Is the Textual Female in Hos 2 YHWH's Wife?

1. Introduction: Interpretations of the "Marital Metaphor" in Hos 1-3

The first thing that is associated with Hos 1-3 is the key term „marital metaphor". Accordingly, what most interpretations seem to agree on is that already Hos 2:4-15 presents us with a (though adulterous) situation of husband and wife. In this paper, I will argue that nothing that is immediately given in the text shows that Hos 2:4-15 presents any kind of marital relationship, respectively a case of adultery. In other words: in no sense it follows directly from what is "in" the text that the speaker occupies any legal position that would justify his violent actions against the textual female.

What *exactly* to make of that key "marital metaphor" of Hos 1-3 is a matter of scholarly controversy. Some scholars have looked at Hosea's marriage to a harloterous wife (אֵשֶׁת זְנוּנִים) as a metaphor, allegory or sign act that resembles YHWH's relationship to Israel. Others have argued that the marital imagery in Hos 2 might present YHWH and his wife Israel as one that is portrayed in the image of a female personified city. Still others have argued that the marital imagery depicts a divorce of YHWH from a Goddess, like Ashera[1]. And again others have argued that the marital metaphor is shaped according to the biblical idea of covenant[2] or at least resembles such an idea.[3] In this reading the textual female is interpreted as Israel in general (not a city) and seen as YHWH's wife. Finally, some scholars turn away from the theological idea of covenant and focus on legal documents and practices that deal with divorce and adultery as found in ancient Near Eastern and biblical material

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[1] E.g. Whitt, W.D. (1992), "The Divorce of Yahweh and Ashera," SJOT 6/1: 31-67 ; Dijk Hemmes, F. van (1989), "The Imagination of Power and the Power of Imagination. An Intertextual Analysis of Two Biblical Love Songs: The Song of Songs and Hosea 2," *JSOT 44*: 75-88.

[2] A theory raised by Adler, E. (1989), *The Background for the Metaphor of Covenant as Marriage in the Hebrew Bible* (PhD diss., University of California at Berkely). Cf. Abma, R. (1999), *Bonds of Love: Methodic Studies of Prophetic Texts with Marriage Imagery (Isaiah 50:1-3 and 54:1-10, Hosea 1-3, Jeremiah 2-3)* (SSN; Assen: Van Gorcum), 23-24. Fensham, C. (1984), "The Marriage Metaphor in Hosea for the Covenant Relationship between the Lord and His People (Hos 1:2-9," *JNSL 12*: 77-78; Ortlund, R., Jr. (1996), 9, 25. Rallis, I. (1990), "Nuptial Imagery in the Book of Hosea: Israel as the Bride of Yahweh." *St. Vladimir's Theological Quaterly 34*: 197-219.

[3] Cf. e.g. Rudolph, W. (1966), *Hosea* (KAT, 13.1; Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn); And more recently: Baumann, G. (2000), *Liebe und Gewalt. Die Ehe als Metapher für das Verhältnis JHWH-Israel in den Prophetenbüchern* (SBS; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk), 66-73.

in order to historical critically enlighten the relationship between the speaker and the textual female in Hos 2.[4]

In this paper I will focus on those readings that understand "the marital metaphor" as a depiction of YHWH's relationship to Israel: a large majority of the scholars who read Hos 2 in this way highlight the (punitive) educational and at the same time affirmative function of the portrayal of YHWH's and Israel's relationship in Hos 2 and suggest that the notion of a just judgment and the proposal of forgiveness and reunion was well received and found acceptance by the primary readership. The emphasis in these interpretations is on *YHWH's reliable and lasting commitment* that spans over the past and future which establishes an *intense and enduring relationship* with Israel as well as on Israel's reception of Hos 2:4-15 as a deserved and just punishment.[5]

One might argue that the kinds of interpretations just mentioned are theologically rather than historical critically motivated and therefore biased and irrelevant for historical critical biblical reconstructions. Yet, it should be recognized that even scholars who intend to answer purely historical questions by investigating the "real life relations [the text internalizes] and the ideologies that support them,"[6] base their evaluations of the text's meaning on the same kinds of assumptions: dependent on the notion that Hos 2:4ff depicts a marital relationship that is threatened by the woman's adultery, legal material and practices found in extra-biblical and biblical sources are drawn upon to describe the "real life background" of this imagery. Thus, it can be recognized that the idea of a transgression of an institutionalized relationship that justifies the demand for loyalty and the infliction of punishment is maintained. Things only receive a different label: the legally institutionalized relationship that was previously called *covenant* becomes *marriage* and *apostasy* becomes *adultery*. The textual woman remains the "sinner" and the speaker the "righteous master."

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[4] Andersen, F. I. and D. N. Freedman (1980), *Hosea* (AB, 24; Garden City, NY: Doubleday), 127, 219; Kelle, B. E. (2005), *Hosea: Metaphor and Rhetoric in Historical Perspective* (SBLAcBib, 20; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature), 47-97.

[5] Cf. e.g. Abma, R. (1999), "The God of Israel: Engaged and Engaging," Pages 257-58 in Abma, R. *Bonds of Love: Methodic Studies of Prophetic Texts with Marriage Imagery (Isaiah 50:1-3 and 54:1-10, Hosea 1-3, Jeremiah 2-3)*. Assen: Van Gorcum. Ben Zvi, E. (2004), "Observations on the Marital Metaphor of YHWH and Israel in its Ancient Israelite Context. General Considerations and Particular Images in Hos 1.2," JSOT 28.3 (2004): 363-84.

[6] cf. e.g. Kelle (2005), 79.

To sum up: what all readings mentioned so far have in common is that they are depend on the notion that Hos 2:4 presents some kind of marital relationship which serves as legal foundation for the punitive actions described in Hos 2:4-15.

An increased awareness of the difficulty to reconstruct a *uniform covenant theology* in the Hebrew Bible and to find covenant language in the book of Hosea or earlier,[7] have lead to the fact that most scholars now have turned away from describing Hos 2 explicitly in terms of covenant theology. Yet, despite the fact that the images that are drawn upon for comparison have changed, it can nevertheless be recognized that the notion of a pre-existing covenantal/institutionalized relationship between YHWH and Israel (similar to the deuteronomistic idea of covenant which has been frequently compared with Assyrian vassal treaties) still strongly influences almost all current interpretations of the text's content and function. Even those readings that do not explicitly use the term *covenant* and view the metaphor of *husband and wife*-along the lines of hierarchical biblical images such as "ruler-ruled"; "king-subject," "master-servant/slave", "father-child", or "shepherd-flock"[8] exhibit an understanding of the marital metaphor that shares the following characteristics with the conception of "covenant:"[9]

1. the notion of an asymmetric, hierarchical relationship in which one part dominates.
2. The dominant part is seen as the provider.
3. The hegemonic partner demands loyalty and submission.
4. Punishment is executed and expected in case of disobedience.
5. Punishment is accepted as justified by the subordinate partner.

But what in Hos 2 assures us that Israel (as the primary audience of the text!) was supposed to perceive Hos 2:4-15 as a portrayal of a durable relationship between them and YHWH, in which YHWH is seen as provider and as somebody that acts from a position that is grounded in a legitimized relationship that demands loyalty and punishment in case of disobedience?

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[7] Cf. Nicholson, E.W. (1986), *God and his People: Covenant and Theology in the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon). For covenant texts in Hosea see esp. 179-91.
[8] Ben Zvi (2004); cf. Stienstra, N. (1993), *YHWH Is the Husband of His People: Analysis of a Biblical Metaphor with Special Reference to Translation* (Kampen: Kok Pharos), 96.
[9] Cf. Ben Zvi, E. (2004); Baumann, G. (2000) Weems, R.J. (1989), "Gomer : Victim of Violence or Victim of Metaphor," *Semeia* 47: 87-101. Stienstra (1993).

As announced at the beginning, in what follows, I will argue that nothing that is immediately given in the text shows that Hos 2:4-15 presents any kind of marital relationship, respectively a case of adultery. In other words: in no sense it follows directly from what is "in" the text that the speaker occupies any legal position that would justify his violent actions against the textual female.

I will first investigate the textual evidence presented by Hos 2 in detail. Then, I will present my own reading of Hos 2 in its context. My interpretation will show that there is at least one plausible reading of the text according to which the textual female in Hos 2 is *not* YHWH's wife.

An important clarification may be in order: it is not my goal to present my reading as a better or more plausible interpretation that is supposed to *mark as wrong* other readings or *replace* them. By contrast, I will offer my reading *as one of many possible* readings. Staying within the literary context of the text as well as within the frame of what we know about Israelite and ancient Near Eastern law and practice, it is thus my goal to highlight that even under these interpretational constraints there are crucial gaps left open by the text itself.

The reason I consider this important is that I want to point to the fact that - from a meta-analytical perspective – what interpretations necessarily do is to *fill in* these gaps in order to make sense out of the text.

Specifically, it is my hypothesis that every interpretation crucially depends on (though, of course, not only on) the interpreter's extra-textual presuppositions concerning gender issues. In order to highlight how particular assumptions about gender issues influence our reading of the text, I will offer an interpretation that starts from my particular standpoint on gender issues, which is a feminist perspective.

What is a feminist perspective? Starting from a feminist perspective, in my case, means that I assume – unless the text explicitly says otherwise - that textual females are to be considered as *subjects,* i.e. as autonomous, self-sufficient agents.

Thus, I will demonstrate that our assumptions concerning the woman's standing as such autonomous subject influences our interpretation. For example: it matters for the reading of Hos 2:4-15 whether we assume that the implied audience is supposed to identify with the *male* speaker or with the *feminine* personified Israel and it also matters whether we perceive the textual female in Hos 2:4-15 as an *autonomous* female (i.e. a professional prostitute) or a *dependent* woman (i.e. the wife of a man). If we assume that the implied audience is to identify with the male

speaker's perspective and if we assume in addition that he is the husband and therefore according to Israelite law "the master" of the woman, we would interpret the verb זנה as adultery and read the violent actions in Hos 2:4-15 as a legitimate and accepted punishment. If, however, we assume that the implied audience is to identify with the *feminine* personified Israel and in addition assume that her being characterized by signs of whoredom hints to the fact that she is a prostitute (i.e. not an adulteress!), we would understand her as an autonomous female who is not dependent on male custodianship. Therefore, the violent actions would be perceived as somewhat displaced for their lack of legal grounds.

2. The Relationship between YHWH and Israel

Let me, then, start by asking what the text does and does not say.

As mentioned above, I will make the common assumption that the textual woman in Hos 2:4 represents Israel and the speaker represents YHWH.

Let me start by considering the later parts of Hos 2. With regard to marital imagery Hos 2:18, 21-22 (in my view unlike Hos 2:4-15!) clearly uses terminology that belongs to the semantic field of "marriage": Hos 2:18 uses the expression "my husband" which can be understood as a marriage declaration. And vv. 21-22 uses the term ארשׂ (to betroth). With great emphasis on the fact that YHWH is the agent (because he is the speaker that proposes a marital relationship) and neglecting the fact that a proposal requires an answer, it can furthermore be assumed that vv. 21-22 involve the notion of an asymmetric, hierarchical relationship. In addition it can be observed that neither vv. 18 and 21-22 (nor the following vv. 23-25) explicitly refer to a notion of punishment in case of disobedience nor to the previous violent actions. Furthermore, it can be recognized that a relationship under the conditions such as צֶדֶק (righteousness), מִשְׁפָּט (justice), חֶסֶד (lovingkindness), רַחֲמִים (mercy), אֱמוּנָה (faithfulness) is only proposed in vv. 21-22 but not yet finalized. Thus, it cannot be deduced from these verses that the previous violent actions mentioned in Hos 2:4-15 are justified on legal grounds. Thus, starting from Hos 2:16-25 there is no need to assume that the violent and destructive measures described in the previous Hos 2:5-15 are themselves to be understood in terms of a the legal background of a marital relationship.

With regard to the situation of Hos 2:4-15 one must then ask: in what way, if any, does this passage *itself* hint at an already existing marital relationship that would justify punishment in case of transgression?

To be sure, there are some verses in Hos 2:4-15 that are very often read within the frame of a "husband-wife" metaphor: v. 4, for example, has been compared to divorce formulas or marital declarations. Furthermore, v. 9 has been read as referring to an earlier marital relationship between YHWH and the textual female and vv. 10-11 have been interpreted as the image of a husband that is providing for his wife.

But what do we really find in these verses that would hint to a marital relationship as the legal foundation for the described punishment?

In v.4 we find: "for she is not my wife and I'm not her husband." What does this mean? For a long time, scholars had argued that we are dealing with *divorce*. This argument was based on two observations.

First, it had been argued that the verb ריב points to lawsuit as a special juridical setting and, therefore, is to be translated as "to bring charges against", "to argue a case", "to defend a case", or "to plead in favor of", since the verb occurs also in integral court procedures ("to conduct a case").[10] Other scholars, however, have shown that ריב ב does not necessarily point to a juridical setting, but can also refer to a controversy of a more general kind, as the usage of the ריב ב in Gen 31:36 where Jacob takes issue with Laban and disputes the right of Laban to pursue him, and Judg 6:32 shows. Accordingly, the expression can also mean "to contend" or "dispute."[11] In other words: there is no clear indication as to whether ריב ב in Hos 2:4 refers to a juridical setting or a controversy of a general kind. Furthermore, we should consider that it is the children that are called up to ריב ב their mother (not a husband or judge that conducts a lawsuit). This makes it even more questionable that in our context ב

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[10] Cf. HAL 4, p. 1142. See also Boecker, H.J., (1970) *Redeformen des Rechtslebens im Alten Testament*, WMANT 14, Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchner, 54. He argues that ריב with preposition ב has the meaning "to bring charges against", to accuse."

[11] See Wacker, M-Th. (1996), *Figuationen des Weiblichen im Hosea-Buch*, HBS 8, Freiburg et al.: Herder, 60 (with n. 7) and 147 n. 25. and Abma, R. (1999). Cf. Blankenbaker, Georg W. (1975), *The Language of Hosea 1-3*. Unpublished PhDiss. Clarmont, 153-54; Andersen, F. I. and D. N. Freedmann (1980), 219ff (contra Wolff, H. W. (^{3}1976), *Dodekapropheton I. Hosea*. BK XIV/1, Neuenkirchen-Vluyn: Neuenkirchener, 37ff.). Already Wünsche, A. (1968), *Der Prophet Hosea übersetzt und erklärt mit Benutzung der Targumim, der jüdischen Ausleger Raschi, Aben Ezra und David Kimchi.* Leipzig, 4 distinguishes between ריב ב ("rechten" = "contend"/ "dispute") and ריב ל ("einen Rechtsstreit führen" = "to conduct a lawsuit").

ריב refers to a divorce. The first argument for the divorce interpretation, thus, doesn't hold ground.

Second, it has been suggested that Hos 2:4cd represents an *official divorce formula.*[12] The argument for this position is based on comparisons with material from Sumerian, Babylonian and Talmudic sources. The punitive measures in v. 5 are, then, attributed to divorce procedures explaining them as "the (customary) penalities that are inflicted on an adulterous wife" after the divorce.[13] The notion of a customary Israelite practice involving death penalty for an adulteress wife (after a divorce) on which Hos 2:5 is supposed to draw, is, however, questionable since there is no evidence that the death penalty mentioned in biblical legal texts has actually been executed. In Gen 38:24, for example, this is clearly *not* the case and in the case of Deut 22:21-24 it appears to be very unlikely, since this law seems to be rather concerned with a wife's and her parents' reputation than with an actual death sentence for an adulteress. Moreover, it is remarkable that references to the stripping of a female all occur with respect to metaphorical rather than with respect to real woman (Isa 47:2-3; Ezek 16:39; Nah 3:5)[14] and therefore can hardly serve as evidence of customary practice in Israelite divorce procedures. Of course, one could argue that texts like Gen 38:24 and Deut 22:21-24 at least prove that the idea of sentencing an adulteress to death was around in Israel – as it was in other legal codes of the ancient Near East. Nevertheless, even if this was the case, it has to be recognized that the legal material in Gen 38:24 and Deut 22:21-24 has little in common with Hos 2:4-5. Hos 2:5 does not mention the traditional death sentence for an adulteress executed through burning or stoning. Yet even if we concede that the idea of a death penalty for adulteresses has been around in general, it remains unclear whether Hos 2:4cd deals with divorce at all. A divorce formula of the type "she is not my wife and I'm not her husband" is neither found in biblical nor extra-biblical material. The divorce formula found in Elephantine documents only presents a formula of the type "I hate (/divorce) my wife x and she shall not be a wife to me".[15] In other words: two "formulas" we

[12] This view is held by e.g. by Cassuto, U. (1973), "The Second chapter of Hosea." Pages 122-23 in U. Cassuto, *Biblical and Oriental Studies* (vol.1; Jerusalem: Magnes), 101-140; 122.
[13] Cassuto, U. (1973), 121.
[14] Cf. Abma, R. (1999), 170.
[15] Whitt, W.D (1992) supports the view that Hos 2:4 draws upon an offical divorce formula with reference to Elephantine documents - in particular Papyrus no. 7 lines 21-22 from the Brooklyn Papyri. See E.G. Kraeling (ed.), *The Brooklyn Museum of Aramaic Papyri: New Documents of the fifth Century B.C. from the Jewish Colony at Elephantine* (Yale University Press: New Haven 1953).

are supposed to compare, which each consist of more than one part, overlap only in the words "not my wife." The key phrase "I hate/divorce" that appears also in Deut 22:13,16; 24:3, and that seems to be crucial for a statement of divorce is completely missing in Hos 2:4. Beyond that, the "formula" "she is not my wife and I'm not her husband" has no parallels in ancient Near Eastern as well as in rabbinic or early Judaic sources (i.e. the Murabba'at divorce letters), since the latter always keep the male and female perspective strictly separated. Overall, then, neither the expression "she is not my wife and I'm not her husband" in v. 4 nor the punitive measures described in v. 5 offer conclusive evidence to the effect that we are dealing with some kind of divorce procedure.

Another, and today probably more common, argument for a marital relationship between the speaker and the textual female in Hos 2:4-15,[16] suggests that the expression "I'm not her husband and she is not my wife" represents the *negation* of an official marital declaration. But, even if we accept that this is the case - despite the fact that the only evidence for a marriage declaration of the type "She is my wife and I'm her husband" is found in the later Brooklyn Papyri from Elephantine[17]- it is still not at all clear what this would imply: the fact that we find the negation of a marriage declaration simply does not answer the question whether the textual female and the male speaker in Hos 2:4 have ever *been* in a marital relationship: to say that x is not married to y clearly does not imply that x and y had been previously married.

Now, of course, while, say, "I am not married to her" does not directly *say* anything about any kind of relationship between the two parties (it is true of most random pairs of people, after all), it's utterance in many contexts might still *pragmatically hint* at some such previous relationship. Why else would the speaker bother to be so explicit in his denial of the existence of such a relationship right now? But, of course, many contexts would make the utterance of, say, "I am not married to her" completely natural and show it as conveying important information while *no* previous marriage is here being denied.

Whether or not we read "for she is not my wife and I'm not her husband" as *pragmatically hinting* at any kind of (previous?) marital relationship is therefore highly dependent on how we read the context of the statement.

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[16] Cf. Abma, R. (1999), Wacker, M-Th. (1996); Rudolph W. (1966).
[17] no. 2 lines 3-4 and no. 7 lines 4.

So let us take a look at how the protagonists and their relationship are characterized in Hos 2:4-15. Let us assume (at least for now) that the male speaker is YHWH. This (preliminary) reading could be justified by the fact that YHWH is introduced and explicitly named in v. 15.[18] At the same we have to keep in mind that he is not *explicitly* introduced as such from the beginning. The identity and status of the textual female in Hos 2:4-15 is even more obscure: first of all, she is introduced as a mother. The plural-suffix hints to the fact that she has several children ("your mother"). It is, however, not stated that the children are the children of the male speaker as well, for they are only attributed to their mother. The relationship between the "textual male" and the textual female remains unclear. The only thing we know is that the speaker *says* that there is no (marital) relationship ("for she is not my wife and I'm not her husband"). The textual female is furthermore characterized by the terms זְנוּנִים ("harlotries"?) and which she shall put away from her face and from between her breasts. The term נַאֲפוּפִים is the only term that could be interpreted as referring to a marital relationship if one puts weight on the fact that it contains the root נאפ. Yet, since this term is a happax legomena it is impossible to determine with any certainty what it really denotes: on the one hand, it might refer to the juridical term "adultery" and therefore to a marital relationship. But, on the other hand, it might also refer to some jewelry customarily worn by prostitutes, which would characterize the textual female as a prostitute (i.e. as independent of any marital relationship). Beyond the fact that it cannot be determined with any certainty that the root פנא in נַאֲפוּפִים factually refers to the juridical issue of adultery, it is furthermore important to note that the roots נאפ and זנה never appear as homonyms in the Hebrew Bible (including Hos 1-3), but rather refer to mutual exclusive circumstances.[19] In other words, there is at least some evidence that makes it questionable whether the term נַאֲפוּפִים in connection with זְנוּנִים can refer to the juridical term "adultery" and thus to a marital relationship.

What we can say for now about the depiction of the textual female in Hos 2:4 is that it is emphasized that she is not the speakers wife, but a mother of several children and somebody that wears attributes related to prostitution (זְנוּנִים). This fits

[18] Also in Hos 1 he is explicitly named and the only one that is granted a direct voice (v.2, 4-5, 6c-7,9).
[19] I will come back to this issue later and show how much effort it takes the author of Jer 2-3 to combine these two terms. For now it is enough to point to the fact that biblical and ancient Near Eastern law clearly treat adultery and prostitution separately and in different ways. Cf. for this and the usage of the terms in Hos 1-3 also Moughtin-Mumby, S. (2008), *Sexual and Marital Metaphors in Hosea, Jeremiah, Isaiah and Ezekiel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 242-44.

the depiction of the textual female as a mother and somebody that is "whoring" in v. 7. Viewing the textual female as an autonomous prostitute rather than a wife is, in addition, supported by the following verses, in which she is characterized as a person that does not live in an exclusive relationship, but has more than one lover who support her with gifts (cf. v. 14). The only way the speaker relates himself to the woman, before he finally proposes to her in vv. 21-22, is that he states that he has given her corn, wine and oil as well as silver and gold. At the same time he describes the woman's reaction as ignorant towards him and his action: she pursues her (other) lovers and forgets about him (v.15; cf. v. 9) and she does not even recognize that he has given her goods (v. 10). Beyond giving her presents (and threatening to take them back), he, for the most part of Hos 2:4-15, primarily relates to her by violent threats against her body, her possessions, her habits and customs: he threatens to strip her naked (v.5), to turn her into a desert and parched land (v.5), to let her die of thirst (v.5), to not have mercy with her children (v.6), to hedge up her ways with thorns (v. 8), to build a wall against her, so that she cannot find her path (v.8), to take away the presents he gave to her (v. 11), to uncover her private parts in the sight of her lovers (v.12), to put an end to all her mirth, her festivals, her new moons, her sabbaths, and all her appointed festivals (v. 13), to lay waste her vines and her fig trees and turn them into wilderness so that the wild animals devour them (v.14). He haunts her (פקד), because she forgets about him (in the face of all the lovers she has). However, it is crucial to remember that all these violent actions are (at least!) *presented* bare of any legal justification (marital relationship, family ties etc.).

Given the fact that v. 4 and the following verses do not explicitly determine the textual woman as YHWH's (former) wife but rather depict a woman that does not live in an exclusive relationship, but has many (male) lovers, it is furthermore, not obvious that the expression "I will go and return to my first man (אִישׁ)" (v.9) refers to a relationship of husband and wife. If we take innerbiblical Israelite law serious, the idea of returning to a marital relationship that has once been divorced must, in fact, be viewed as legal impossibility.[20] In Deut 24:4 this kind of re-marriage is clearly prohibited. Thus, there is no need to assume that the textual female has been in a marital relationship with this "first man." And even if we assumed that the expression "my first man" does hint at a marital relationship, it would remain far from clear

[20] I will come back to this later with regard to Jer 3:1.

whether the expression refers to YHWH: first of all, the speaker in the following verse continues to complain that she has forgotten him. And second, there no single indication in vv. 16-25 that we are dealing with a *re*-marriage, since there are no anaphoric references or particles such as עוֹד (again) or similar expressions that would hint to a revival of a marital relationship. In light of these observations, it is very plausible to understand אִישׁ as a generic term denoting any "man/male person" (not a husband) with whom the prostitute was involved. This could be seen as a stylistic device in order to support the portrayal of an autonomous female that does not consider entering a relationship with the speaker.

To sum up: the text does not give us any information as to whether the term "first man" is to be translated as "husband" or "(generic) man", nor does it give us any direct information as to who this "man" is. Even if we were to ignore Deut 24:4 *as well as* the fact that Hos 2: 4-15 does not explicitly mention one or more marital relationships *and* would focus on the numeral "first (man?/husband?)" *and* connect v. 9 to v. 17, the problem would not be solved. First of all, the numeral "first" connected with the term "husband" would only make sense if there was a second husband. But there is no second husband mentioned in the text, only lovers. Second, although YHWH's hope is expressed that "she will answer (ענה) like in the days of her youth and on the day on which she came up from Egypt," this does not necessarily imply that the speaker in Hos 2:4-15 is Israel's "first husband." To be sure, some kind of previous relationship between YHWH and Israel is in fact stated in v.17. The verb ענה clearly denotes some sort of response. Yet, this imagery does not at all correspond well to the depiction of the relationship between the speaker and the textual female in Hos 2:4-15. Quite the contrary: while some kind of (marital) relationship is stated in Hos 2:17-18, such a relationship is negated in Hos 2:4. While Israel is portrayed as YHWH's bride in Hos 2:18; 21-22, in the previous verses Israel is depicted as a prostitute. While the terms "wilderness" (מִדְבָּר) and "like in the days of your youth" (כִּימֵי נְעוּרֶיהָ) in v.17 are used to describe the place and time of a mutual relationship between YHWH and Israel, the terms "wilderness" (מִדְבָּר) and "the day of birth" (יוֹם הִוָּלְדָהּ) in v. 5 appear in a context that denotes destruction and death caused by one party. While Hos 2:4-15 neglects any kind of marital relationship, the idea of marriage is for the first time proposed in vv. 18; 21-22. Thus, it cannot be taken for granted that vv.17-18 – which contains no anaphoric references to vv.4 and 9 other than the word אִישׁ (!) - refers to the relationship mentioned in Hos 2:4-15.

In addition, the depiction of the speaker in Hos 2:4-15 as someone who provides goods need not be interpreted in terms of a marital relationship, in which the husband is the provider. The text itself mentions not only YHWH, but also the (other) lovers as providers and acknowledges that the woman has her own property. Texts like the Song of Songs furthermore demonstrate that the exchanging of goods, such as wine, oil and grain does not necessarily imply an already existing marriage.

To sum up: Hos 2:4-15 portrays a one-sided "courting" that mainly consists of destructing and violating all which characterizes the textual females identity, habits and possession. In contrast to that, YHWH in Hos 2:16-25 proposes a marital relationship, that draws upon a previous encounter between YHWH and Israel that has been grounded in mutual acceptance. While Israel ignores the speaker of Hos 2:4-15, in Hos 2:16-25 it is said that Israel would recognize *the* YHWH introduced in v.16ff. Overall, then, an institutionalized relationship is proposed only in vv. 18-22, while Hos 2:4-15 contains a destructive and provocative portrayal of YHWH that does not name any legal foundation.

3. Interpreting Hos 2

So, based on these observations here is my reading of Hos 2 (and I'm curious to hear your responses):

Rather than interpreting Hos 2:4-15 as the portrayal of a deserved or justified punishment that is to be understood in its educational function, I suggest that Hos 2:4-15 and 16-25 are not related in a sense of apostasy and reunion. Rather than interpreting Hos 2 as a *univocal* portrayal of YHWH's relationship to Israel, I read the text as presenting two *competing* images of YHWH. In the first image "YHWH" appears as somebody who today we might call a *stalker*. He is depicted as someone that haunts Israel against its will and brings about destruction and violations. The textual female (representing Israel) is portrayed as an independent, unmarried woman and as a prostitute. She does not answer the speaker's courting and favors other lovers instead. The speaker in Hos 2:4-15 undertakes all kinds of measures to prevent her from pursuing her basic habits by violating her and all that constitutes her life. He does this without any legal or institutionalized foundation.

In further support of this interpretation, it is interesting to observe that Jer 2-3, which seems to draw upon topics presented in the book of Hosea, picks up and

counters exactly a view according to which the Israelites understand themselves as innocent, as not having sinned and as, therefore, not deserving the anger. The implied reader's interjection is explicitly quoted when Jer 2:35 addresses its readership directly by saying: "Yet *you say*, because I am innocent/free (נקה), surely his anger shall turn from me […] *you say*, I have not sinned." Furthermore, it is only here (not in Hos 2) that the verb ריב is (re)used in such a way that Judah's (constructed parallel to Israel's) self-perception as being innocent *is* the reason why YHWH pleads against them. In addition, Jer 2 shows an awareness of the necessity to *re-read* and *explain* Hos 2 in terms of divorce and remarriage in order to justify the accusation of apostasy: unlike Hos 2:4, Jer 3 (explicitly) explains that YHWH has divorced Israel. It is *inserted* that YHWH explicitly says "I had put her away, and given her a bill of divorce" (Jer 3:8). Thus, the gap in Hos 2:4 is filled.

Moreover, Jer 3:1 pays account to the fact that a reinterpretation of Hos 2 in terms of divorce and remarriage – which (as already mentioned) according to Deut 24:4 is a legal impossibility – requires a further explanation that counters another explicitly quoted interjection that could be made by the implied audience: "*They say*, If a man puts away his wife, and she goes from him, and become another man's, shall he return unto her again? shall not that land be greatly polluted?" In the following the idea that remarriage after a divorce is impossible is relativized and reinterpreted, by rereading Hos 2:4;7;9 and 16-25 in terms of Judah's (former Israel's) great pollution and YHWH's gracefulness. This is achieved by mentioning YHWH's explicit command to Judah to "return again to me" although "you have played the harlot with many lovers."

A further explanation for such a re-interpretation that reads זנה in Hos 2 (and Hos 1) in terms of adultery – and thus within the frame of already existing marital relationship - is required. The re-interpretation proceeds in several steps that gradually replaces and re-interprets זנה: first, unlike in Hos 2:4; 7 and Hos 1:2, the verb נאף instead of זנה is used in order to characterize Israel's behavior in Jer 3:8. The term whoring" (זנה; Jer 3:8) that describes Israel's behavior towards YHWH described in Hos 1:2;2:4,7 is now eliminated and replaced by the term "backsliding." This "backsliding", then, gets explained in terms of a marital relationship (and no longer in terms of "harlotry"). Overall then, the depiction of Israel, portrayed as an autonomous prostitute is *purposefully* and *deliberately turned into* the image of an adulterous wife. This portrayal of a marital relationship, then, gets emphasized again in the same verse

by reinterpreting Hos 2:4ff as speaking about a divorce. In addition Jer 3:8 even more exhibits an awareness of the fact that נהז and נאפ can not simply be understood as denoting one and the same thing, by attributing adultery (נאפ) and harlotry (זנה) to separate cases: as we saw earlier, Jer 3:8 does not simply read "harlotrous Israel committed adultery" but introduces the expression "backsliding Israel" as a bridge. Furthermore, נאפ and זנה are not (immediately) attributed to the same female personifications (נאפ gets attributed to Israel; and זנה to Judah). It is thus clear that before merging (what must have been perceived as) two mutually exclusive cases into homonyms, some further effort had to be made, in order to justify usage such as the one introduced in Jer 3:9. The justification of this merging appears right here where the terms are equated for the first time. Jer 3:9 introduces the idea that נאפ and זנה are to be read as homonyms by creating a bridge that units the two expressions: Judah's "harlotry" is equated with "adultery," by explicitly emphasizing the idea that both females are "defiled" (חנפ).

To sum up, a comparison of Hos 2 with Jer 2-3 shows that great efforts on the part of Jer 2-3 were necessary in order to turn "harlotery" into marital language. There probably are theological reason behind this: Jeremiah goal is to portray the relationship between YHWH and Israel/Judah as if it had always been institutionalized and to counter injections made by a readership that exhibit a different understanding (i.e. one more similar to what gets portrayed in Hos 2).

Supposed that my interpretation so far is correct and Hos 2:4-15 (and Hos 1:2) indeed does not portray an already legitimatized relationship. How is this passage – and the "relationship" of the speaker and the textual woman then to be understood?

For this we have to take a look at the immediate context of Hos 2. In what follows I will argue that we can read Hos 1-3 *as an introduction to Hos 4-9*; an introduction that serves the purpose of attracting the attention of the readership in provocative and unsettling ways and that, thus, prepares the reader to receive the messages that conveyed in the latter passages.

If we take the role assigned to the reader serious, namely to identify with the textual female in Hos 2 (who, after all, personifies Israel) the rhetoric of the text raises suspicion against the portrayal of YHWH in Hos 2:4-15. Hos 2:4-15 then reads as a continuation of the idea that a relationship between YHWH and Israel is nonexistent, an idea already introduced in Hos 1:2 and 3-9*. The implied reader's sympathy, who presumable at first had identified with YHWH's word to Hosea in Hos 1:2, as the text

progresses in Hos 1:3-9 is gradually drawn from YHWH to the textual woman in Hos 1,[21] before Hos 2 in fact characterizes its readership, Israel, as that woman. Regardless of whether the implied readership consisted only of men (or if women where included), the fact that Israel is addressed in the image of a prostitute has to be considered as provocation. Anticipating the role assigned to the readers the text becomes even more provocative, for it first assigns the Israelites the role of a prostitute and then *at the same time* accuses them for the role that has been assigned to her. The next provocation lies in the fact, that she/the Israelites are attacked and maltreated for her/their behavior without any noticeable legal justification. Beyond, the fact that they are insulted by being called "a prostitute" and violently attacked despite a lack of legal justification, the provocation continues when considering that they are attacked for all that is said to be constitutive for their lives: their physical integrity, their property, their children and their cult are threatened (cf. Hos 3:4) without giving any legitimization. The speaker's (illegitimate) destruction in Hos 2:4-15, on the one hand, is furthermore contrasted by the mother in Hos 1:3-9 who gives birth and nurtures her children (while YHWH/Hosea condemns them) and, on the other hand, is contrasted by the depiction of YHWH's generous marital proposal and his merciful behavior towards the children (2:25).

Given this understanding of the text, the question that naturally arises with regard to Hos 2:4-15 is the following: is this the same YHWH that introduces himself in Hos 2:16-25?

Maybe the answer is no. There are at least hints that can be interpreted as pointing to the depiction of an Anti-YHWH that is mistakenly perceived to be YHWH: First of all, we have already seen that Hos 2:4-15 and 16-25 introduces two conflicting images of YHWH. Beyond that, there are differences in style: While the speaker's name is not mentioned explicitly (but hidden until v.15), YHWH's name is mentioned explicitly and immediately in vv. 18; 23. While the textual female in the first part is addressed only in the third person, v. 18 suddenly addresses her directly with "you" (2 p. f sg). While the speaker's action lacks any legal justification in Hos 2:4-15, marital language is introduced in v. 18 in order to propose (not finalize!) an institutionalized, legal relationship. This relationship is depicted as requiring a declaration and commitment from both sides: she will call him "my husband" and he

[21] As Yvonne Cf. Sherwood has argued. Sherwood, Y. (1996), *The Prostitute and the Prophet. Hosea's Marriage in Literary Perspective* (JSOTSup 212; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic), 115-47; 143-47.

in turn will offer her safety and a relationship and life that is grounded in righteousness, justice, steadfast love, mercy and faithfulness. Only then she will really know who *the* (real) YHWH is.

Furthermore, if we accept – as Marie-Theres Wacker has suggested – that the conflict portrayed in Hos 1-3 is not solved in Hos 3 (because the woman that explicitly represents Israel's situation is commanded to remain in waiting position), we will even more find it plausibly that Hos 1-3 serves the purpose of raising provocations that are answered in Hos 4. In this chapter the readership, provoked and unsettled by YHWH's seemingly arbitrary behavior in Hos 2, encounters the answers to its questions: the verb ריב in Hos 4:1 points back to Hos 2:4. The accusations against Israel as well as the description of its misery (described in Hos 2:5-15), now appears in a different light. YHWH suddenly takes – at least to some extent – the side of the Israelites that were attacked in Hos 1-3. Thus, the accusations against Israel that continue in Hos 4-9 are easier to swallow for its readers: in ch. 4 it now becomes *obvious* that it has not been the real YHWH that has caused Israel's distress. The one that is to blame is the YHWH priest (the YHWH priests?) that has rejected his knowledge of the real YHWH as he is presented in Hos 2:21-25 (and 4:1). Instead the priest has presented an image of YHWH that lead Israel into its misery. This misery in Hos 4:2-3 – like in Hos 2:4-15 – is described as unsocial and violent behavior. It furthermore is – like in Hos 2:5 - described by using terms such as "parched land" (cf. 2:5). Like in Hos 2 the image of an unsocial and violent behavior is contrasted with the terms truth (אֱמֶת) and lovingkindness (חֶסֶד) and knowledge of God (דַּעַת אֱלֹהִים) that resemble what YHWH had offered to Israel in Hos 2:21-22. Beyond that, it is explicitly acknowledged by YHWH's voice that nobody (among the Israelites) should blame one another – for it is only (!) the priest(s) that are to be accused in the first place: "It is you that I plead against, priest"[22] (Hos 4:4). Thus, in light of Hos 1-3 (and particularly Hos 2) Israel is now given the chance to recognizes where its misery and the accusations against it originate. The fact that they could not know the real YHWH and are suffering on the basis of a wrong image of YHWH is attributed to the priests (and in the following also to the political leaderships). Overall, then, it is my claim that Hos 1-3 functions as a provocative introduction to make Israel accept the list of accusations uttered in to Hos 4-9, because the are partially given credit for their

[22] Mas. T.: "But your people are like those who plead against the priest."

notion that they are caused to suffer innocently and for the fact that they where right in not wanting to accept the Anti-YHWH –as he is presented in Hos 2:4-15 - but rather wanted to escape from him as stated in Hos 1:2 and 2:4-15. Now that it has been revealed to them that the "YHWH" that has caused destruction and violence is not the real YHWH as introduced in Hos 2:16-25 and Hos 4 and that they suffer because of somebody else (their leadership), the words of judgment in Hos 4-9 – raised in the name of YHWH - are likely to be heard and accepted.