

“SHE IS NOT MY WIFE AND I AM NOT
HER HUSBAND”:
A MATERIALIST ANALYSIS OF HOSEA 1–2

GALE A. YEE
Episcopal Divinity School

This paper investigates the material and socio-historical conditions that give rise to the notorious marriage metaphor for the God–Israel relationship, a metaphor capturing the imaginations of Hosea’s male audience through a dramatic rhetoric of pain and pleasure. The exegetical method used is ideological criticism—described in my chapter in *Judges and Method*¹—which performs two interrelated investigations. The *extrinsic analysis* will highlight the native tributary mode of production in eighth-century Israel and its effect on gender relations, the pluralistic cult, and emergent monolatry with its marginalization of women’s popular religion. The *intrinsic analysis* will underscore the ideological dynamics of the marriage metaphor for God’s covenant, the feminization of the ruling hierarchy, and its consequences for the symbolization of women as evil in Hosea.

Before turning to the extrinsic analysis, I address first the difficult problems in dating the book of Hosea. The authorship of the book of Hosea is a complex matter that is still disputed. Many scholars insist that most of the book originated with the prophet Hosea himself.² Others think that redactional activity was more extensive than previously thought.³ For the purposes of this article, I will presume the former opinion, that bulk of the oracles

¹ G.A. Yee, “Ideological Criticism: Judges 17–21 and the Dismembered Body,” in G.A. Yee (ed.), *Judges and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), pp. 146–70.

² For example, F.I. Andersen and D.N. Freedman, *Hosea. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 24; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1980), p. 59; D. Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah* (WBC 31; Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), p. 8; T.E. McComiskey, *The Minor Prophets. An Exegetical and Expository Commentary. Vol. 1: Hosea, Joel, and Amos* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992).

³ See G.A. Yee, *Composition and Tradition in the Book of Hosea: A Redaction Critical Investigation* (SBLDS 102; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), pp. 1–25, for a review of the literature.

in the work is Hosean, having a particular theological thrust: a polemical monolatry, highlighting fidelity to YHWH among the gods. Building upon this monolatry, later interpretive stages left their noticeable imprint upon the oracles by their evolving monotheism.

I. Extrinsic Analysis of the Book of Hosea

The Socio-Political Context of Eighth-Century Israel

Very little is known about the northern prophet Hosea. The superscription to his book (1:1), added later by a redactor, identifies Hosea as the son of Beeri, about whom nothing more can be said. The superscription situates Hosea between 750-724 BCE, that is, between the last years of Jeroboam II (786-746) and three years before the fall of Israel to the Assyrians in 721.

During this period, Israel operated under a native tributary mode of production, into which a foreign tributary mode of production intruded and made demands.⁴ Because Israel was forced to pay tribute to foreign powers to secure its position in the wider political sphere, the native tributary mode in the eighth-century northern kingdom had a much different configuration than the one under which the Yahwist operated, who composed Genesis 2-3 in southern Judah.⁵ Four major factors impinged upon this mode of production in related, complex ways, directly affecting gender relations and Hosea's theological and social location in the YHWH-alone movement: 1) agricultural intensification of royal "cash crops"; 2) political instability within the Israelite royal court, coupled with the external threat of Assyrian invasion; 3) conflicts within Israelite polytheism; and 4) socio-economic relations among the religious and political élite, that is the king, priest, and prophet.

⁴ N.K. Gottwald, "From Tribal Existence to Empire: The Socio-Historical Context for the Rise of the Hebrew Prophets," in J.M. Thomas and V. Visick (eds.), *God and Capitalism: A Prophetic Critique of Market Society* (Madison, WI: AR Editions, 1991), p. 17; N.K. Gottwald, "Sociology (Ancient Israel)," in *ABD* 6: 84-85. For an overview of the economy of the monarchy, see R.H. Lowery, *The Reforming Kings: Cults and Society in First Temple Judah* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1991), pp. 393-461.

⁵ G.A. Yee, "Gender, Class, and the Social-Scientific Study of Genesis 2-3," *Semeia* (forthcoming).

Royal Agricultural Intensification. Beginning with David's land grants to military supporters of non-Israelite territories, such as the fertile lowlands, two conflicting systems of land tenure, with widely differing social values, operated in ancient Israel.⁶ Under a familial mode of production, highland farmers practiced a mixed, village-based agriculture that distributed risks of crop failure and optimized labor across a diverse spectrum.⁷ Most importantly, villagers retained their "surplus" income and resources. Under a tributary mode of production, land grants in Israel's "breadbasket" regions became latifundia, passed on as patrimony in the hands of a few wealthy élites.⁸ To gain access to the land, peasants paid enormous rent and/or taxes, turning their "surplus" over to the landholders.

In order for the state to survive and compete with other nations in the ancient Near East, agribusiness under the state's system of taxation focused on certain crops that were easily appropriated, storable, transportable, and liquid. These highly exportable and lucrative "cash crops" proved to be oil, wine, and grain (cf. 1 Kgs 5:11; 2 Chron. 2:10,15; Ezek. 27:17). Particularly during the eighth century, the monarchy imposed an increased demand for these crops upon highland villagers.⁹ In Hosea, the desire for "grain, wine, and oil" becomes a signifier for the nation's promiscuity.¹⁰

⁶ M.L. Chaney, "Systemic Study of the Israelite Monarchy," *Semeia* 37 (1986), pp. 67-68; R. Albertz, *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period: From the Beginnings to the End of the Monarchy* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1994), pp. 159-60; J.A. Todd, "The Pre-Deuteronomistic Elijah Cycle," in R.B. Coote (ed.), *Elijah and Elisha in Socioliterary Perspective* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), pp. 5-8; J. Blenkinsopp, *Sage, Priest, Prophet: Religious and Intellectual Leadership in Ancient Israel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1995), pp. 149-54.

⁷ D.C. Hopkins, "The Dynamics of Agriculture in Monarchical Israel," in SBLSP (1983), pp. 187-93; D.C. Hopkins, "Bare Bones: Putting Flesh on the Economics of Ancient Israel," in V. Fritz and P.R. Davies (eds.), *The Origins of the Ancient Israelite States* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), p. 133.

⁸ D.N. Premnath, "Latifundialization and Isaiah 5.8-10," *JSOT* 40 (1988), pp. 49-54; K.W. Whitelam, "King and Kingship," *ABD* 4: p. 40.

⁹ Hopkins, "Dynamics of Agriculture," pp. 196-202; M.L. Chaney, "Bitter Bounty: The Dynamics of Political Economy Critiqued by the Eighth-Century Prophets," in R.L. Stivers (ed.), *Reformed Faith and Economics* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1989), pp. 22-23; Gottwald, "From Tribal Existence to Empire," p. 17.

¹⁰ Hos. 2:8-9; 7:14; 12:1. Cf. 2:5, 22; 8:7; 9:2. A.A. Keefe, "The Female Body, the Body Politic and the Land: A Sociopolitical Reading of Hosea 1-2," in A. Brenner (ed.), *A Feminist Companion to the Latter Prophets* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), pp. 70-100, correlates Hosea's sexually charged critique with this agribusiness.

Although royal policy of crop intensification may have been more efficient in the short run, it had damaging effects on the highland mode of production in the long run. First of all, the tributary economy redistributed profits from grain, wine, and oil exportation among the ruling élite, leaving the village barely enough to carry on production.¹¹ Although the monarchy utilized this wealth for vital reasons, such as national security, the system succumbed to corruption and extortion.¹² Second, the royal focus on specific crops conflicted with village strategies to spread risks, such as crop rotation, staggered sowing, fallowing, and herd grazing.¹³ Third, this policy impinged upon village agriculture most directly by forcing upon its own agenda upon land use. Formerly employed in multiple ways to spread risk, the highlands were gradually transformed through enormous peasant investment into terraces, growing vineyards and olive trees to keep pace with the state's demand for wine and oil.¹⁴ Because procedures to deal with crop failure were minimized, the villagers joined the lowland peasantry, in being the hardest hit during lean years by economically ruinous cycles of tax and debt.¹⁵

Internal and External State Politics. Social, political, and economic developments in both Israel and Judah often resulted from external influences and pressures from the wider ancient Near East context. A hiatus in Aramean hegemony and Assyrian westward expansion allowed Israel a time of relative peace and prosperity during the early to middle years of the eighth century under

¹¹ J.A. Dearman, *Property Rights in the Eight-Century Prophets* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), pp. 132-33, notes that instead of the "anonymous rich and powerful of popular reconstruction," those profiteering from surplus income were mostly state officials or servants. Also, Blenkinsopp, *Sage, Priest, Prophet*, pp. 153-54; B. Lang, *Monotheism and the Prophetic Minority: An Essay in Biblical History and Sociology* (Sheffield: Almond, 1983), pp. 114-27.

¹² See Dearman, *Property Rights*, pp. 132-35, on a redistributing economy; Albartz, *History of Israelite Religion*, pp. 161-62.

¹³ Hopkins, "Dynamics of Agriculture," pp. 187-200. For a more extended discussion, see D.C. Hopkins, *The Highlands of Canaan* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1985), pp. 213-61.

¹⁴ Chaney, "Bitter Bounty", p. 24.

¹⁵ Gottwald, "Sociology (Ancient Israel)," p. 84; Chaney, "Bitter Bounty," pp. 25-26; Albartz, *History of Israelite Religion*, pp. 160-61; Lang, *Monotheism*, pp. 114-27. See N.K. Gottwald, "A Hypothesis About Social Class in Monarchic Israel in the Light of Contemporary Studies of Social Class and Social Stratification," in N.K. Gottwald (ed.), *The Hebrew Bible in Its Social World and in Ours* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), for an extended analysis of ruling class extraction of surplus during the Israelite monarchy.

Jeroboam II. Nevertheless, wealth was primarily redistributed to the ruling classes. As the prophet Amos testifies, the ordinary citizen suffered under Jeroboam's vigorous reconstruction projects and policies.¹⁶ Similar policies under the Omrides resulted in popular discontent, but with specific differences. The Omrides consolidated their power through intermarriage (1 Kgs 15:30-31) and profitable foreign trade agreements, while Jeroboam II primarily seized the momentary lull in the broader ancient Near Eastern struggles for power to expand his holdings.¹⁷

If Hos. 1:1 is correct, Hosea prophesied during a politically turbulent period after Jeroboam II's rule (cf. 2 Kgs 14:23-17:41).¹⁸ The monarchy was plagued by a number of assassinations. Of the six kings to ascend the throne, all but one died violently (2 Kgs 15:8-31; 17:1-18). Continuing to benefit from the redistributive economy of Jeroboam II, the ruling élite exploited the system, causing court corruption and partisan intrigue to be rampant (Hos. 6:8-10; 7:1-7). Furthermore, external pressures influenced Israelite domestic affairs. The Northern Kingdom not only contended with the western encroachment of the Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser III, but also clashed with its southern rival, Judah, during the Syro-Ephraimite war (735-33 BCE). Israel's foreign policy was often unpredictable. The nation curried favor with international powers, such as Egypt and Assyria, which competed with each other in the political arena (Hos. 5:13; 7:8-15; 8:8-10; 10:6; 12:1). The tribute Israel paid to Assyria in the consecutive stages of their relations¹⁹ exacted a considerable price upon élite (cf. 2 Kgs 15:20), who passed the burdens onto an already hard hit peasantry. Thus, political struggles the Israelite élites faced in their

¹⁶ Amos 2:6-8; 3:9-10; 5:11; Dearman, *Property Rights*, pp. 132-33, 140; Albertz, *History of Israelite Religion*, pp. 165-67; Lowery, *The Reforming Kings*, p. 11.

¹⁷ T.H. Renteria, "The Elijah/Elisha Stories: A Socio-Cultural Analysis of Prophets and People in Ninth-Century BCE Israel," in R.B. Coote (ed.), *Elijah and Elisha in Socioliterary Perspective* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), pp. 89-95; Dearman, *Property Rights*, pp. 136-37.

¹⁸ See J.M. Miller and J.H. Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986), pp. 326-37; J.H. Hayes and J.K. Kuan, "The Final Years of Samaria (730-720 BC)," *Bib* 72 (1991), pp. 153-81.

¹⁹ See Miller and Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*, pp. 320-22; Hayes and Kuan, "The Final Years of Samaria," pp. 153-81. Cf. 2 Kgs 15:19-20; 17:3-4; Hos. 5:13; 7:8-12; 8:10; 10:6; 12:1. For an analysis of the economic complexities of the Assyrian Empire, see J.N. Postgate, "The Economic Structure of the Assyrian Empire," in M.T. Larsen (ed.), *Power and Propaganda: A Symposium on Ancient Empires* (Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1979), pp. 193-221.

own subordination to more powerful ancient Near East countries simultaneously affected the way they imposed an aggressive hegemony over their own countrymen and women.²⁰ Hosea will label Israel's contradictory and oppressive foreign and domestic policies with a sexual trope, "promiscuity" (see below).

The Cult in Eighth-Century Israel. Traditional reconstructions of ancient Israelite religion describe a monotheistic Yahwism brought into Canaan either by conquering or migrating nomads, which clashed with the indigenous fertility religions of the land.²¹ In light of recent analyses, this view must be revised. The emergence of ancient Israel is currently regarded as a movement among the indigenous peoples within Canaan itself,²² rather than as an influx of an alien population into the land, whether through conquest or immigration. These peoples were primarily agrarian, steeped in religious beliefs and practices that focused on the fertility of the land, flock and women. The development of monotheism in ancient Israel is, therefore, a gradual internal process of convergence with, and differentiation from, these diverse beliefs and practices of the Canaanite population.²³

To understand Hosea, then, we must recognize that ancient Israelite religion had a strong heritage in the Canaanite religion itself. Early Israelite religion included the worship of several other deities, along with YHWH. Veneration of the Canaanite deities El,

²⁰ Albertz, *History of Israelite Religion*, pp. 162-63; W.I. Toews, *Monarchy and Religious Institution in Israel Under Jeroboam I* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1993), p. 166. See also the analysis of M. Liverani, "The Ideology of the Assyrian Empire," in M.T. Larsen (ed.), *Power and Propaganda: A Symposium on Ancient Empires*, (1979), pp. 297-317, on the hierarchical structure and dynamics of colonization, which can be applied to the Israelite scene.

²¹ For example, H. Ringgren, *Israelite Religion* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1963; reprinted, London: SPCK, 1966), pp. 41-54. For a critique of these positions, see D.R. Hillers, "Analyzing the Abominable: Our Understanding of Canaanite Religion," *JQR* 75. 3 (1985), pp. 253-69, and Albertz, *History of Israelite Religion*, pp. 172-75.

²² The major scholars proposing this models are G.E. Mendenhall, "The Hebrew Conquest of Palestine," *BA* 25 (1962), pp. 66-87, and N.K. Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel, 1250-1050 B.C.* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1979). See also the critique and modification of Gottwald by N.P. Lemche, *Early Israel. Anthropological and Historical Studies on the Israelite Society Before the Monarchy* (VTSup 37; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1985). For a review of the literature, see J.D. Martin, "Israel As a Tribal Society," in R.E. Clements (ed.), *The World of Ancient Israel: Sociological, Anthropological and Political Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 95-118.

²³ M.S. Smith, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1990), pp. xxii-xxvii.

Baal, and even the goddess Asherah (see below), was accepted or at least tolerated in the earlier stages of Israel's religious development.²⁴ What stands condemned as Baal worship in Hosea—for example, baal/s (2:8, 13, 17; 9:10; 13:1), cultic rites on the high places (4:13; 10:8), pillars (3:4; 10:1-2), divining rods (4:12), images (4:17; 8:4; 14:8), and calf figurines (8:5-6; 10:5; 13:2)—were for centuries accepted components of the worship of YHWH. In other words, Hosea condemns not Canaanite encroachment into Yahwism, but rather early Yahwism itself.²⁵ Although these had been taken over from foreign cults, their appropriation had occurred much earlier and was no longer regarded as syncretistic by the people.

The theological position Hosea advocates vis-à-vis the cult of his time would appropriately be a *polemical* monolatry. In contrast to an integrating or unpolemical monolatry, that seemed to characterize the official and popular religion and cult of early Israel, a polemical monolatry venerated one God without denying the existence or activity of other deities, but was intolerant or critical of them.²⁶ Hosea's theology would be decisive for the eventual later development of Israelite monotheism, the belief in the existence and veneration of a single, solitary God, during the exilic and post-exilic periods.²⁷ His polemical monolatry will also be a

²⁴ See the essays by Coogan, McCarter, Dever and Holladay in P.D. Miller, Jr., P.D. Hanson and S.D. McBride (eds.), *Ancient Israelite Religion. Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987). Also consult the review article by W.G. Dever, "Will the Real Israel Please Stand Up?" Part II: Archaeology and the Religions of Ancient Israel," *BASOR* 298 (1995), pp. 37-58.

²⁵ R.K. Gnuse, *No Other Gods. Emergent Monotheism in Israel* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), p. 73.

²⁶ For this distinction, see J.A. Dearman, *Religion and Culture in Ancient Israel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1992), p. 36. Regarding Hosea, see Smith, *Early History of God*, p. 151; Lang, *Monotheism*, pp. 30-36; and M. Smith, *Palestinian Parties and Politics That Shaped the Old Testament* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), pp. 42-45.

²⁷ On monotheism, see D.L. Petersen, "Israel and Monotheism: The Unfinished Agenda," in G.M. Tucker, D.L. Petersen and R.R. Wilson (eds.), *Canon, Theology and Old Testament Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), p. 97; Smith, *Early History of God*, pp. xix-xxv, 152-57; Lang, *Monotheism*, pp. 13-56; and several of the essays in W. Dietrich and M.A. Klopfenstein (eds.), *Ein Gott Allein? JHWH—Verehrung und biblischer Monotheismus im Kontext der israelitischen und altorientalischen Religionsgeschichte* (Freiburg: Universitätsverlag Freiburg, 1994). B. Halpern, "Brisker Pipes Than Poetry": The Development of Israelite Monotheism," in J. Neusner, B.A. Levine and E.S. Frerichs (eds.), *Judaic Perspectives on Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), distinguishes an unselfconscious monotheism in early Israel, which was monolatrous and henotheistic, from a later

crucial factor in his gender-specific visualization of the deity and covenant community as a married couple.

Two religious practices need to be addressed, because they bear particularly on women's cultic participation and its relationship to the polemic behind Hosea's marriage metaphor: the worship of a/Asherah and the rituals of cultic prostitution. The former most likely was a feature of early Israelite cult, but the latter was not, despite the traditional scholarly presumption that it was.

The Cult of a/Asherah. On the basis of archaeological and inscriptional evidence, it seems very probable that early Israel venerated the goddess Asherah, YHWH's consort, along with her cultic wooden symbol, the asherah.²⁸ Although not a new speculation,²⁹ recent interest in the goddess is sparked by the discovery of pithoi inscriptions from the eighth-century site of Kuntillet 'Ajrud. The

radically self-conscious monotheism. M.S. Smith, "Yahweh and Other Deities in Ancient Israel: Observations on Old Problems and Recent Trends," in W. Dietrich and M.A. Klopfenstein (eds.), *Ein Gott Allein?* pp. 225-26, argues against this lack of terminological precision.

²⁸ For the secondary literature, see J.A. Emerton, "'Yahweh and His Asherah': The Goddess or Her Symbol?," *VT* 49.3 (1999), pp. 315-37; Albertz, *History of Israelite Religion*, pp. 85-87; G. Braulik, O.S.B., "The Rejection of the Goddess Asherah in Israel: Was the Rejection As Late As Deuteronomistic and Did It Further the Oppression of Women in Israel?" in *The Theology of Deuteronomy* (N. Richland Hills, TX: BIBAL Press, 1994), pp. 167-71; J. Day, "Asherah," *ABD* 1: 483-87; J. Day, "Asherah in the Hebrew Bible and Northwest Semitic Literature," *JBL* 105 (1986), pp. 385-408; W.G. Dever, "Asherah, Consort of Yahweh? New Evidence From Kuntillet 'Ajrūd," *BASOR* 255 (1984), pp. 21-37; D.N. Freedman, "Yahweh of Samaria and His Asherah," *BA* 50 (1987), pp. 241-49; J.M. Hadley, "Yahweh and 'His Asherah': Archaeological and Textual Evidence For the Cult of the Goddess," in W. Dietrich, and M.A. Klopfenstein (eds.), *Ein Gott Allein?* pp. 235-68; J.M. Hadley, "From Goddess to Literary Construct: The Transformation of Asherah Into Hokmah," in A. Brenner, and C. Fontaine (eds.), *A Feminist Companion to Reading the Bible: Approaches, Methods and Strategies* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), pp. 360-99; P.D. Miller, Jr, "The Absence of the Goddess in Israelite Religion," *HAR* 10 (1986), pp. 239-48; S.M. Olyan, *Asherah and the Cult of Yahweh in Israel* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988); Smith, *Early History of God*, pp. 80-103; M.S. Smith, "God Male and Female in the Old Testament: Yahweh and His 'Asherah,'" *TS* 48 (1987), pp. 333-40. Z. Meshel, "Did Yahweh Have a Consort?" *BAR* 5 (1979), p. 31, is open to the possibility of a consort for Yahweh, although "a thoroughly blasphemous notion, but one which seems consistent with the diverse religious influences at Kuntillet 'Ajrud." For iconography of the goddess, see the massive study of U. Winter, *Frau und Göttin: Exegetische und ikonographische Studien zum weiblichen Gottesbild im alten Israel und in dessen Umwelt* (Freiburg/Göttingen: Universitätsverlag/Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983).

²⁹ Cf. R. Patai, *The Hebrew Goddess* (Philadelphia: KTAV, 1967).

inscriptions recount a blessing on different individuals "by Yahweh of Samaria and by his/its asherah/Asherah." Moreover, from a pillar in a burial tomb near Khirbet el-Qôm is an inscription, "May Uriyahu be blessed by Yahweh, my guardian [?], and his/its asherah/Asherah."³⁰ Along with other cultic artifacts not mentioned in the biblical texts,³¹ the discovery of hundreds of terracotta female statuettes, "pillar figurines," in the stratigraphy of domestic sites dated at the second half of the eighth to seventh centuries, reveals that a "non-conformist" cult existed alongside the official state cult.³²

Several scholars argue that Hosea's polemic against Israelite cult condemned the worship of the goddess.³³ In particular, some think that the goddess Asherah was the offending party behind Hosea's famous marriage metaphor.³⁴ However, Hosea does not explicitly refer to or condemn devotion to the goddess Asherah, her cult object, or the female figurines, even though the baals and bull-calves face consistent censure (cf. Hos. 2:8, 13, 17; 8:5-6; 9:10; 10:5; 13:1-2). The references to the goddess which scholars find in Hosea are quite oblique.³⁵ The condemnation of the goddess

³⁰ Z. Zevit, "The Kirbet El-Qôm Inscription Mentioning a Goddess," *BASOR* 255 (1984), pp. 39-47.

³¹ W.G. Dever, "Ancient Israelite Religion: How to Reconcile the Differing Textual and Artifactual Portraits?" in W. Dietrich, and M.A. Klopfenstein (eds.), *Ein Gott Allein?* p. 111.

³² John S. Holladay, Jr, "Religion in Israel and Judah Under the Monarchy: An Explicitly Archaeological Approach," in P.D. Miller, Jr, P.D. Hanson and S.D. McBride (eds.), *Ancient Israelite Religion. Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross*, pp. 275-82; Braulik, "Rejection of the Goddess Asherah," p. 171.

³³ See G.I. Emmerson, "A Fertility Goddess in Hosea IV: 17-19?", *VT* 24 (1974), pp. 492-97; H. Balz-Cochois, "Gomer oder die Macht der Astarte. Versuch einer feministischen Interpretation von Hos. 1-4," *EvT* 42 (1982), pp. 37-65; Day, "Asherah," p. 486; Braulik, "Rejection of the Goddess Asherah," pp. 165-82; F. Gangloff and J.C. Haelewyck, "Osée 4,17-19: Un Marzeah en l'honneur de la Déesse 'Anat'?" *ETL* 71.4 (1995), pp. 370-82; M. Wacker, "Traces of the Goddess in the Book of Hosea," in A. Brenner (ed.), *A Feminist Companion to the Latter Prophets* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), pp. 219-41.

³⁴ J. McInlay, "Bringing the Unspeakable to Speech in Hosea," *Pacifica* 9 (1996), pp. 121-33; W.D. Whitt, "The Divorce of Yahweh and Asherah in Hos. 2.4-7.12ff," *SJOT* 6. 1 (1992), pp. 31-67. See the critique of Whitt by J.J. Schmitt, "Yahweh's Divorce in Hosea 2—Who Is That Woman?" *SJOT* 9 (1995), pp. 119-32.

³⁵ Emmerson, "A Fertility Goddess," pp. 492-97; Balz-Cochois, "Gomer," pp. 37-65; Day, "Asherah," pp. 385-408; Braulik, "Rejection of the Goddess Asherah," pp. 165-82; Gangloff and Haelewyck, "Osée 4,17-19," pp. 370-82; and Wacker, "Traces of the Goddess," pp. 329-48, single out Hos. 4:12, 17-19; 9:13;

should not therefore be considered the determinative factor in Hosea's symbolization of faithless Israel as female. It is however part of a more complex matrix that constituted Hosea's polemic (see below).

Theories of Cult Prostitution. A persistent belief of scholars "in manual after manual"³⁶ is the alleged practice of cult prostitution in the Levant and in Mesopotamia, involving a class of women who participated in *hieros gamos* ceremonies by representing the fertility goddess.³⁷ For example, one reads in McKenzie's *Dictionary of the Bible*:

A peculiar feature of the Mesopotamian and Canaanite culture was ritual prostitution. To the temples of the goddesses of fertility (Inanna, Ishtar, Astarte) were attached *bordellos* served by consecrated women who represented the goddess, the female principle of fertility. Intercourse with these women was communion with the divine as the principles of fertility.³⁸

In spite of admissions regarding "the meagerness of the data,"³⁹ the "fragmentary and somewhat contradictory" nature of the evidence,⁴⁰ the lateness of the sources,⁴¹ the notion of widespread sacred prostitution remains a standard presupposition in academic inquiries. Scholars contend that such sexual rites are at the very heart of prophetic use of the adulterous wife symbol.⁴²

and 14:9 (Engl. 14:8), where ambiguous feminine references and wordplays, they argue, indicate the presence of the goddess.

³⁶ Thus is the critique of M. Arnaud, "La Prostitution sacrée en Mésopotamie, un mythe Historiographique?" *RHR* 183 (1973), p. 111, on the academic study of "sacred prostitution." He argues that the supposed ancient practice was "an historiographic myth."

³⁷ Cf. M.C. Astour, "Tamar the Hierodule: An Essay in the Method of Vestigial Motifs," *JBL* 85 (1966), pp. 185-96; O.J. Baab, "Prostitution," *IDB* 3: 932-34; B.S. Brooks, "Fertility Cult Functionaries in the OT," *JBL* 60 (1941), pp. 227-53; L.M. Epstein, "Sacred Prostitution," in *Sex Laws and Customs in Judaism* (New York: Bloch, 1948), pp. 152-57; E.O. James, *The Cult of the Mother-Goddess: An Archaeological and Documentary Study* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1959), pp. 81-84; Lang, *Monotheism*, p. 24; B. MacLachlan, "Sacred Prostitution and Aphrodite," *SR* 21 (1991), pp. 145-62; E.M. Yamauchi, "Cultic Prostitution: A Case Study in Cultural Diffusion," in H.A. Hoffner (ed.), *Orient and Occident* (Butzon & Bercker: Kevelaer, 1973), pp. 213-22.

³⁸ J.L. McKenzie (ed.), *Dictionary of the Bible* (New York: MacMillan, 1965), p. 700, *Italics* mine.

³⁹ Baab, "Prostitution," p. 933.

⁴⁰ Yamauchi, "Cultic Prostitution," p. 222.

⁴¹ Epstein, "Sacred Prostitution," p. 154.

⁴² Cf. N. Stienstra, *YHWH Is the Husband of His People: An Analysis of a Biblical Metaphor with a Special Reference to Translation* (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1993), pp. 98-100, 139-41; I.K. Rallis, "Nuptial Imagery in the Book of Hosea: Israel As the Bride of Yahweh," *SVTQ* 34 (1990), pp. 197-219; F.C. Fensham, "The Marriage

Nevertheless, after a critical examination of the available evidence, a number of scholars have recently questioned the existence and extensiveness of ancient Near East cult prostitution. Ugaritic, Mesopotamian, and Egyptian texts offer no explicit information about sacred prostitution, and testimonies used by some to support such an institution, such as Herodotus and Strabo, are quite unreliable, because they were written at a far later date and are rather biased.⁴³ Though tongue-in-cheek, the remarks of Lang highlight the colonialist bias of Western biblical scholars regarding the so-called "Orient":

Ancient authors such as Herodotus and modern novelists and orientalist even more so were obviously carried away by their erotic fantasies. Temple prostitution belonged to what came "easily to their daydreams packed inside Oriental clichés: harems, princesses, princes, slaves, veils, dancing girls and boys, sherbets, ointments, and so on." The modern as well as the ancient East was associated with licentious sex, untiring sensuality, unlimited desire, and deep generative energies; "the Orient was a place where one could look for sexual experience unobtainable in Europe."⁴⁴

Scholarship and women have suffered immensely in the hands of academics who are unable to imagine any cultic role for women in antiquity that did not involve sexual intercourse. The Akkadian

Metaphor in Hosea for the Covenant Relationship Between the Lord and His People," *JNSL* 12 (1984), pp. 71-87; H.W. Wolff, *Hosea. A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Hosea* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974), pp. 14-15; J.L. Mays, *Hosea. A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969), pp. 25-26; P.A. Kruger, "Israel, the Harlot (Hos. 2:4-9)," *JNSL* 11 (1983), pp. 107-16; G. Snyman, "Social Reality and Religious Language in the Marriage Metaphor in Hosea 1-3," *OTE* 6 (1993), pp. 90-112, and others.

⁴³ For a review and critique of the unfounded claims of thinkers, past and present, regarding sacred prostitution, see Arnaud, "La Prostitution sacrée," pp. 111-15; E.J. Fisher, "Cultic Prostitution in the Ancient Near East? A Reappraisal," *BTB* 6 (1976), pp. 225-36; Winter, *Frau und Göttin*, pp. 334-42; R.A. Oden, Jr, *The Bible Without Theology: The Theological Tradition and Alternatives to It* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987), pp. 135-53; Hillers, "Analyzing the Abominable," pp. 253-69; M.I. Gruber, "Hebrew *Qēdēshāh* and Her Canaanite and Akkadian Cognates," *UF* 18 (1986), pp. 133-48; J.A. Hackett, "Can a Sexist Model Liberate Us? Ancient Near Eastern 'Fertility' Goddesses," *JFSR* 5 (1989), p. 68; T. Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake of the Goddesses; Women, Culture, and the Biblical Transformation of Pagan Myth* (New York: The Free Press, 1992), pp. 199-202; J.G. Westenholz, "Tamar, *Qēdēšā*, *Qadištu*, and Sacred Prostitution in Mesopotamia," *HTR* 82. 3 (1989), pp. 245-65; and R.A. Henshaw, *Female and Male: The Cultic Personnel. The Bible and the Rest of the Ancient Near East* (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick, 1994), pp. 218-56.

⁴⁴ B. Lang, *Wisdom and the Book of Proverbs: A Israelite Goddess Redefined* (New York: Pilgrim, 1986), p. 98. The quotation Lang cites is by cultural critic E.W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979), p. 190.

texts describe a number of cultic and other functions for the *qadištu*—wet nurse, midwife, a cult singer, archivist, and even later a sorceress—but none of which imply cultic prostitution. And yet, the Akkadian *qadištu* has erroneously been translated as female prostitute on the basis of the Hebrew *qēdēšāh*.⁴⁵ By a process of circular reasoning, assumptions informed by exaggerations in later sources are read into the biblical text. The biblical text is then used to explain terms found in extra-biblical literature, which in turn are used to “validate” the original interpretation of the biblical text. Although in the prophet’s mind these rituals involved uncontrolled sexuality or prostitution, it is difficult to accept these at face value.⁴⁶

Oden suggests that the phenomenon of cult prostitution should be investigated as an *accusation* that one society levels against another, as part of its process of self-definition. The indictment—that another society engages in cultic prostitution—would reveal more about those who level the accusation than about the other society itself. Summarizing the anthropologist Fredrik Barth, Oden points out that ethnic groups categorize themselves directly in opposition to other groups. They may categorize themselves according to overt signals, such as, dress, language, eating habits, etc. And they may categorize themselves according to standards of morality and excellence that would distinguish them from other groups. Groups usually focus on certain areas of conduct to demonstrate their difference from and perhaps superiority to other societies. It is significant for our discussion of cult prostitution, that one of these areas of conduct is sexual behavior. A group can assert its distinctiveness by charging that other nations are lax, excessive, or perverted in their sexual conduct.⁴⁷

Expressed in Hosea (other prophets and the Deuteronomist)

⁴⁵ Gruber, “Hebrew *qēdēšāh*,” pp. 138-48, and Fisher, “Cultic Prostitution,” pp. 227-28.

⁴⁶ This is not to say that female sexuality was never a part of the fertility cults. Both P. Bird, “To Play the Harlot’: An Inquiry Into an Old Testament Metaphor,” in P.L. Day (ed.), *Gender and Difference* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1989), pp. 87-88, and R. Jost, “Von ‘Huren und Heiligen’: Ein sozialgeschichtlicher Beitrag,” in H. Jahnou (ed.), *Feministische Hermeneutik und Erstes Testament: Analysen und Interpretationen* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1994), p. 135, allow for the possibility that rituals of the *qēdēšôt* may have included sexuality, but may not have been regarded as “prostitution” by the performers.

⁴⁷ Oden, *The Bible Without Theology*, pp. 132-35.

is a politics of difference, defining his theological assertions as being “distinct from,” rather than “in connection with,” the other groups. As we will soon see, these groups include those involved in cult, royal court, and foreign office. According to Hosea, Israelite self-definition lies in the exclusive worship of YHWH alone, to whom Israel is bound in covenant. Operating under the paradigm “in distinction from,” Hosea may have exaggerated the worship practices in Israelite religious pluralism to include cultic sexual service and all its depravities, in order champion his monolatrous position.

Relations Among King, Cult, Priest, and Foreign Affairs. Neglected but certainly more fruitful areas of study, contributing to our understanding Hosea’s marriage metaphor, are the complex social, political and economic relations among the king, cult, priest, and prophet, both at home and abroad in eighth century Israel.⁴⁸ Scholars primarily interpret the adulterous wife metaphor as Hosea’s condemnation of Israel’s “heterodox” cult.⁴⁹ However, the metaphor is also applied to Israel’s foreign allies and trading partners (8:8-10).⁵⁰ Cult and domestic and foreign affairs are not mutually exclusive, but converge in very real ways in the book of Hosea. Infractions in one sphere dramatically affect the others.

Particularly in Hosea 4–14, Hosea singles out the nation’s leaders for rebuke and condemnation. They include the king (5:1; 7:3, 5, 7; 8:4, 10; 10:7, 15; 13:10-11), priest (4:4-10; 5:1; 6:7-10; 7:1-7), prophet⁵¹ (4:5; 6:5; cf. 9:7), and princes (7:3, 5, 16; 8:4, 10; 9:15). Their transgressions overlap in the areas of cult, state, and foreign affairs, and are depicted metaphorically as *sexual* infractions.

⁴⁸ Although connections among cult and king have been discussed (see for example R. Gnuse, “Calf, Cult, and King: The Unity of Hosea 8:1-13,” *BZ* 26 [1982], pp. 83-92) correlations are not made with the husband/wife metaphor.

⁴⁹ Thus, Kruger, “Israel, the Harlot,” who argues in that *znh* “is not once applied to (Israel’s) external politics” (p. 109, n. 8). He glosses over 8:9-10 by commenting that Hosea only “hints at the idea of harlotry in a political sphere.” He overlooks the fact that the image of the “wild ass” in Hos. 8:9 has deeply sexual connotations (Jer. 2:24). Moreover, the use of *znh* in 9:1 should not be restricted to cult. The reference to the threshing floor and wine vat could refer to the state’s agricultural intensification of “grain, wine, and oil,” as I will argue below.

⁵⁰ In Yee, *Composition and Tradition in the Book of Hosea*, pp. 289; 305-306, I correlated the *earliest* tradition of the “harlot” metaphor in the Book of Hosea with Israel’s foreign policy. This metaphor was interpreted by later redactors to be the “polluted” cult.

⁵¹ See M.S. Odell, “Who Were the Prophets in Hosea?” *HBT* 18 (1996), pp. 78-95, regarding the institutional prophets condemned by Hosea.

The prophet is condemned along with the priest for “stumbling,” causing the people to be “destroyed for lack of knowledge” (4:5-6). Having devoted themselves to “fornication,” priest and prophet permit a “spirit of promiscuity” to infect the people (4:10-12, 18-19).⁵² Both priests and king fall under God’s judgment (5:1), for Ephraim/Israel has “played the whore” (5:3). “A promiscuous spirit” defiles the nation and it “does not know YHWH” (5:4). A murderous gang of priests (6:9) is responsible for the moral deterioration of the king and his royal court (7:3-7).⁵³ This decline in state affairs, instigated by priests described as “adulterers” (7:4),⁵⁴ directly affects foreign affairs, where “Ephraim mixes himself with the peoples” (7:8). Ephraim becomes “a cake unturned” which foreigners devour (7:8-9). The relation between internal and external politics is achieved through the metaphors of the “oven,” describing the internal intrigue (7:4-7), and that which is baked in the oven, “a half-baked cake” which foreigners consume (7:8-9). Ephraim’s capricious foreign policy with Egypt and Assyria is likened to a silly, senseless dove (7:11-13). For grain and wine, the people gather themselves together and rebel against God (7:14).

Hos. 8:1-14 also underscores the cultic entanglements of kings and princes and their effects on foreign affairs.⁵⁵ The illegitimacy of royal leadership is closely linked with the royal forging of the idolatrous “calf of Samaria” from silver and gold (8:4-6). The futility of this leadership⁵⁶ segues into the theme of unwise political alliances, described in sexual language as “hiring lovers” (8:9-10). Ephraim is like a “wild ass,” which according to Jer. 2:24 is characterized by unbridled sexuality: “In her heat sniffing the wind! Who can restrain her lust?” The tribute that Ephraim’s king and princes offer the nations is like the fee a man negotiates with a

⁵² See also Jer. 2:8 where priest, prophet, and leaders are grouped together in a divine accusation.

⁵³ The perpetrators of political intrigue in 7:1-7 seems to be the “gang of priests” described in 6:9. See Yee, “Hosea,” in *NIB* 7, pp. 255-57.

⁵⁴ The use of “adulterers” (*mēnā’špīm*) to describe the priests, rather than “promiscuity” (*zny*) which is usually employed, is due to the wordplay on “baker” (*špēh*) in 7:4, a figure associated with the oven metaphor.

⁵⁵ On the unity of the chapter, see Gnuse, “Calf, Cult, and King,” pp. 83-92.

⁵⁶ Dramatized in 8:7 through a literary device known as “pseudo-sorites.” See M. O’Connor, “The Pseudo-Sorites in Hebrew Verse,” in E.W. Conrad and E.W. Newing (eds.), *Perspectives on Language and Text: Essays and Poems in Honor of F.I. Andersen’s Sixtieth Birthday* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1987), pp. 245-46.

prostitute (8:10). The theme of imprudent foreign treaties is juxtaposed with the condemnation of unlawful sacrifices in 8:11-14. Ephraim's multiple altars to expiate sin have become the very sites for committing sin.

Hos. 10:1-10 contain similar interconnections among king (10:3-4, 7, 15), cult (10:1-2, 5-6, 8), and foreign politics (10:6, 10). God will break down Israel's altars and destroy its pillars, because it does not acknowledge YHWH as king (10:1-4). The city inhabitants and the idolatrous priests will mourn and wail over the calf of Samaria (10:5). This "idolatrous" cult object will be carried off to Assyria as "tribute to the great king" (10:6). Then, Samaria's illegitimate king shall perish (10:7, 15), just as the high places of Bethel are destroyed (10:8, 15). Foreign nations will be gathered against the people (10:10; cf. 10:14).

The interweaving of priestly, prophetic, and kingly crimes underscores the reality that Israelite religion, politics, and foreign affairs were inseparable.⁵⁷ Infractions in any of these domains were symbolized by Hosea through sexual imagery. Royal bureaucracy and ideology were not only legitimated by cult, but the cult itself functioned as an organ of the state.⁵⁸ Sanctuaries were established by kings not only as religious centers, but also as sites of administrative and economic activity.⁵⁹ Priests were male state bureaucrats who had major fiscal responsibilities, especially during the harvest. According to Matthews and Benjamin,⁶⁰ priests adjudicated which state households were honored or shamed on the basis of their record of tax payments. They assessed the productivity of a

⁵⁷ Lowery, *The Reforming Kings*, pp. 119-20; K. Van Der Toorn, "Theology, Priests, and Worship in Canaan and Ancient Israel," in *CANE* 3, pp. 40-41.

⁵⁸ Cf. G.W. Ahlström, *Royal Administration and National Religion in Ancient Palestine* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1982), p. 8: "From what has been said above, it should be evident that religion was an arm of the royal administration. By sending out and placing military personnel and civil servants including priests in district capitals, at strategic points, in store cities, and in the national sanctuaries, the central government saw to it that both civil and cultic laws were upheld and that taxes were paid." For a study of the cultic legitimation of kingship in Hosea, see H. Utzschneider, *Hosea Prophet vor dem Ende*, (OBO 31; Freiburg/Göttingen: Universitätsverlag/Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1980).

⁵⁹ Holladay, "Religion in Israel and Judah," pp. 249-99; Lowery, *The Reforming Kings*, pp. 112-16. Regarding Bethel and Samaria, see Ahlström, *Royal Administration and National Religion*, pp. 58-62.

⁶⁰ For what follows, see V.H. Matthews and D.C. Benjamin, *Social World of Ancient Israel: 1250-587 BCE* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993), pp. 187-95.

household's fields and herds by the amount of grain and animals it brought to the sanctuary. They collected tithes and taxes, in the form of sacrifices and tributes. They offered or processed sacrifices for storage. They deposited sacrifices at the sanctuary treasury until the king redistributed them to workers and soldiers at home, or in trade and tribute to foreign nations abroad.

Sacrifice was the central means of collecting revenue for the state (cf. 2 Chron. 31:4-6; Neh. 10:36-39).⁶¹ In contrast to the standard depiction of the complete annihilation of offerings, only a token portion of grain and animals was usually consumed in the sacrificial fires. The remainder went to the priests and their households (cf. Lev. 2:2-3; 6:14-17; 7:31-34).

In general, it would be better to understand sacrifice in Leviticus and Numbers as processing farm produce to be stored and redistributed rather than destroying it. At sanctuaries throughout Israel, priests slaughtered and butchered livestock, decanted wine and olive oil, and parched grain.⁶²

Priests, therefore, had significant responsibilities in handling the monarchy's desired cash crops of "grain, wine, and oil" (cf. Deut. 12:17; 14:23; 18:4; 2 Chron. 31:5; Neh. 10:39; 13:5,12). According to Hos. 4:8, the priests "feed on the sin of my people; they are greedy for their iniquity." Although this feeding could be figurative, it is quite plausible that the literal is meant. The priests secured their economic livelihood from practices of the cult.⁶³ Moreover, because of their role in sacrifices and food processing, priests were directly involved amassing tribute from the peasant classes to be delivered to the superpowers, Assyria and Egypt (5:13; 7:3-14; 8:9-10; 10:6; 12:1). The convergence of priestly and state interests in agricultural products, such as "grain, wine, and oil," for both foreign and domestic purposes will be branded by Hosea as "sexual promiscuity" (2:8-9; 4:11-17; 7:14; 9:1-2; 12:1).

The Social Location of the Prophet Hosea: The YHWH-Alone Movement

Hosea is singular in his attacks against the veneration of the baals and those cultic practices that had been regarded as compatible

⁶¹ Matthews and Benjamin, *Social World*, p. 188; Lowery, *The Reforming Kings*, p. 80; and Blenkinsopp, *Sage, Priest, Prophet*, p. 152.

⁶² Matthews and Benjamin, *Social World*, p. 192.

⁶³ Cf. Yee, "Hosea," *NIB* 7, p. 239; G.I. Davies, *Hosea* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), pp. 24-25.

with the worship of YHWH or, minimally, tolerated. It is essential, however, to read these attacks within the broader context of domestic and foreign affairs and the complex interconnections among king, priest and cult. By differentiating YHWH from the worship and cult of other deities, Hosea has been regarded as an important proponent of a so-called Yahweh-alone movement, instrumental in the later development of Israelite monotheism.⁶⁴ The movement is thought to have its origins in the ninth century with Elijah and Elisha, and the ruthless coup d'état of Jehu. It continued in the eighth century with Hosea, as the movement's "fanatical representative,"⁶⁵ and climaxed in Israelite monotheism during the Exile. Although eventually becoming the normative theological position, the worship of YHWH alone was the conviction of only a small minority group within early Israelite polytheism, and had different configurations over the course of the centuries. The YHWH-alone movement was, nevertheless, not simply a theological one, but was joined in complex ways to a wider socio-political environment through interconnections with monarchy, cult, and foreign policy.

Although the social, political, and economic climates in which they prophesied were different, Elijah and Hosea have some points of contact which may help explain their differentiation of YHWH from other deities. For both, YHWH, not Baal, brings the thirst-quenching rains which are integral to an agrarian-based society (1 Kgs 18; Hos. 6:3; 10:12; 14:5). Although Ahab increased profitable foreign trade and political relations, his support of Jezebel's Phoenician cult of Baal Shamem in Israel, the building of a temple in Baal's honor (1 Kgs 16:31-32), the economic support of the god's four hundred and fifty prophets at Jezebel's table (18:19), and the overall maintenance of the state system itself, created an enormous burden on the populace particularly during a time of

⁶⁴ Smith, *Palestinian Parties*, pp. 34-37, 43-48; Lang, *Monotheism*, pp. 13-56; Smith, *Early History of God*, pp. 154-55; J. Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel: From the Settlement in the Land to the Hellenistic Period* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983), pp. 104-105; Albertz, *History of Israelite Religion*, pp. 61-62; Petersen, "Israel and Monotheism", pp. 94-95; W.S. Boshoff, "Yahweh As God of Nature. Elements of the Concept of God in the Book of Hosea," *JNSL* 18 (1992), p. 33; E.K. Holt, *Hosea and History: A Tradition of Israel's History in the Book of Hosea* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), pp. 107-14; G.H. Wittenberg, "Amos and Hosea: A Contribution to the Problem of the 'Prophetenschweigen' in the Deuteronomistic History (Dtr)," *OTE* 6 (1993), pp. 302-309.

⁶⁵ Smith, *Palestinian Parties*, pp. 35-36.

famine (1 Kgs 17–18).⁶⁶ Wealth from expanded foreign involvement was allocated primarily to the ruling élite. Elijah's stringent critique of the Naboth affair demonstrates the extent of the monarchy's exploitation of small holders, instigated by the machinations of the foreign-born queen (1 Kgs 21).

With Elijah, YHWH moved from being a local God to one who had power and authority in the international arena. YHWH works beyond Israel's national borders, for example, in Zarephath for a Phoenician widow and her son (1 Kgs 17), and on Mount Horeb (1 Kgs 19). According to Smith, this enlargement of YHWH's dominion promoted an early form of monolatrous faith, which will continue in Hosea, who proclaims YHWH's power in both foreign and domestic affairs, and blossom fully as monotheism in the exilic period.⁶⁷

Like Elijah, Hosea prophesied during a time when foreign affairs impinged upon the administration of the Israelite state and dictated its domestic policy. The monarchy imposed an economic agenda upon its agrarian population, which escalated the production of "grain, wine, and oil," not only to satisfy export demands for these commodities, but also to mollify foreign aggression through tributes. This agricultural policy had disastrous effects upon the nation. It increased risks of crop failures and distributed profits primarily to the ruling élite (cf. 12:1, 7-8), impoverishing both highland villagers and lowland peasants. As foreign nations levied heavier tributes upon the Israelite ruling élite, this élite shifted the burden upon the farmers, already laboring under financially reduced and agriculturally precarious conditions.

The two prophets differ in the fact that Elijah condemned a foreign Baal, Baal Shamem,⁶⁸ while Hosea lambastes the worship of Israelite baals, whose worship had long since converged with YHWH's.⁶⁹ These baals became subordinates in YHWH's host or assembly (cf. Hos. 12:5), but Hosea maligns them as *foreign* deities.

⁶⁶ Lang, *Monotheism*, pp. 27-28, for a consideration of the financial impact of Jezebel's cult in Israel. For an analysis of Israel's socio-economic and political situation during the time of Elijah and Elisha, see Rentería, "Elijah/Elisha Stories," pp. 83-95.

⁶⁷ Smith, *Early History of God*, p. 149. It may be fair to say that a correlation exists between Omride promotion and strengthening of international ties and Elijah's proclamation of a more universal YHWH.

⁶⁸ See Smith, *Early History of God*, pp. 41-44.

⁶⁹ Albertz, *History of Israelite Religion*, pp. 172-73.

According to Halpern, the worship of the baals had political ramifications for Hosea, resulting in his own particular differentiation of YHWH from other deities:

The alternation in Hosea between foreign alliance and rural cult and 'baal' suggests that the intellectual process involved is a denial both of subordinate gods and of foreign entanglements, or to put it differently, of the equation of what is foreign (*and what is unjust*) with worship of subordinate deities. In Hosea, the background for the intellectual developments of the late 8th and, later, 7th century is present. Indeed, the identification of the "baals" as gods of foreign nations ... as distinct from as gods subordinate to YHWH, lies at the base of their rejection.⁷⁰

The cult in eighth-century Israel embodied a mode of production that, for Hosea, was unjust and intolerable: agricultural intensification, tied to a profitable foreign market and an aggressive foreign hegemony that insistently imposed its will upon Israelite internal affairs, and corrupt Israelite institutions of kingship, prophecy, and priesthood which oversaw this agribusiness, funneled profits to their own social sectors, and furthered the exploitation of the peasant classes.⁷¹ Hosea responds to the oppressive mode of production of his time by proclaiming the exclusive worship of YHWH-alone. His polemical monolatry has its theological source in the Exodus and wilderness periods of Israel's history:

I have been the Lord your God
ever since the land of Egypt;
You know no God but me,
and besides me there is no savior.
It was I who fed you in the wilderness,
in the land of drought. (Hos 13:4-5)

Hosea's fondness for the Exodus and wilderness periods of Israelite history is well known. Through Moses, the prophet *par excellence*, God brought Israel out of Egypt and guarded it (12:13). It was in the wilderness where the wife/Israel first responded in covenantal fidelity to the husband of her youth (2:14-15). When God chose Israel as partner in an exclusive relationship, it was like "finding grapes in the wilderness" (9:10).⁷² Through a meta-

⁷⁰ B. Halpern, "The Baal (and the Asherah) in Seventh-Century Judah: Yhwh's Retainers Retired," in R. Bartelmus, T. Krüger, and H. Utzschneider (eds.), *Konsequente Traditionsgeschichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993), pp. 148-49. *Italics* mine. Also, Halpern, "Development of Israelite Monotheism," pp. 93-94, and Toews, *Monarchy*, pp. 153-54.

⁷¹ Keefe, "The Female Body," pp. 91-93. Blenkinsopp, *Sage, Priest, Prophet*, pp. 142-50.

⁷² Hos. 9:10-17 was most likely proclaimed during the feast of Sukkoth. See

phor of the caring parent of a rebellious son, God calls Israel from Egypt, adopts him in the wilderness, and performs a series of nurturing gestures on his behalf: teaching the lad to walk, carrying, healing, leading, lifting, and stooping down to feed the youngster (11:1-4).⁷³ After a revelation of the divine name, Ephraim is reminded that YHWH has been the nation's deity ("your God") ever since its enslavement in Egypt. Referring to shelters built during the feast of Sukkoth commemorating the wilderness period, God will make the nation "live in tents again" (12:9). The threats Hosea makes against the present nation are framed in terms of "returning to Egypt," and the enslavement that it implies (8:13; 9:3, 6; 11:5; cf. 11:11).

The basic structures of Israelite religion tended towards exclusivity in the divine-human relations. This exclusivism had its source in the radical experience of being freed from Egyptian socio-political oppression, to embark a long sojourn in the wilderness, where Israel was covenanted with God. These dramatic events resulted in a close personal relationship between the Exodus group and YHWH, its deliverer. In view of the many socio-political changes brought about by the Israelite transition from tribal alliance to the state, the extraordinary religious experience of being freed precisely from state oppression to enter into an intense personal relationship with the saving deity *had to be rediscovered again*,⁷⁴ according to Hosea.

That Elijah had strong affinities with this Exodus/Wilderness tradition in his own proclamation of YHWH-alone is clear from his sojourn to Mount Horeb (Sinai) after his slaughter of Jezebel's Baal prophets (1 Kgs 19:4-18).⁷⁵ For both Elijah and Hosea, the insistence on YHWH-alone

was at the same time a fight against the social and political developments of the middle and late monarchy, against a disintegration of Israelite society into competing classes and its political alliances and the foreign infiltration into it. It was only in the course of this controversy that the prohibitions against alien gods were formulated.⁷⁶

Yee, "Hosea," *NIB* 7, pp. 265-70. God's remembering focuses on two themes that the feast commemorates: the wilderness period and fertility.

⁷³ Cf. Deut. 32:10-14; Ezek. 16:6-14.

⁷⁴ Albertz, *History of Israelite Religion*, pp. 62-64.

⁷⁵ See M.C. White, *The Elijah Legends and Jehu's Coup* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), pp. 3-11, for a discussion of the similarities between Moses and Elijah.

⁷⁶ Albertz, *History of Israelite Religion*, p. 64.

Hosea reminds Israel that it arose out of a struggle with a brutal regime. Nevertheless, the present Israelite kingship was using the cult, supposedly dedicated to YHWH the liberator, as a mechanism for state oppression. The cult supplied tribute and trade for a mercurial foreign policy, which imposed greater hardships on an already exploited underclass (cf. esp. Hos. 8).⁷⁷ Such practices were totally opposed to the very theological principles on which the covenant with YHWH was founded, namely, liberation from tyrannical foreign powers and the establishment of a just society under the one God YHWH.⁷⁸

The Marginalization of Women's Popular Religion

In light of the convergence of cult, state politics, and foreign affairs, the effects of Hosea's polemical monolatry on the religious experiences of Israelite women can now be explored. Although lines between domestic and public spheres were blurred during the pre-state period, they became sharply demarcated with the rise of the monarchy.⁷⁹ Women were identified with the private matters of "hearth and home," while men were associated with the official public arena. Women were restricted in their participation in the official cult. Their own particular piety, however, is difficult to determine from the biblical texts alone, which are much more focused on male cult matters.⁸⁰ Attempting to reconstruct a "popular religion" based on the material culture recovered through archaeology, Dever observes that women played a dominant role in this popular piety, which included the making and use of images, mostly female, veneration of Asherah, as the Mother Goddess and/or consort of Yahweh, rituals connected with conception, childbirth, lactation, rites of passages; private prayer, and magic associated with maintenance of hearth and home, as well as security of the family patrimony.⁸¹

⁷⁷ Albertz, *History of Israelite Religion*, p. 122; N.K. Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible. A Socio-Literary Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), p. 361.

⁷⁸ Gottwald, "From Tribal Existence to Empire," pp. 18-20.

⁷⁹ C. Meyers, *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 189-96.

⁸⁰ P. Bird, "Women's Religion in Ancient Israel," in B.S. Lesko (ed.), *Women's Earliest Records From Ancient Egypt and Western Asia* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1989), pp. 285-88. Bird offers an excellent attempt at reconstructing the religious experiences of Israelite women in Bird, "The Place of Women in the Israelite Cultus," pp. 397-419.

⁸¹ Dever, "Archaeology and the Religions of Ancient Israel," pp. 45-48, 53.

Hosea's polemical monolatry, his insistence on the worship of the one God YHWH, had marginalized women's popular religion, particularly in its devotion to Asherah. Nevertheless, condemnation of women's popular religion was not the determinative factor in the formation of his adulterous wife metaphor. The traditional dichotomy that sets the male god YHWH against the female fertility goddesses can no longer be maintained. What is at issue in Hosea is the plurality of Israelite cult, *primarily where it intersects with the political and economic interests of the monarchy and foreign affairs*. Hosea is principally concerned with how the public male face of the cult, found in the sanctuary and priesthood, served the state. He condemned the way official cultic pluralism supported and legitimated the state's profitable but short-sighted agricultural agenda, which in turn supplied trade and tribute for its foreign affairs by collecting and processing meat, produce, and other material resources through its sacrifices.

Veneration of the goddess Asherah was a major feature of Israelite religious pluralism, but was not mentioned or condemned directly by Hosea.⁸² Perhaps one reason why Hosea passed over Asherah is the difference in kingship ideology between Judah and Israel. According to Ackerman, since YHWH was regarded as the adopted father of the Judean king, it was possible that the goddess Asherah, as YHWH's consort, was looked upon as the king's adopted mother. If this was so, the queen mother (the king's human mother) could be seen as Asherah's earthly representative, which would explain the particular veneration of Asherah by the queen mothers of Judah. Given such divine sanction, the queen mother would become the second most powerful person in the royal assembly.⁸³ Since worship of Asherah did not intrude

See also Bird, "Women's Religion in Ancient Israel" and P.A. Bird, "Israelite Religion and the Faith of Israel's Daughters: Reflections on Gender and Religious Definition," in D. Jobling, P.L. Day, and G.T. Sheppard (eds.), *The Bible and the Politics of Exegesis: Essays in Honor of Norman K. Gottwald on His Sixty-Fifth Birthday* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1991), pp. 97-108. Holladay, "Religion in Israel and Judah," p. 269, remarks that the social function of "nonconformist" religion is an attempt by certain individuals or groups to rectify perceived weaknesses in the established religion, e.g., the exclusion of women, or the "unclean," from important aspects of cult.

⁸² Olyan, *Asherah*, p. 22.

⁸³ For the worship of the Asherah in royal circles, especially among the queen mothers in Judah, see Olyan, *Asherah*, pp. 6-8, and S. Ackerman, "The Queen Mother and the Cult in Ancient Israel," *JBL* 112 (1993), pp. 385-401.

in royal matters of public politics in the northern kingdom, as it did in the south, it was not castigated by Hosea.

Women's popular religion became marginalized by Hosean monolatry, only insofar as it overlapped with the pluralistic cult that was tied to state-run economic investments. Hosea censured neither the female Asherah nor her cult object, but rather the male "baals,"⁸⁴ primarily because their cult had taken on a more public role in the politics of the state. The bull-calf images of Samaria (8:5-6) and Bethel (10:5), which had assimilated Baal worship,⁸⁵ stand condemned, because of their connections with the king, his royal court (8:4; 10:3, 7) and foreign tribute (8:9-10; 10:6). The material culture reveals that women evidently continued a fervent veneration of the goddess Asherah, along with other practices of female spirituality centered the family household. However, even though her worship was not directly singled out by Hosea, it was ultimately suppressed as Hosea's insistence on YHWH-alone became the normative theological position. Along with the suppression of the goddess, other facets of women's piety are ignored, obscured or skewed in the formation of the biblical text by male writers and redactors, who promulgate the official (male) position.

An extrinsic analysis reveals that, for the most part, the Book of Hosea was produced during a time when Israel's native tributary mode of production was adversely affected by political instability amid foreign encroachment. Involving complex intersections among king, cult, priest and foreign affairs, royal agribusiness exploited the peasantry and maximized ecological risks. The embodiment of this oppressive mode of production, for Hosea, was the nation's public veneration of the (male) *baalim*, which had become identified with these domestic/foreign entanglements. To castigate this mode of production, Hosea proclaims a religio-political ideology of YHWH-alone, apparently initiated by Elijah during the previous century.

II. Intrinsic Analysis of Hosea 1-2

Hosea required a rhetorically effective metaphor to articulate his polemical monolatry and his critique of the present religio-

⁸⁴ Hos. 2:8,13,17; 11:2; 13:1. I am assuming with Halpern, "Baal," p. 130, that the expression, "the baal" (2:8), should be understood as a collective plural.

⁸⁵ Albertz, *History of Israelite Religion*, pp. 144-45.

political dealings of the Israelite state. This metaphor had to embody the *exclusivity* of Israel's relationship with YHWH alone, and the *inequity* of that relationship. Israel had to relearn the covenantal truth that its existence was dependent only on YHWH. Ideologies of exclusivity and inequity were already imbedded in the social and material practices of marriage in ancient Israel.⁸⁶ Hosea utilized the fullest rhetorical force of these ideologies as vehicles for his polemical monolatry. The intrinsic analysis that follows will discuss the ideological dynamics of the marriage metaphor, how an emphasis on marital fidelity contributes to a monolatrous theology, and its consequences for the representation of women in Hosea.

The Feminization of the Israelite Ruling Hierarchy

I primarily focus on Hosea 1–2, because these chapters have traditionally been identified with the God–Israel marriage metaphor.⁸⁷ Even though other sections of Hosea extend the metaphor to a much broader and more complex socio-political arena (see above), scholars typically associate the wife/Israel's "lovers" in Hosea 1–2 with an idolatrous orgiastic fertility cult, seemingly isolated from the affairs of state. One must now reread the sexual imagery imbedded in Hosea 1–2, in light of Hosea's critique of Israel's oppressive and debilitating mode of production, which was intrinsic to the national cult.

Hosea's accusations are targeted primarily at a male audience: the king and his political and cultic élite. The marriage metaphor effectively *feminizes this male ruling hierarchy*, by depicting its members collectively in a graphic image of a promiscuous wife. Hosea accomplishes several rhetorical goals through this feminization.

First, the feminization epitomizes a radical loss of status for the élite. By reducing them, not merely to the level of a male commoner but to that of a woman, Hosea strikes a heavy blow against their exalted male honor and prestige. Since "masculinity" in Israelite society is typically defined against and regarded as supe-

⁸⁶ Ideology is understood here not simply as a set of ideas, but as material practices embodied within patterns of social behavior and social institutions.

⁸⁷ I did not include Hosea 3 in this analysis, primarily because its dating is so disputable, and that my argument regarding the interrelation between cult, monarchy, and marital ideology can already be made by focusing on Hosea 1–2.

rior to “femininity,” Hosea symbolically “castrates” the élite by placing them in the “female” position with its lower status and power.⁸⁸ Hosea sharpens the insult even further by portraying this “woman” as a sexually promiscuous wife, *the* most shameful individual of Israelite society, who brings the greatest dishonor to the world of men. To represent an élite group “penetrated” by foreigners, Hosea describes a libidinous wife who allows her body to be “penetrated” sexually by her lovers.

Second, Hosea is able to exploit the marriage metaphor theologically to proclaim his covenantal monolatry. In a culture where wives owe sexual fidelity to one husband, Hosea depicts the exclusivity of Israel’s relationship with its “spouse,” the one God, YHWH. As wives are economically and socially dependent upon their husbands, the marriage metaphor encodes similar relations of power. Hosea summons the ruling élite to trust in YHWH alone, and not on their agribusiness, foreign alliances, and military prowess. Hosea thus utilizes the inequity and exclusivity of ancient Israelite marriage to make his monolatrous point.

Third, by underscoring this exclusivity and inequity, Hosea’s metaphor invokes the personal experiences of the male élite as husbands, the superior partner in marital relations, to teach them the depths of YHWH’s covenantal love. An adulterous wife and questionable paternity are exceedingly threatening to a society, where male notions of descent, inheritance, and honor are intimately tied with fathering legitimate sons. Hosea highlights rhetorically the enormous effort an Israelite husband must make to forgive an unfaithful wife and accept her children as his own, even if sired by another. To stand by his wife and children, enduring the social stigma it entailed, would be one of the most difficult experiences for an Israelite male. And yet, YHWH has precisely this kind of magnanimous love for Israel and its corrupt leadership.

Feminists have already discussed the interpretive problems women have regarding this gender-specific metaphor for God’s covenant, wherein God becomes the all-forgiving husband, and

⁸⁸ See especially, K. Stone, *Sex, Honor and Power in the Deuteronomistic History: A Narratological and Anthropological Analysis* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), pp. 74-84, and A. Brenner, *The Intercourse of Knowledge. On Gendered Sex and Desire in the Hebrew Bible* (E.J. Brill, 1997), pp. 138-43, on the dynamics of homosexual rape for male-male power relations. The raped man is violently cast into the passive position of the female.

Israel, the sinful promiscuous wife.⁸⁹ Feminizing men in a marital relation with a male God reinscribes the ideological and social links among women, subordination, shame, and sin into the text. Nevertheless, Howard Eilberg-Schwartz maintains that such masculine imagery for the deity is also problematic for men, because it unstablizes norms of "masculinity." In a society where heterosexuality is the rule, and women are thus "in theory" more fitting partners for a male God, a homoerotic predicament arises when human males become the "Other" with respect to this God. According to Eilberg-Schwartz, the biblical writers avoided this problem in two ways. First, they symbolically displaced male tensions and contradictions onto women. The otherness of women is exaggerated in order to minimize the ways men become the "Other" in a system which validates male authority. Second, the biblical authors personified Israelite males as female subjects.⁹⁰ Hosea combines these two ways of dealing with divine/human homoeroticism. The élite are not simply embodied in the person of an ordinary woman, but are caricatured in a graphic depiction of an exceptionally promiscuous wife, one particularly horrifying to men anxious about their paternity.

In order to humiliate and shame the élite, Hosea moves from the public male arena of king and cult to the private domestic arena of man and woman. However, by feminizing the ruling hierarchy as "Other", the marriage metaphor functions in Hosea 1–2 as a "symbolic alibi,"⁹¹ which mystifies and conceals *for later interpreters* the conflicts between the prophet and king and his élite, just as it simultaneously reinforces the subordination of Israelite women to men. What one remembers from reading Hosea 1–2 is

⁸⁹ T.D. Setel, "Prophets and Pornography: Female Sexual Imagery," in L.M. Russell (ed.), *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985), pp. 86–95; R.J. Weems, "Gomer: Victim of Violence or Victim of Metaphor?" *Semeia* 47 (1989), pp. 87–104; R.J. Weems, *Battered Love: Marriage, Sex, and Violence in the Hebrew Prophets* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995); Yee, "Hosea," *NIB* 7, pp. 206–11; and the essays in A. Brenner (ed.), *A Feminist Companion to the Latter Prophets* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995).

⁹⁰ H. Eilberg-Schwartz, *God's Phallus and Other Problems for Men and Monotheism* (Boston: Beacon, 1994), pp. 20, 97–102.

⁹¹ Such was the case for Genesis 2–3, which also functions as a "symbolic alibi," concealing the conflicts between the ruling élite and the peasant under the cover of a clash between man and woman. Yee, "Gender, Class, and the Social Scientific Study of Gen. 2–3," *Semeia* (Forthcoming). F. Landy, *Hosea* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), p. 37, describes this shift in gender as "mystification," "displacement," and misogyny in drag.

the conflict between a faithful divine husband and his sinful wife/Israel, and not the clash between prophet and male aristocracy. In order to understand Hosea's polemic correctly and rectify traditional (mis)readings of the gendered metaphor, Hosea 1–2 must be reread as a conflict between the latter. The close reading of Hosea 1–2 that follows will presume a polemic against the oppressive mode of production typified by eighth-century Israel, which Hosea characterizes as “sexually promiscuous.”

Hosea 1: the Prophet's Dysfunctional Family

In Hos. 1:2, YHWH commands Hosea to take a “promiscuous wife” and bear “children of promiscuity.” Hosea's true metaphor may be a family rather than a marital metaphor, using the centrality of family unit to criticize the deterioration of the larger social body by the self-serving policies of the ruling élite.⁹² Following Andersen and Freedman and Bird,⁹³ I translate *'ēšet zēnûnîm* as “promiscuous woman.” Previous translations of *'ēšet zēnûnîm* as “harlot” or “whore” have mistakenly identified Gomer as an ordinary prostitute, or as a cult prostitute involved in Canaanite fertility cults.⁹⁴ Although marginalized in androcentric Israelite society, a prostitute is still tolerated,⁹⁵ while an adulterous, promiscuous wife would never be. Because of the gravity of her sin and social dishonor, an adulteress is a more effective metaphor to incarnate the élite's covenantal infidelity.

Hosea is ordered to marry this promiscuous woman, because “the land fornicates away from YHWH.” As a semantically loaded term, “land” could represent the nation of Israel, the physical territory, and all of its inhabitants—ruling élite, clergy, and populace. However, in light of our extrinsic analysis, the “land” acquires greater significance as the principal means of production in an oppressive mode of production. The “land” becomes the site of struggle, where the religious and political élite who control the land enforce a risky crop intensification of “grain, wine, and oil,”

⁹² So argues Keefe, “The Female Body,” pp. 76, 97.

⁹³ Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea*, pp. 157–62; Bird, “To Play the Harlot’,” pp. 80–89.

⁹⁴ See H.H. Rowley, “The Marriage of Hosea,” in *Men of God* (London: Nelson, 1963), and Davies, *Hosea*, pp. 79–92, for fuller discussions.

⁹⁵ P.A. Bird, “The Harlot As Heroine: Narrative Art and Social Presupposition in Three Old Testament Texts,” *Semeia* 46 (1989), p. 121.

parlaying their exports among competitive foreign powers, making covenants with them, and growing rich at the expense of the peasantry who work the land.

Hosea describes royal (mis)use of the "land" through a sexual trope: it "fornicates away from YHWH" (*zânôh tizneh hâ'âres*). By means of this trope, Hosea shrewdly exploits various interconnections among land, ownership, marriage, female sexuality, and procreation, to articulate his critique of the ruling élite and promote his covenantal monolatry. Appropriating a convention identifying woman with the land,⁹⁶ Hosea correlates the feminized élite with the "land." As a wife belongs solely to her husband, so does the "land" belong not to the élite, but to YHWH.

Themes of land, ownership, marriage and procreation converge in the birth of Hosea and Gomer's first son, Jezreel, whose name means "God sows" (Hos. 1:4). Jezreel (*yizrē 'ēl*) is paronomastically similar to the nation's name Israel (*yisrā'ēl*). As the wife belongs to her husband and becomes the field which her husband alone "plows," so does Israel belong solely to YHWH and is the land which "God impregnates" or "seeds."⁹⁷ A faithful wife certifies the paternity of her *husband's seed*, providing legitimate sons who will eventually inherit the land.⁹⁸ The adulterous wife/Israel, however, sabotages the legitimacy of her divine husband's seed by allowing herself to be "plowed" and "seeded" by others, (viz., the foreign nations). Jezreel's own legitimacy as Hosea's firstborn son becomes suspect because of Gomer's promiscuity.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ M.H. Pope, *Song of Songs: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1977), pp. 323-36, cites a number of ancient Near Eastern references where women become the land or field, plowed by the male. See also C. Delaney, "Seeds of Honor, Fields of Shame," in D.D. Gilmore (ed.), *Honor and Shame and the Unity of the Mediterranean* (Washington, DC: American Anthropological Association, 1987), pp. 38-43, for cross-cultural examples.

⁹⁷ Besides the references cited by Pope, *Song of Songs*, pp. 323-36, regarding the woman as the field plowed by the male, see also Sir. 26:19-21, and the eroticization of Wisdom in Sir. 6:19. For other ANE material, see T. Frymer-Kensky, "The Planting of Man: A Study in Biblical Imagery," in J.H. Marks and R.M. Good (eds.), *Love and Death in the Ancient Near East* (Guilford, CT: Four Quarters Publishing, 1987), pp. 129-36.

⁹⁸ See especially Delaney, "Seeds of Honor," p. 39, who argues that a woman's fertility (her ability to produce children) is not the issue in the Turkish society she investigates. If it were, lesser weight would be put on female virginity and the sexual purity. Rather, the issue is "a woman's ability to guarantee the seed of a particular man: it is because of this that she *becomes* valuable." Also, J.F. Reixach, "Procreation and Its Implications for Gender, Marriage, and Family in European Rural Ethnography," *Anthropological Quarterly* 71. 1 (1998), p. 38.

⁹⁹ W.R. Harper, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Amos and Hosea*, ICC

Besides highlighting themes of ownership, marriage, fertility, and legitimacy, Jezreel carries other associations that Hosea maximizes.¹⁰⁰ The Jezreel Valley was one of most fertile agricultural regions of the state and, most likely, an important source of the royal cash crops: grain, wine, and oil (cf. Hos. 2:22[24]). It was a significant region in Solomon's redivision of the kingdom into twelve districts that supplied enormous resources for the royal court (1 Kgs 4:12, 22-28). It maintained an important trade route and strategic military highway, connecting Israel with its foreign treaty partners. The area had other significant royal connections: David married Ahinoam of Jezreel (1 Sam. 25:43), who may have been Saul's own wife.¹⁰¹ The town of Jezreel included the royal palace of Ahab and Jezebel (1 Kgs 21:1) and their son Joram (2 Kgs 8-9). Jezreel thus played a critical economic, political, and military role in Israel's tributary mode of production.

Moreover, Jezreel embodied the treachery occurring in this mode of production. As the site of an infamous abuse of royal power, Jezreel was home to the landowner Naboth, whose vineyard Ahab coveted and seized through Jezebel's ruthless intervention (1 Kgs 21). It was also the locale of Jehu's bloody massacre of Ahab's dynasty (2 Kgs 8-10), as foretold by Hosea's erstwhile predecessor, Elijah, who condemned Ahab's and Jezebel's victimization of Naboth (1 Kgs 21:17-19, 23). Hosea prophesies that God "will visit the bloodshed of Jezreel on the house of Jehu" (1:4). Ironically, just as Jehu exterminated the House of Omri through his violent coup at Jezreel, so will Jehu's own dynasty suffer extinction during Hosea's time, through the assassinations following the death of Jeroboam II (2 Kgs 15:8-31; 17:1-18. Cf. Hos. 7:4-7).¹⁰² It is also ironic that valley of Jezreel, which boasted of a vital military route, will become the place where God will "break the

(Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1979), p. 211, for example, argues that Jezreel is not Hosea's legitimate son.

¹⁰⁰ H.G.M. Williamson, "Jezreel in the Biblical Texts," *TA* 18 (1991), pp. 72-92.

¹⁰¹ J.D. Levenson and B. Halpern, "The Political Import of David's Marriages," *JBL* 99 (1980), pp. 507-18.

¹⁰² A number of scholars interpret Hos. 1:4 as a prediction of God's punishment on Jehu's dynasty for his killing spree at Jezreel. See a review of recent interpretations in S.A. Irvine, "The Threat of Jezreel (Hosea 1:4-5)," *CBQ* 57: 3 (1995), pp. 494-503. However, T.E. McComiskey, "Prophetic Irony in Hosea 1:4: A Study of the Collocation *Pqd 'l* and Its Implications for the Fall of Jehu's Dynasty," *JSOT* 58 (1993), pp. 93-101, is persuasive in arguing that Hos. 1:4 is an instance of prophetic irony.

bow of Israel (1:5),” that is, destroy the élite’s military power.¹⁰³

In the extrinsic analysis above, I argued that Hosea’s polemical monolatry had its theological roots in Israel’s Exodus/Wilderness traditions. The monarchy and cult, which were meant to serve the interests of the liberating God, had become instruments of state oppression. Israel’s ruling élite had to be reminded of the radical experience of being freed from Egyptian state tyranny, to enter into an exclusive covenantal relationship in the wilderness with the saving God. The Hosean Exodus/Wilderness tradition first appears in the birth of the couple’s third child, the son Lo Ammi: “Call his name Lo Ammi (Not My People), for you are not my people and I am not I AM¹⁰⁴ to you” (Hos. 1:9). The judgment Lo Ammi personifies is the negation of the covenant established between YHWH and Israel after their flight from Egypt (Lev. 26:12-13; Jer. 7:22-23; 11:4). The élite’s inequitable domestic and foreign policies regarding “the land” were completely antithetical to the religious beliefs upon which this covenant was established, namely, liberation from unjust foreign powers and the creation of a just society under the one God, YHWH.

Hosea 2: God’s Dysfunctional Family

Chapter 2 moves from the story of Hosea’s dysfunctional family to God’s story about dysfunctional Israel under the present rulership. Hosea’s story will resume in chapter 3. Nevertheless, it is difficult to separate the stories of Hosea and Gomer and YHWH and Israel. Narratives of Hosea’s family life in chapters 1 and 3 become stereoscoped with God’s stormy relations with Israel in chapter 2. Hosea presents YHWH as a husband who has been dishonored by his wife, whom he punishes for dalliances with her “lovers.”

In its final redacted state, a prologue (1:11-2:1 [MT 2:2-3]) and an epilogue (2:23[25]) form an inclusio of hope and restoration around a story of violence and betrayal.¹⁰⁵ Both prologue and

¹⁰³ N.M. Waldman, “The Breaking of the Bow,” *JQR* 79 (1978), pp. 82-86.

¹⁰⁴ The background for this translation is Exod 3:14-15, where the liberating God reveals the divine name YHWH to Moses through a wordplay on *hāyâ*, “to be, become”: “I AM WHO I AM ... Say this to the people of Israel, ‘I AM (’ehyeh) has sent me to you.’” For a further discussion of the Hosean wordplays on ’ehyeh, see Yee, *Composition and Tradition in the Book of Hosea*, pp. 69-71.

¹⁰⁵ For a detailed discussion of this prologue and epilogue, see Yee, *Composition and Tradition in the Book of Hosea*, pp. 71-76.

epilogue reverse the threats embodied in names of Hosea's children, Jezreel, Unpitied (Lo Ruhama), and Not My People (Lo Ammi). The optimistic tone changes abruptly in 2:2[4], where these children are called to *rib* with their mother. In an explicit parallel of 1:9, where the birth of Lo-Ammi symbolizes the disintegration of the wilderness covenant, God proclaims "She is not my wife, and I am not her husband" (2:2[4]). Playing out the metaphor of marriage, the broken covenant of 1:9 is represented figuratively as a divorce in 2:2[4], because of the wife's infidelity.

The husband enjoins his children to plead with their mother that she "remove her promiscuity (*zēnûnêhā*) from her face and her adultery (*wēna'ýpûpêhā*) from between her breasts" (2:2[4]). The expressions, "her promiscuity" and "her adultery," most likely refer to the cosmetics and jewelry used to make the wife attractive to her lovers (cf. 2:13[15]; Isa. 3:18-23; Jer. 4:30; Ezek. 23:40).¹⁰⁶ They may also be eroticized idioms for the luxury goods the élite derive from their agribusiness and foreign affairs (cf. Isa. 1:21-23; 23:17-18). Describing punishment for aristocratic indifference to the wilderness covenant, Hosea draws on an apparent social practice. As an adulterous wife is publicly stripped and shamed,¹⁰⁷ so will the nobility be openly humiliated (2:3[5]). A woman's disgraced naked body becomes a metaphor for God's punishment of the élite and their exploitative land-use projects. Ironically, the land they are identified with, the very land they abuse, will become a parched wilderness, because they have forgotten the intense wilderness experience where the nation pledged itself to the one God.

Hosea teases out the interconnections among woman, land, and seed further in 2:4-5[6-7], where God has no pity upon the woman's children because they are children of promiscuity. The wife is the land/field which only her husband plows with his "seed." The faithful wife guarantees the purity of her husband "seed," producing legitimate sons who will inherit the patrimony.

¹⁰⁶ The NRSV translation, "put away her whoring from her face," is misleading. It suggests that the wife is either an actual prostitute, ostensibly wearing some sort of signs on her face to broadcast her profession, or a cultic prostitute, adorned with ritual insignia. We have very little evidence about what prostitutes actually wore. In order to convey the full force of the disintegration of the wilderness covenant, the metaphor necessitates an adulterous wife, not a prostitute.

¹⁰⁷ The usual punishment for adultery is death by stoning (Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22; cf. John 7:53-8:11). However, Hos. 2:3[5], along with Jer. 13:26 and Ezek. 16:37-39, apparently offers another method of marital chastisement.

Because the wife/land/élite has been shameless in her promiscuity, the legitimacy of her children is suspect. They may not be of her husband's "seed." Hence, he refuses to acknowledge paternity of her children. He will have no compassion upon them.

The wife articulates her own transgression in 2:5b[7b]: "I will go after my lovers." Scholars traditionally interpret the "lovers" as the baals,¹⁰⁸ although this identification is not explicit.¹⁰⁹ Hosea's only clear identification of the "lovers" is in 8:9-10, where the lovers are "the nations" with whom Ephraim is foolishly allied. In 2:7[9], the wife will pursue (*rdp*) her lovers, but not overtake them. According to 12:1[2], Ephraim's treaties with Assyria and Egypt are as futile as pursuing (*rdp*) the wind. For Thompson, the references to "lovers" can have political nuances, similar to that found in suzerainty treaty language for covenant partners.¹¹⁰ In biblical texts, Hiram of Tyre is considered a "lover" of David (2 Kgs 5:1[15]). Ezekiel's allegories of the wife/Jerusalem in Ezekiel 16, and of the sister cities, Samaria and Jerusalem in Ezekiel 26, both equate the women's lovers with the foreign nations (see also Jer. 22:20, 22; 30:14).

Israel believes that the nations, not YHWH, supply its bread, water, wool, flax, oil, and drink (2:5b[7b]). These items may be commodities of trade (cf. 7:14; 12:1[2], 7-8[8-9]). According to 2 Kgs 3:4, King Mesha of Moab used to deliver the wool of one hundred thousand rams to the king of Israel. Wolff thinks that the rare occurrences of "drink" (*šqwyym*) indicate a luxury "beyond the necessities of life."¹¹¹ Keil, moreover, understands the pairing, "oil and drink," to refer to "everything that conduces to luxury and superfluity."¹¹² The list of gifts in 2:5[7] may then include the expensive items the élite procures through their risky foreign trade agreements. I do not rule out the baals as the wife's lovers (See discussion of 2:13[15] below). They can be interpreted as the "lovers," if one recognizes that they are the public cult symbols of the

¹⁰⁸ See for example, Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea*, p. 230; Harper, *Amos and Hosea*, p. 229; Kruger, "Israel, the Harlot," p. 113; Mays, *Hosea*, p. 39; Stuart, *Hosea*, p. 48; Wolff, *Hosea*, p. 35.

¹⁰⁹ The "lovers" appear in Hos. 2:5[7], 2:10[12], 2:12[14], 2:13[15], and 8:9. The "lovers" can refer to the Baals in 2:13[15], although they may also be interpreted as the "nations."

¹¹⁰ J.A. Thompson, "Israel's 'Lovers'," VT 27. 4 (1977), pp. 475-81.

¹¹¹ Wolff, *Hosea*, p. 35.

¹¹² C.F. Keil, *The Twelve Minor Prophets* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1900), p. 54.

ruling class's foreign and domestic policies, and not the objects of worship in some alleged orgiastic fertility cult.

The élite did not depend on God, but rather on its "lovers," the nations, to supply the necessities and comforts of life. The Israelite rulers did not "know (*yđ'*),"¹¹³ that it was YHWH who provided the cash crops ("grain, wine, and oil"), that secured their imported goods and "silver and gold which they made into Baal" (*'āsû labbā'al*, 2:8[10]).¹¹⁴ The reference to "silver and gold" also indicates Hosea's focus on the upperclasses in his polemic, for only these classes traffic in "lavish" quantities of "silver and gold." In 8:4, Hosea attacks the "kings and princes" who "with their silver and gold made (*'āsû*) idols" (see also 13:1-2). The baals had become equated with profitable royal foreign entanglements and are thus rejected as idolatrous (cf. 10:5-6).

The interconnected themes of the woman's nakedness and the land's destruction, first appearing in 2:3[5], resurface in a series of threats in 2:9-13[11-15]. The husband's duty to provide for the material welfare of his wife¹¹⁵ simultaneously secured her dependence and subordination. To punish his wife, then, the disgraced husband YHWH threatens to withdraw her food ("grain and wine") and clothing ("wool and flax which were to cover her nakedness" 2:9[11]). These threats are amplified in 2:12[14], where YHWH destroys her vines and fig trees, making them a forest devoured by wild beasts. As actions upon the land, these punishments imply a devastating famine, drying up the élite's sources of income (cf. 2:3[5]; 4:3), or a military conquest destroying the nation (5:8-14; 10:7-8, 13-15; 13:15-16[14:1]). However, Hosea describes these chastisements through a trope in which a husband physically punishes his wife.

After withdrawing the wife's food and clothing, God "will uncover her *nablût* in the sight of her lovers" (2:10[12]). As a polyvalent term, *nablût* can refer to the woman's genitalia,¹¹⁶ the lewdness of her sexual behavior,¹¹⁷ or the woman/land's deteriora-

¹¹³ Or better "forgot," see 2:13[15]. As Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea*, p. 242, point out, the lack of "knowledge" is not simply ignorance, but the result of "rejecting" knowledge, just as "forgetting" is a sin, not just a mental lapse.

¹¹⁴ According to Harper, *Amos and Hosea*, pp. 229-30, the silver and gold came from the sale of the grain, wine, and oil.

¹¹⁵ Exod. 21:10-11.

¹¹⁶ See those cited in footnote 1 of S.M. Olyan, "In the Sight of Her Lovers': On the Interpretation of *Nablût* in Hos. 2,12," *BZ* 36 (1992), pp. 255-56.

¹¹⁷ Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea*, pp. 248-49.

tion.¹¹⁸ Uncovering her genitals, YHWH reveals the literal site of the woman's pleasure, fertility, and transgression. The wife's exposed genitalia becomes a graphic image for the ruling class's breach of covenant and the land's decline. Unmasking their shared desires and sexual misconduct, the most vulnerable part of wife's body will be displayed before her lovers, the nations.¹¹⁹ Although the male gaze usually results in visual pleasure,¹²⁰ it is not the case here. The gaze of the nations/lovers reveals their own sexual and moral impotence, in their inability to rescue Israel from its disgrace (2:10b[12b]. See also 5:12-14 and 7:11-12).¹²¹

God will put an end to "her festivals, her new moons, her Sabbaths, and all her appointed festivals" (2:11[13]). These cultic celebrations have usually been interpreted as the syncretistic services where sexual acts allegedly occurred.¹²² As was discussed, however, the rampageous sexuality of these rites is probably fictional, and not Hosea's bone of contention. Rather, these sacred festivals were major sources of income for the religious and political élite. Pilgrimages brought the products of the land to various northern shrines (4:10,15; 5:6-7; 8:11-13; 9:1-6; 10:1-2). By feminizing the élite as a wanton wife, Hosea labels their economic misuse of these festivals as *sexual* wrongdoing, describing the luxuries they acquire during these occasions as a hooker's fee (*'etnâ*), "which my lovers have given me" (2:12[14]). Once God abolishes these festivals, however, their economic base dries up, threatening national security.

God will punish the élite for "the festival days of the baals" (2:13[15]). Hosea here makes explicit the identification of the woman's lovers as the baals. Nevertheless, the cultic veneration of the baals should not be isolated from the larger political sphere,

¹¹⁸ Thus argues Olyan, "In the Sight of Her Lovers'," pp. 260-61, exploring the sense of *nbl* as "to languish, wither, fade."

¹¹⁹ See also Ezek. 16:37 where the nations are the paramours who gaze on the wife/Jerusalem's nakedness.

¹²⁰ L. Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in R.R. Warhol and D.P. Herndl (eds.), *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991), pp. 432-42.

¹²¹ Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea*, p. 249, correlate 2:10b[12b] with the larger political arena expressed in 5:12-14, where the king of Assyria will be unable to protect Ephraim and Judah. Nevertheless, they "hesitate to give the word 'lovers' too many meanings," preferring to limit the word to the alleged sexual activity of the Canaanite cult.

¹²² Harper, *Amos and Hosea*, p. 233; Mays, *Hosea*, p. 42-43; Stuart, *Hosea*, p. 51; Wolff, *Hosea*, p. 38, Rallis, "Nuptial Imagery," pp. 108-109, 207.

where festivals had become state occasions particularly for the worship of the baals in their calf iconography (8:4-6; 10:3-6; 11:2; 13:1-3). References to the wife decking "herself with her ring and jewelry," and "going after her lovers (2:13[15])" indicate that these festivals were sumptuous public affairs through which the élite curried favor with the foreign nations (see esp. 10:1-3). Although once legitimate parts of YHWH's cult, the baals have become equated with a unjust mode of production and are now condemned by Hosea.

YHWH accuses the wife that "she went after her lovers, *and forgot me*" (2:13b[15b]). What the élite forgot, Hosea insists, was the exclusive relationship Israel had with YHWH, an historical bond forged in the Sinai wilderness after YHWH had delivered them from their slavery in Egypt (9:10; 12:9[10]; 13:4-5). Articulating his polemical monolatry, Hosea asserts that ever since Egypt, Israel "knew"¹²³ no other god or savior but YHWH (13:4. Cf. 2:8[10], 20[22]). The élite forgot the nation's dependency upon YHWH alone, a dependency inherent in the very nature of its covenant with God. It was YHWH alone who fed, taught, and healed Israel in the wilderness (11:1-4; 13:5). The élite had to relearn these earlier experiences with the one God. National security depended upon it.

The site of this reeducation is the wilderness itself, the place of the first intimate encounters between God and the people. The wilderness is for Hosea both a threat and punishment for betrayal (2:3[5]) and a place for hope and reconciliation. In the language of courtship, YHWH will seduce the nation into the wilderness and speak tenderly to her/it (2:14[16]). The cash crop vineyards that God destroyed (2:2:12[14]) will be returned to the nation (2:15[17]), reinforcing the notion that YHWH is the provider on whom Israel depends. Envisioned is the renewal of the covenant when the nation responds to YHWH, "as in the days of her youth, as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt" (2:15b[17b]).¹²⁴

¹²³ Regarding the covenantal character of the "knowledge" of God, see R. Crotty, "Hosea and the Knowledge of God," *ABR* 19 (1971), pp. 1-16; H. Huffmon, "The Treaty Background of Hebrew *YADA*," *BASOR* 181 (1966), pp. 131-77; and H.W. Wolff, "'Wissen um Gott' bei Hosea als Urform von Theologie," in *Gesammelte Studien zum Alten Testament* (München: Kaiser, 1964), pp. 182-205.

¹²⁴ The verb "*nh*" to answer, respond" refers to the nation's covenant response at Sinai, described in Exod 19:5-6, 8: "I you keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all the peoples ... All the people responded (*nh*) as one: 'Everything that the Lord has spoken, we will do.'"

The Exodus/Wilderness experience is the source of Hosea's covenantal monolatry, which becomes most explicit in 2:16[18]): "On that day, says the Lord, you will call me, "My Husband," and no longer will you call me, "My Baal." The motif of name changing began in the prologue (1:11-2:1[2:2-3]), continues here in 2:16[18], and will conclude in the epilogue of 2:23[25]. For Halpern, the implied practice of referring to God as *baal*, evidently inspired Hosea's marriage metaphor for the covenantal relationship, because baal not only indicates the deity Baal, but can also mean "husband."¹²⁵ As a wife only has one husband, the élite have only one 'îš. Hosea completely rejects the veneration of a deity who had been a legitimate part of the state cult, alongside YHWH. Baal had represented royal and élite interests so much, that Hosea believed his cult had displaced the worship of the one God, YHWH. The cult had become an instrument of state oppression, totally opposed to the religious ideals upon which the wilderness covenant was based: freedom from foreign oppression and the creation of a just and equitable society. Some scholars interpret the title "My Husband" as Israel having a more intimate partnership with God, rather than the ownership relation, implied in "My Baal."¹²⁶ Such an interpretation dangerously imposes modern conceptions of marriage upon Hosea. Hosea utilizes the marriage metaphor to emphasize not only the exclusivity of Israel's relationship with YHWH alone, but also the inequity of that relationship. The very existence and continuance of the Israelite nation is dependent solely on YHWH, a reality forgotten by its aristocracy.

Hosea depicts covenantal renewal as the restitution of both cosmic world order and patriarchal authority in the family. The God/Israel covenant embraces the "wild animals, the birds of the air, and the creeping things of the ground" (2:18[20]). Military strife will be ended. God, the heavens, and the earth will reciprocate in answering one another in a cosmic chain reaction.¹²⁷ The earth's unique response to God is the production of "grain, wine, and oil" (2:21-22), the royal cash crops. Hosea thus reminds the

¹²⁵ Halpern, "Baal," pp. 122, 148.

¹²⁶ Stuart, *Hosea*, p. 57; Wolff, *Hosea*, p. 49; Mays, *Hosea*, p. 48. According to the NJB, "The transition from 'my master' to 'my husband' hints that the emphasis will henceforth be on marital intimacy rather than on the subordination of wife to husband." (p. 1499, note r).

¹²⁷ According to Smith, *Early History of God*, pp. 46-47, Hosea's words in 2:21-23[23-25] recall the Canaanite literary tradition of Baal blessings on the cosmos.

élite that the land's freedom from armed conflict and its agricultural fertility to yield crop revenue depend directly on their fidelity to YHWH alone. In the simultaneous restoration of patriarchal authority, the husband becomes reconciled with his wife and takes her back (2:19-20[21-22]). As husband and father, he is head of the family. His faithful wife (the élite) is his subordinate, protecting his seed and thereby legitimating his children. The notion of seed appears when the grain, wine, and oil answers Jezreel ("God sows," 2:22[24]). In a wordplay on Jezreel identifying the wife with the land, God sows "her" (the wife)¹²⁸ in the ground, impregnating her with his seed. No alien seed can sprout in the land in this new world order, because the wife will remain true to her spouse.

Finally, the children's paternity which the husband had questioned in 2:4-5[6-7] is resolved in 2:22-23[24-25]. As part of this covenantal renewal, God acknowledges his wife's children as his own. God the husband becomes God the father. The children receive new names, symbolic of their change in status from suspected bastard to legitimate offspring. No longer the embodying the murderous exploitation of the tributary mode (1:4-5), Jezreel becomes a place where God inseminates his wife after their reconciliation. God will have pity on his daughter Un-Pitied. God and will say to his son Not My People, "You are my people," and son will declare, "You are my God." In Hosea's depiction of covenantal renewal, then, the respective parties acknowledge and submissively accept their place within the cosmic and social order: the élite with their God, the woman with her husband, and the children with their father.

III. Conclusion

Hosea reacts against an oppressive mode of production, embodied in the cult of eighth-century Israel. This mode of production involved 1) an intensive agribusiness of grain, wine, and oil for export by the élite classes; 2) a volatile political situation, coupled with a reckless foreign policy; 3) an intertwining of cult, kingship, priesthood with foreign policy; and 4) an unpolemical monolatry whose male cultic veneration of Baal legitimated élite interests.

¹²⁸ Some scholars have emended the MT to have "him" (Jezreel) sown in the land. Cf. NRSV. However, the MT is perfectly clear, if one understands the sexual connotation of "sowing."

Previous scholarship on Hosea 1–2 isolated Israelite cult from state interests, and imagined licentious fertility cults of Baal, which infected a pure Yahwism. However, in the rest of the book, Hosea's "lovers" are the foreign nations (as in Jeremiah and Ezekiel), with whom the élite is economically and politically entangled. Hosea thinks that the nation's aristocracy forgot that God freed Israel from oppression in Egypt, to worship YHWH alone in a self-sustaining tribal fellowship. Instead, the élite administers an exploitative state that violates the very theological principles of its origins. Through unjust domestic and foreign policies, Israel seems to be "returning to Egypt" (8:13, 9:3).

How does Hosea pressure a powerful group of privileged men to recognize their oppression and return to the worship of YHWH alone? His first rhetorical strategy is feminizing them as a promiscuous wife, an action that symbolically castrates and shames them. He then exploits a full range of figurative identifications of the woman/wife with the land. The land can simultaneously represent the élite, the whole nation, the people, and the means of production for "grain, wine, and oil." In addition, the woman becomes the fertile field or land, which her husband plows and inseminates to produce legitimate sons. Famine, drought, and foreign invaders can destroy the woman/land. The woman/land thereby becomes a barren wilderness. The wilderness is also the site of the God's seduction of the wife. As in the early days of the wilderness, Hosea predicts a return to YHWH alone. The wife will respond by proclaiming YHWH as "my husband" and by being faithful to him, allowing no foreign seed to contaminate her. God will respond in turn like a good husband, taking her back, providing for her material needs, and acknowledging paternity for her children.

A materialist reading thus grounds Hosea's polemical monolatry in specific material practices and social conditions. Behind Hosea's marriage metaphor and symbolization of woman as evil is not the worship of fertility goddesses and perverse sexual practices of their cult, as has been maintained by traditional scholarship. Rather, through a shaming feminizing metaphor, Hosea directs a stringent critique against the nation's male leadership. This metaphorical feminization functions in Hosea 1–2 as a "symbolic alibi," which obscures *for later interpreters* Hosea's conflicts with this leadership, while concurrently reinforcing the subordinate status of Israelite women to men. What one remembers from reading

Hosea 1–2 is the conflict between a faithful divine husband and his sinful wife/Israel, and not the clash between prophet and male aristocracy.

ABSTRACT

This article is a materialist analysis of Hosea 1–2, involving an investigation of the eighth-century mode of production operative during Hosea's time (extrinsic analysis) and how this mode of production is ideologically embedded in Hosea's marriage metaphor for the God/Israelite relationship (intrinsic analysis). Hosea denounces a mode of production that involved a royal agribusiness and foreign policy, which exploited the peasantry, and was embodied in the public state veneration of the *baals*. Hosea directs his condemnation against the ruling élite, feminized in a metaphor of an adulterous wife who runs after her lovers (the foreign nations). Through this metaphor, Hosea theologically proclaims a polemical monolatry that places him in continuity with the YHWH-Alone movement that will become normative for Israel during the exilic and post-exilic periods.

Copyright of Biblical Interpretation is the property of Brill Academic Publishers and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.