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

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, which serves as legal foundation for the punitive actions described in Hos 2:4-15. In this paper, I will argue that nothing that is immediately given in the text shows that Hos 2:5-14 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. This means that 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.