ruth's hesed, she was still an outsider, so everyone viewed the land as Naomi's. Alternatively, Elimelech sold the land to somebody not in his family, and Boaz is stating that Naomi wishes to buy the land back and sell it to another.[13] Ruth was not allowed an inheritance within the community. The best case is that Ruth had given Boaz permission to sell the land, who took it upon himself to use Naomi's name to lend the sale some higher level of respect.

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[9] The ten elders align with the ten years in Moab and the ten generations given later. Linafelt, *Ruth*, 65.

[10] Before the time of the kings, elders oversaw the law and maintained order. They were necessary to carry out a trade in the responsibility of a *go'el*. Eskenazi and Frymer-Kensky, *Ruth*, 72.

[11] There is evidence that women were allowed to own, buy, and sell property in the later possible period when Ruth was written. See Eskenazi and Frymer-Kensky, 73.

[12] Linafelt, *Ruth*, 67.

[13] Sakenfeld, *Ruth*, 71.

Boaz proceeds to tell the go'el about the sale and that he thought that they should, as go'el, take some responsibility for the land. If the man wanted to redeem it, he could, but if not, Boaz would.[14] Fewell and Gunn describe this scene as a way of pushing the kinsman into a corner. They describe his as poor and needing money. He could not afford to buy the land and intentionally ignored the two women.[15] However, Boaz brought the sale in front of the ten elders, so the man had no choice unless he wanted to lose honor. There are other potential reasons why the man had not yet helped the two women. Whatever his reasons and financial status, he agrees to buy the land. At this point, Boaz reveals the twist: he will marry Ruth (or perhaps that the go'el must marry).[16] The end result is the same, the man reneges on his decision to redeem the land because, "I might endanger my own estate" (Ruth 4:6). The reading of how it might endanger his own estate depends upon how one reads who marries Ruth. The NRSV translates it as, "You will acquire Ruth." If the man already has a wife and heir, then marrying Ruth and raising a child with her might create problems within his own family and with how his inheritance is split. He might care for Elimelech's land, but if Ruth has a son, it would not be added to his child's inheritance.[17] Or, perhaps, the ground is far from the best and would not be useful to him and avoiding marriage to a foreign woman is a good excuse. It is also important to note, for the final time, that being a go'el does not require a person to marry their kinsman's widow, that is specifically for the levir. It would not make sense

[14] The NRSV and other translations make it as though Boaz were still talking to the redeemer, but Linafelt notes that the Hebrew reads more as though Boaz were making an aside to the elders. Linafelt, *Ruth*, 66.

[15] Fewell and Gunn, *Compromising Redemption*, 59..

[16] The text is unclear. The vowels present in the Masoretic text conflict with the consonants. The vowels make it sound as though the closer *go'el* would have to marry Ruth, though the consonants point to Boaz.

[17] Linafelt, *Ruth*, 68.

that the man would acquire Ruth as a wife, that is not part of the deal. So, for my own reading, I translate the text as "I will acquire Ruth." In that case, the land which the man bought from Naomi would revert to Naomi/Ruth's descendants as soon as they were born. This is clever on Boaz's part and also makes him look even better in the community.[18] Boaz was an honorable and respected man, and this reveals how. He is both clever and kind, and he knows how the politics of the village works. He is taking on what the go'el would not.[19] The go'el's duty to Elimelech was to provide for those who could not provide for themselves, and he had avoided that duty for a while.[20] He rejects his duty to the dead even when Boaz brings it before him, even though Boaz clearly set a trap for him. This would lessen the man's standing amongst the village. In addition, Boaz's decision to bring a foreign woman into his home is now seen in a more positive light, as he is doing something that the go'el refused. He is fulfilling the duty that somebody else should have, and going a step further by actually providing an heir for Elimelech.

At this point, the two settle the contract that they created by the exchange of a sandal. The author takes time out to explain that this is how contracts were settled at the time, placing the author at a significantly later date where people would need that explained. It also shows a sign of further confusion regarding the difference between a go'el and a levir. The shoe exchange was meant to take place when a brother gave up his right as a levir (Deut. 25:7-9), not when a go'el gave up his right to redeem.[21] Upon

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[18] Fewell and Gunn, *Compromising Redemption*, 60.

[19] There is evidence that, in societies at that point in time, such actions would accrue honor and status among the community. Eskenazi and Frymer-Kensky, *Ruth*, 75.

[20] Saxegaard points out that this might be because Boaz had also neglected his duty, so he was publicly blaming the nearer kinsman as a way to shift his own shame. See Saxegaard, *Character Complexity*, 162.

[21] Linafelt, *Ruth*, 71.

finishing this transaction, Boaz turns to the elders who witnessed everything, and possibly the surrounding crowd,[22] and announces what has happened. He phrases it in a way that also reveals much more information than the narrator had previously given. The first is something already stated, that he is buying the land from Naomi, but now states that although he is buying the land from Naomi, it is the land of the men of her family. And, again, Naomi never told him she would buy the land, but he will instead acquire it simply through his marriage to Ruth. He hides the truth as he speaks around his plan to marry Ruth and acquire the land in whatever fashion it worked out. He also reveals that Ruth was Mahlon's wife, which is the first time the audience hears which brother she had married. Boaz continues to lay out why he is doing such a thing, which is, "so that his name will not disappear from among his family or from his hometown" (Ruth 4:10). Boaz phrases his actions in a way that looks as though he will be extending and maintaining the family line of Elimelech and Chilion.[23] However, by the end of the book, the genealogy cuts out Elimelech's line and instead follows Boaz. His overture of kindness is only that, and does not truly extend Elimelech's line in the community.

The witnesses assent to the contract and give Boaz a blessing. This blessing is strange in that it references marriages and tricks that are not the most conducive to positive familial relationships. They say,

> May the Lord make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the family of Israel. May you have standing in Ephrathah and be famous in Bethlehem. Through the offspring the Lord gives you

[22] Fewell and Gunn, *Compromising Redemption*, 61.
[23] Koosed, *Gleaning Ruth*, 104.

> by this young woman, may your family be like that of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah. (Ruth 4:11-12)

These relationships are far from the best, though they are important in Israel and Judah's history.[24] The first reference is to the home of Rachel and Leah, sisters who both married Jacob. Jacob worked for seven years to marry Rachel, but Laban instead wed him to Leah. Then, seven years later, Jacob again earns a marriage to Rachel. Laban gives him both daughters, who proceed to fight with each other. They start a battle to earn Jacob's approval through having as many children as possible. Rachel, who at most gives birth to two, uses her servant as a surrogate, and Leah follows suit. These women, Bilhah and Zilpah, whose names are not mentioned in the blessing, are an important part of the community, each giving birth to several sons. Then the elders move to Tamar, who bore Perez to Judah.[25] Tamar was married to two of Judah's sons, first to one, then to the next through levirate law. However, Judah never gave her to his third son to maintain the first's name, in the way that Boaz is doing for Ruth. Thus, Tamar tricked Judah into impregnating her to force him to care for her like he should have all along. These are not the best images of family dynamics, though they are important stories for the history of Judah (Genesis 38).[26] There is a possibility that this is the author hinting at the importance of Ruth's marriage to Boaz and the coming genealogy that connects David to

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[24] The role of these women as the mothers of the men who would become the twelve tribes is often praised. Their negative attributes, alongside their problematic and hateful relationship, is overlooked in several commentaries and possibly in the speech. The elder might have truly wished for the blessing to be positive, but the undercurrent remains. See Eskenazi and Frymer-Kensky, *Ruth*, 84.

[25] Again, like Leah and Rachel, this story is often read in a positive light, although it contains the dereliction of duty. The fact that the levirate marriage finally happened at the end of the story makes the overall message more palatable. Ibid., *Ruth*, 85.

[26] Sakenfeld, *Ruth*, 72.

all three instances of marriage. Yet, the elders mention shameful acts that focus on trickery, in a manner similar to how Ruth snuck near Boaz's genitals. She is a Moabite and they refuse to name her, forcing Boaz to remember that she is a foreigner, like Tamar, and may cause problems.

LOOKING FORWARD (Ruth 4:13-22)

This section entails the future and end of the story concerning Ruth, though she hardly makes an appearance. Boaz takes her as a wife and makes love to her, and YHWH enables her to conceive and she gives birth to a son.[27] Ruth is passive throughout the whole section, except whenever she bears a son. She has become subsumed into her role as a wife and as a mother. She no longer needs to go out to gather grain, work to establish connections for her survival, or do anything else. Her job in the story is finished because she has married and given birth. This final dismissal of the main character seems unfair to her and all the work she did.[28] She was strong and independent, working for months to survive and take care of her mother-in-law. However, she is not only subsumed under Boaz, but Naomi as well. The women of the town take Obed and give him to Naomi saying,

> Praise be to the Lord, who this day has not left you without a guardian-redeemer. May he become famous throughout Israel! He will renew your life and sustain

[27] Linafelt notes that Ruth never mentions wanting a child, though many scholars read that desire into the text. Many scholars also read Ruth as barren, having not given birth after ten years of marriage. Yet, neither did Orpah, which connects to the story of Tamar, where the men were to blame. Linafelt, *Ruth*, 78.

[28] Ruth is erased at the end of the story, hardly mentioned and doing nothing. Koosed, *Gleaning Ruth*, 117.

> you in your old age. For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth. (Ruth 4:14-15)

It is important to note that, although Ruth is praised, she is not named. She is important only because she has given Naomi an heir and somebody to look after her.[29] That was previously Ruth's job. Now that she is married and has given birth, none of her earlier hesed compares to what she does after her name is erased. Naomi then takes the child and the women of the town say, "Naomi has a son" (Ruth 4:17).[30] The women of the town name the boy Obed and Ruth has no say in the matter. The women seem to view this newborn as Naomi's son, not Ruth's.[31] The women of the town take Ruth out of the picture and continue the line of a child who is descended from somebody within her community.[32] Ruth receives no credit because she is a Moabite woman. The women in the town will always view her as an outsider. She has foreign blood in her that needs to be covered over and hidden for the sake of Naomi and Boaz's lineage.

Finally, the grand lines that explain why the whole story matters, is that Obed gave birth to Jesse, who gave birth to David. David is the most important figure in the story, but is not revealed until the end. The statement of connection is followed by a genealogy from Perez to David. This genealogy is important and interesting for many reasons: the first apparent reason is that Perez and Tamar never had a son, their son was through Judah. This was already explicitly mentioned just a few verses earlier, in the

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[29] Linafelt, *Ruth*, 79.

[30] The verb here is one that holds a meaning of special intimacy reserved for mothers and lovers. Saxegaard, *Character Complexity*, 99.

[31] Koosed, *Gleaning Ruth*, 113.

[32] Eskenazi and Frymer-Kensky go so far as to translate the phrase as "She became its foster mother." Eskenzi and Frymer Kensky, *Ruth*, 91.

blessing. As the genealogy comes to an end, Elimelech is not mentioned. Instead, the story moves from Salmon to Boaz. It is interesting that Perez is mentioned, although Judah served as his surrogate, but Elimelech is not mentioned because Boaz is his surrogate. This cuts out even Naomi's role and any chance of the genealogy being damaged by Moab.[33] This could be a way to protect Boaz, or even David. In fact, Elimelech, Mahlon, and Chilion had almost no connection to the story whatsoever, except in bringing Ruth and Naomi together and serving as kinsmen to Boaz. Thus, David is re-aligned with Israel and away from Moab, descending from Boaz and Naomi.

CONNECTIONS

Ruth 4 can connect to the problems of Indians in several ways. The final two connections which I will draw here are the connections of land and descendants. I have already mentioned each of these several times, but I would like to focus more intentionally on each. The United States government has forced tribes from place to place in the quest for more land and for assimilation. The government tried to control and assimilate the tribes through several different methods, treaties, and laws. Several laws removed their ability to control their land, in much the same way that Boaz acted to sell Naomi and Ruth's land without their permission. They were, in a manner of speaking, considered incompetent because they were women. Indians were considered too incompetent to control their land because they were Indians. Thus, the government assigned agents, who were often corrupt, to control their land for them.

[33] Ibid., *Ruth,* 93.

It is no secret that many problems relating to reservations and land ownership typically occurred because citizens of the United States wanted land that belonged to the tribes. The United States government often tried to protect these tribal lands from settlers who desired them.[34] Many settlers snuck into Indian Territory and set up their homes and families illegally, creating a problem for the tribes.[35] These people were known as Boomers and their actions gave Oklahoma its state nickname: The Sooner State. Their actions led to the opening of Indian territory for land runs, slowly shrinking Indian Territory and leading to the eventual state of Oklahoma. The Office of Indian Affairs was set up to curtail lies and protect the tribes. The workers had the job of gathering information about people to determine if they were considered part of the tribe. They set up tents where people could come and attempt to prove that they were part of specific tribes through their ancestry, or their "blood." Many members of the tribes were unable to appear before the commission or were denied such a privilege for various reasons.[36] On the other hand, several non-Indian people, meaning whit-Europeans, were able to successfully make it onto the roles.[37] Indigenous women that married white men often had their rights as an Indian revoked, particularly when they began acting more like their white counterparts.[38] The descendants of mixed marriages often had no chance of finding a place on the roles, even if they could prove their ancestry.

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[34] Ellinghaus, *Blood Will Tell*, 61.

[35] Karen Maguire and Branton Wiederholt, "1889 Oklahoma Land Run: The Settlement of Payne County," *Journal of Family History* 44, no. 1 (January 1, 2019): 55.

[36] These reasons include being unable to travel, not knowing about the role, and living too far away with no means of transportation. Ellinghaus, *Blood Will Tell*, 90.

[37] There are many ways that this happened, which led to continued problems regarding ownership of the land. Ibid., 40.

[38] Ellinghaus, *Blood Will Tell*, 54.

Separating people from the land, forcing them to rely upon somebody else's good will, is far from the best welfare system which people can choose. Many indigenous people relied on marriage for survival and for an escape from racism, much as Ruth seeks to do at this point in the narrative. The choice to take on a new identity through marriage can cut a person off from their past. The children, and especially the grandchildren, of the Indian women who married white men were not placed on the tribal roles.[39] They were ineligible for land on the reservation, which dramatically decreased the land given to the tribes. They were ineligible for the mineral rights that enriched many, and they are still ineligible for the money received from the casinos. For Ruth, her son, her grandson, and her great-grandson, are no longer Moabite. They are fully Israelite, which is better for David, who becomes king. That is not to say that their situations are the same, only that they are similar.

Another way that Indians were cut off from their land and power is the beginning of the story laid out in Killers of the Flower Moon. This book, based on the life of the Osage tribe in the first few decades of Oklahoma, outlines how land became a commodity and how many white citizens took advantage of the system. Almost everybody was corrupt in some way, excluding, for the most part, members of the Osage tribe.[40] The tribe bought their land so that the government could not force them off. However, the government eventually convinced/forced the tribe to create allotments and allow the individuals to sell their lands. Many Indians would rent out their land with bad contracts, and some were tricked into selling their land instead of renting it out.[41] They

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[39] Ibid., 98.

[40] There is evidence that people bribed the judges and police officers, faked bank loans, and bribed the US government. Grann, *Killers of the Flower Moon*, 119.

[41] Nichols, *Indians in the United States and Canada*, 205.

thought they could still live on the land. Education was meant to help this problem. Even the US president, Grover Cleveland, said that people should try to get the tribes into debt so they would be forced to sell off their land.[42] Some Osage citizens would rent money from their white "friends" who could afford to help them. The white citizens would then work with the bank to change the numbers and then sue the Indian for their land as payment.[43] The government created competency laws as a way to protect the Indians. These laws gave somebody else control over their finances. However, many Indians, perhaps most, were competent with money, but could not prove their competency. They still lost their privileges and, in many cases, the ability to control their land and independence. These were all actions taken to force assimilation on the Indians. The only way for them to maintain their land and independence was to gain an education, but that damaging to their culture.

The second major connection between Ruth and Indians is the way that their descendants were cut off from their history. For Ruth, this happened because she married Boaz and the women, seeing her status as a Moabite, took Obed away and gave him to Naomi. The Indians, on the other hand, were stationary, lost their connections to their culture through the very educational systems they tried to use to prove their competence. The schools available to the tribes were far from helpful. They began as missionary schools, using education as a resource to force students to convert to Christianity. One of the denominations best at this practice was the Presbyterian Church.[44] The government used their model when it provided education systems in many different reservations.[45]

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[42] Ibid., 178.
[43] Grann, *Killers of the Flower Moon*, 170.
[44] Nichols, *Indians in the United States and Canada*, 198.
[45] Ibid., 219.

However, the problem spread beyond merely cutting somebody off from their religion. The Presbyterian schools would keep Cherokee children away from their families, keeping the children in boarding schools and cutting them off from any chance at learning the Cherokee way of life.[46] This made acculturation into white culture much easier. The children were unable to see their parents, take part in cultural practices, or learn how to speak their native language.[47] Instead, they only learned English and received punishment if they spoke any other language. They had to cut their hair and dress like European people.[48] This created a vast difference between the older and younger generations, and they found it difficult to connect.

When the government began taking over from the missionaries, everything became more difficult. The government was better able to enforce the rules which the missionary schools were not. The government would take children from their homes and send them hundreds of miles away, totally separated from their family. There, the schools required that the students dress, act, and look like they were part of the United States. The children were unable to take part in any rituals and did not learn the language which their parents spoke. This led to a major discrepancy, where many children began to see their parents as stupid and uncultured due to their inability to speak English. Many moved away and never tried to reconnect with their pasts. Others, such as Molly Burkhart in Killers of the Flower Moon, moved back to their old land, but were different. They tried to walk the line between their tribe and the culture within the United States. Molly initially married an Osage, but they divorced and she married a white man, Ernest.

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[46] Ibid., 268.
[47] Ibid., 272.
[48] Ibid., 211.

Several other Osage women did the same and the tribe eventually became somewhat dependent upon the white folk among them. Molly and Ernest's children also struggled to find a balance, as did all people among the Osage and other tribes. Among these other tribes is also the relative of Robin Wall Kimmerer, a man who was taken away from his family to go to a boarding school. He cut himself off from the tribe while there and they lost contact with him.

CONCLUSION

Independence and connection to the past is an important part of maintaining a cultural history and future. However, surviving within a community that is different from and denies the importance of one's culture makes those things difficult and often leads to their destruction. Ruth struggled to survive throughout the book. She made several decisions on her own and fought to remain with Naomi and take care of her. However, in the end, it was a better proposition for her to propose marriage to Boaz, as he would care for both of them in the difficult times when the women did not have enough food to care for themselves. In order to achieve that goal, Ruth had to give up almost everything. She gave up the ability to control the land she inherited from Mahlon, she gave up the agency which guided her throughout the first three chapters, and she gave up her child to the town. She became fully assimilated into the community and subsumed under the household of Boaz. Her reward for all of this was to become the great grandmother of David, though she was likely dead by the time David was born. Native Americans, also, had similar struggles. They tried to use their agency and land to sign treaties which would be helpful for them and allow them to maintain their cultural practices. However, unlike

Ruth, they had much less agency. They were not one person choosing to live in a town of around 150 people. Instead, they were tens of thousands of people among many different tribes who were invaded and constantly pushed off to the side. They also lost control of their land, but not by their choice. The United States used violence to control them and provided little recompense. Even more, the United States took children away from their parents in an attempt to acculturate them and force the white way of living upon the Indians. Those who didn't fully assimilate lost control of their land due to their "incompetence." Even then, many who tried to regain control and fully assimilate by learning and marrying white men, were murdered by their husbands.

The balance of power has not shifted and the US government continues to force assimilation upon the non-white groups who exist in the territory of the United States. Illegal migrants have their children separated from them at the border, causing lasting damage to their relationship. DREAMers are sent back to countries where they had never lived, even though they were fully assimilated. The attempts of the government to control, assimilate, and cut people off from their ancestry continues.

CONCLUSION

CONTINUING PROBLEMS

The Book of Ruth is a story about a woman who moves to a new land and slowly assimilates to a new and different way of living. She must learn to assimilate and separate herself from her past in order to survive. Yet, despite her conversion process and promise to assimilate, she cannot escape her past and her lineage as a Moabite. The people of the town constantly remind her, the narrator constantly reminds the reader. She works hard to collect enough food for her own survival, but the food only lasts for so long. She eventually marries a well-known and honorable man just for her own survival. She loses her independence and she loses any chance to teach her son about their other history because the people of the town take him away and give him to Naomi as a replacement son. This struggle has been hidden by readings that focus on how wonderful her conversion was and the supposed love story between Ruth and Boaz. This reading which promotes assimilation has been used as an example of how other groups should assimilate in the United States. Native American tribes have fallen prey to forced assimilation, not even having the choice to return to their own land and culture like Ruth. The government has forced them to move around, give up many cultural practices, and cut themselves off from their ancestors in its attempt to assimilate them.

There are still issues that continually arise in the United States. One of the major issues that has recently arisen within the state of Oklahoma is the old treaties made with the Cherokee and other tribes. The United States government swore that the land would belong to the Cherokee tribe forever, but much of that land now belongs to Oklahoma. The tribes had previously attempted to create an all-Indian state called Sequoyah, but

their attempt fell on deaf ears. A couple years later, white citizens created an assembly to create the state of Oklahoma, which succeeded. In the rush to create the state, the US government never annulled the old treaties, though they also gave the land for the state of Oklahoma. Jurisdictional problems arose a few years ago after a murder.[1] A lawyer for the case discovered that the land upon which the murder took place was, according to older maps, tribal land. As both men were members of a tribe, that would mean that Oklahoma did not have jurisdiction.[2] However, that land was also given to Oklahoma by the government when the state was formed. The case has made it to the Supreme Court, which debated the topic in 2019 and decided to push it to 2020 for a second round. The Attorney General of Oklahoma has decided to follow the path of old colonists posits that the reservations no longer exist.[3] If the Supreme Court sides with the state, then several, if not all, reservation lands inside the state, and possibly among other states, would cease to exist as separate. On the other hand, the tribes claim that, because the treaties were never annulled, the land belongs to them. This would place around half the State of Oklahoma into tribal hands, with unknown consequences as to the future of the state. This problem arose because the US government continually treated the tribes as less than human, incompetent, and unworthy of any effort on their behalf. The government did not care enough to disband or renegotiate the treaties, instead assuming that everyone would just go along with the change. To be fair, everyone did for over a century, but the past caught up to Oklahoma.

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[1] Crooked Media, *This Land*, Episode 1: "The Case," June 3, 2019, hosted by Rebecca Nagle, podcast, https://crooked.com/podcast/this-land-episode-1-the-case/.

[2] Karen Maguire and Branton Wiederholt, "1889 Oklahoma Land Run: The Settlement of Payne County," *Journal of Family History* 44, no. 1 (January 1, 2019): 54.

[3] Crooked Media, *This Land*, Episode 3: "The Opposition," June 17, 2019, hosted by Rebecca Nagle, podcast, https://crooked.com/podcast/this-land-episode-3-the-opposition/.

Other Indian reservations continue to struggle with control over their land as well. The still-recent No Dakota Access Pipeline Movement (NoDAPl) has largely fallen out of national conversation, but dominated many lives for over a year. The Dakota Access Pipeline is an oil line that connects oil from North Dakota to Illinois and would provide several jobs and help boost the economy of the Dakotas and elsewhere. However, the path the line traveled was through the Standing Rock Indian Reservation. The tribe, who owned the reservation, rejected the pipeline and attempted to gather support to stop its construction, citing environmental impact (such as oil spills, especially into rivers) and the destruction of sacred land.[4] Yet, their concerns were pushed aside or ignored, as was their right to choose what happened on the reservation. The protests led to violence enacted upon the protestors, and the construction workers increased the crime rate in the areas they worked, including rape.[5] Eventually, President Barack Obama stalled the process while the administration looked into other routes for the pipeline (though, it is important to note, did not rule out the current route). However, before those studies finished, Donald Trump became president, and one of his first actions as president was to end the search for other routes and allow the original plan. This obliviates the rights of the tribes as separate entities and continues to old method of treating the tribes.

Finally, among these other issues, is the continuing racism against indigenous people. Here, I will use my own experiences as example. The first I will use is a friend that was a fellow classmate in elementary school. She was a black woman, which creates its own problem, but descended from former slaves that the tribes made full members.

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[4] Ellen E. Moore, *Journalism, Politics, and the Dakota Access Pipeline : Standing Rock and the Framing of Injustice*, Routledge Studies in Environmental Communication and Media (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2019), 35.

[5] Ibid., 104.

Her grandmother was, in fact, the chief of a tribe, and she would occasionally attend festivals. However, students in the middle school and high school treated her as something less than them, and in a way different from they did other black students. She had extra money, which she would spend on hair extensions, among other things. The students often complained that she was rich and abused her wealth. This same complaint was leveled against tribes in general by those students. Another student graduated when I was still eleven, but received similar racist comments. Her tribe provided a car for her upon graduation and offered to provide a house for her if she lived on the reservation. Some parents accused the person she married upon graduation of trying to take advantage of her money.[6] The tribes receive money from the government and from their own lands, which is shared amongst them all. This generated anger amongst the other students, my parents, and other parents in the area.

Whenever some aspect of her past showed, comments also appeared against Indians and tribal money. The reparations given to the tribes are understood as a waste of money on a group of people that are just drunk all of the time. This "drunk" stereotype arose because many members of tribes have alcohol problems because, "The government pays for everything and they don't have to work." Of course, most Native Americans have jobs and live outside the reservations. Many reservations contain businesses and houses owned and run by white citizens, people they tax like any other state. However, the racist image of starving families on a reservation with a drunken father is almost entirely inaccurate. Those Indians who are impoverished and starving have little ability to escape their situation. The food provided to them is unhealthy and cheap, jobs are hard to

[6] This man was a 64-year-old pediatrician, so he almost certainly had enough money on his own. The age difference also raised eyebrows, but he was a long-time doctor of everyone in the area.

come by when a person looks unhealthy, and the money provided to them does not ease their situation. These people did not accidentally stumble across wealth like the Osage did. Or, if they did, white men squandered their money, as also happened to the Osage. This racism arises from the early days of colonization, portraying the native people as savage and unwilling to work hard.

The treatment of Native Americans and forced assimilation has a continuing legacy in the assimilation of immigrants that come to the United States. This takes place through several different methods and is especially prescient as the children and grandchildren of migrants develop and grow up in a culture which is very different. The "Great American Melting Pot" is a description about how many different cultures mix in the United States, but that mixture covers over and negates any differences. People who dress differently are often criticized or excluded, the most prominent of which, at this moment are Sikh men (who wear turbans, though many mistake them for Muslim men), and Muslim women (who wear hijabs). These clothing differences embrace different cultural and religious norms, and would add to the "melting pot," but assimilation, not respect, is the goal of the "pot." Just like with the children of Native Americans in the early 20th century and before, many children are not allowed to wear their native dress (no head coverings) at school. Uniforms at schools, which are meant to make everyone look the same, reinforce that assimilation by forcing the replicating of white clothing styles. These are just minor examples of the forced assimilation of minority groups into acting and dressing as though they were a part of the majority.

The afterlife of the story of Ruth provides an undercurrent of critique that can guide an upheaval of old patterns of assimilation. Despite the way the Book of Ruth

covers over the titular character at the end, Ruth continues as an important figure and reappears as an important character in her own right. She appears in the genealogy of Jesus, mentioned as the mother of Obed. Her role has become that of mother, not provider, but she still appears in the genealogy, standing out as one of few women mentioned. Though she was covered over in her own time, she reappears as an important figure in other narratives. Her relation to David is important, but she is mentioned later in her own right. In addition, the Book of Ruth is one of the Megillot, scrolls read every year for Jewish holidays. Her story is read aloud to millions of Jews every year. In addition, she stands out as a strong woman who promoted herself, one of only two who have books focused around them in the Bible, both Hebrew and Christian. This undercurrent shows that, despite covering over, the assimilation never completely takes hold.

Tribes have continued to fight for their own culture and fight for their land. Many members of the tribes replicate the practices of their ancestors. They celebrate the same seasons and many have found occupations that allow them to continue older methods of survival. Among these jobs are basket-weavers, who chop down trees (with permission), shave the wood, and use that wood to create baskets, just as their parents, grandparents, etc., before them. Others, like Robin Wall Kimmerer, try to bring the beliefs of their ancestors into their work. Kimmerer formulates her lessons and her research in a way that allows nature to teach her and her students, just as her father did. The Cherokee tribe in Tahlequah contains schools that actively teach the Cherokee syllabary created by Sequoyah. Many street signs and other signs are written in both English and their own language. All of these actions demonstrate that the tribal culture was never destroyed,

even though white citizens in the United States tried their best to destroy and assimilate what was left.

This connection between Ruth and indigenous peoples shows that it is more difficult to assimilate and cover over differences than just forcing a separation. People cling to their past and to their heritage. Stories are an important method of challenging the societal norms that embrace similarity. Full assimilation is not the final word. Many different communities throughout the United States maintain their independence and their cultural identity. These communities provide different perspectives about the world. If Ruth were covered over completely, her story would be forgotten. It was her nature as a foreign woman that has kept her story relevant and useful, even if some used it to destroy her nature as a foreigner. Indian tribes that connect to and use their ancestors' ways of living and thinking can provide guidance for the future of global ecology. Their ancestors lived in harmony with the land, promoting a worldview about giving back to the earth instead of constantly taking. Kimmerer describes these methods in Braiding Sweetgrass, and adds her own biology-trained understanding about how and why they work. Assuming that one methodology or belief system holds all of the answers limits outside-the-box or alternative solutions to problems. These almost-forgotten methods of living can provide powerful solutions to problems such as climate change. They challenge the capitalist system, but provide for a different and more equal system. The challenge is to overcome and undo the colonial spirit that first generated assimilation in the first place.

Assimilation is not a positive solution against war for peace. All that assimilation accomplishes is creating sameness and the continuing domination of those in power, those who choose how assimilation looks. The roots of such methods arise out of racist,

sexist, and patriarchal norms that reinforce the status quo. Ruth has provided both an example of assimilation and an argument against it through its internal critiques and representation of non-dominant people attempting to survive. Ruth assimilated because it was necessary for survival. The history of the United States and Native Americans, also, provide an example of assimilation and a critique. The government kept pushing to make everyone the same and to take whatever it wanted. The government continues to do so, but the tribes continue to maintain their separate identity and continue to fight for their rights. These examples show that, though one is covered over or abused for a time, the story comes out. Different cultures are different. It might be easier if everyone were the same, but important people and events, such as David in Ruth or current ecological movements led by tribes, can only arise where there is difference.

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