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Feminized Male Symbol of Gomer and Hosea

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Abstract

This paper has attempted to explore the implications of the marriage metaphor in Hosea 1-3, not only within the socio-political context of 8th-century BCE Northern Israel but also for contemporary readers. To this end, it has considered the interpretation of Gomer as symbolizing feminized elite males who exploited the common people and failed to trust in God. It has also sought to show that the marriage metaphor functioned as Hosea's resistance to the ideology of the Assyrian Empire. However, women became represented as objects of violence, as the prophet Hosea criticized elite males by equating them with the figure of the promiscuous woman. In light of this, the study hopes that the marriage metaphor in Hosea 1–3 will cease to serve as a text that legitimizes hatred and violence in the name of love.

Keywords

Assyrian Empire, Feminized Elite Male, Gomer, Hosea, Marriage Metaphor

1.Introduction

Hosea 1–3, which recounts the prophet Hosea's marriage to Gomer, is one of the biblical texts that often discomfort female readers. Gomer is portrayed as a promiscuous woman and subjected to brutal violence. Traditionally, Hosea and Gomer have been interpreted as a religious metaphor representing the relationship between God and unfaithful Israel. However, the metaphorical dimension has often been overlooked, and Gomer has served to reinforce prejudices and violence against women's bodies and sexuality. Meanwhile, Hosea—who does not abandon the promiscuous Gomer—has been interpreted as a symbol of God's unfailing love.

This study reexamines interpretations of Gomer as a symbol of "feminized elite males"[1] from two perspectives: resistance to the Assyrian Empire and Israel's eighth-century BCE ruling class, and contemporary female readers. First, it examines how the metaphor of Gomer functioned as a counter-narrative within the historical context of the Northern Kingdom. Second, it explores how the metaphor of feminized elite males reproduces violence against women's bodies and sexuality.

The reexamination of Hosea 1–3 was prompted by the misogynistic murder at Gangnam Station in 2016. Since then, women have increasingly spoken out about the discrimination and violence they experience. In 2018, the Christian Anti-Sexual Violence Center was established

1 Gale A. Yee, *Poor Banished Children of Eve: Woman as Evil in the Hebrew Bible* (Fortress Press, 2003), 81–109. In addition to Gale A. Yee, other scholars have argued that the marriage metaphor in Hosea targets elite males and that Hosea's primary audience was male. For example, see Renita J. Weems, *Battered Love: Marriage, Sex, and Violence in the Hebrew Prophets* (Fortress Publishers, 1995), 42. Marvin Chaney, "Agricultural Intensification as Promiscuity in the Book of Hosea," This paper is an unpublished manuscript presented at the SBL (SBL, Washington, D.C.1993), 1, quoted in Hye-Kyoung Park, "Hosea, Gomer and their Children," *Korean Feminist Theology*, 12 (1998), 9.

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in Korea to address sexual violence and misogynistic crimes within Christian communities.[2] Nevertheless, digital crimes continue to generate increasingly sophisticated forms of sexualized violence against women. Churches are no exception. The abusive conduct of Jung Myung-seok, exposed in the documentary *I Am God*, cannot be dismissed as incidents that occurred because he belonged to a religious sect. Rather, women remain vulnerable whenever religious authority is abused or biblical texts are interpreted in misogynistic ways. Although it cannot be argued that the Bible or its interpretations directly cause violence against women, the ways in which biblical texts can be used to legitimize such violence underscores the importance of critically engaging violent passages. Hosea 1–3, particularly the violence directed toward Gomer, therefore requires careful reading, as identifying Hosea with men and Gomer with women can inadvertently shift blame onto women. Moreover, equating Hosea with God risks justifying violence against women as divinely sanctioned.

2. Historical Context of 8th-Century Northern Israel and the Marriage Metaphor

The prophet Hosea began his ministry near the end of Jeroboam II's reign (c. 787–746 BCE) and continued until shortly before the fall of the Northern Kingdom in 722 BCE.[3] After a period of prosperity under Jeroboam II, the kingdom entered a phase of politically instability, with six kings succeeding one another, four of whom were assassinated. Under the growing threat of the Assyrian Empire, the Northern Kingdom became an Assyrian vassal state in 738 BCE and was forced to pay tribute (2 Kgs 15:19–20). In its search for security through foreign alliances, the kingdom joined an anti-Assyrian coalition with Aram and initiated the Syro-Ephraimite War (734–732 BCE). This rebellion was swiftly crushed, much of the land was incorporated into Assyrian territory, and large numbers of inhabitants were deported. The last king, Hoshea, later pursued another anti-Assyrian policy, which ultimately precipitated to the kingdom's destruction.

During the reign of Jeroboam II, state-directed agricultural policies and the cultivation of cash crops generated economic growth, but this prosperity disproportionately benefited the wealthy while marginalizing the poor. Political and economic elites who controlled land use and production decisions ignored the survival needs of farmers and local communities, concentrating wealth in the hands of the urban ruling class and further destabilizing rural livelihoods. As inequality deepened and urban–rural disparities widened under heavy taxation, the lives of ordinary people—especially rural farmers—became increasingly precarious, placing once egalitarian, family-centered communities at risk of collapse.[4] These structural inequities

2 Christian Anti-Sexual Violence Center, Newsnjoy, *Me Too Church Too With You: A Guidebook for Addressing Sexual Violence in the Church* (Newsnjoy, 2018).

3 Joseph Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel*, John Knox Press (Louisville, 1996), 83.

4 For a feminist critique of traditional religious interpretations grounded in the socio-economic context of eighth—century Northern Israel, see Alice A. Keefe, "The Female Body, the Body Politic and the Land: A Sociopolitical Reading of Hosea 1–2," in *Feminist Companion to the Bible: The Latter Prophets*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 70–100. Keefe argues that Hosea's critique engages the social, political, and economic crises that led to the collapse of family-based communities, interpreting these developments as a religious crisis and

were compounded under Assyrian domination, as even the tribute extracted by the empire was ultimately borne by the common people.

It was within this context of compounded internal exploitation and external imperial pressure that Hosea emerged as what may be described as a "marginal prophet," speaking on behalf of the oppressed while resisting both the Assyrian Empire and Israel's ruling elite. The Assyrian Empire asserted its cultural, political, and religious superiority, claiming that its gods governed history and demanding unwavering loyalty from subject nations—an ideology that many in Israel also internalized. Hosea challenged this imperial worldview by proclaiming that God, not Assyria, was sovereign over history.[5] Israel's suffering, he insisted, was not the result of God's defeat at the hands of Assyria, but the consequence of Israel's own unfaithfulness.[6]

Against this backdrop, Hosea opens with God's command to marry a promiscuous woman and bear children of promiscuity, explaining that "the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the LORD" (1:2, hereinafter NRSV). In its ancient context, "the land" (literally, "that land") often refers not merely to territory but to the ruling class, particularly military and political elites. Gomer thus functions as a literary symbol for elite men who separated the land from the lives of ordinary farmers and exploited it for economic gain.[7] The portrayal of the land as promiscuous serves as a pointed critique of entrenched elites—including priests and political leaders—whose exploitation of the common people is repeatedly condemned throughout the book of Hosea.

Baal worship further reinforced these structures of exploitation. As a fertility deity, Baal was believed to control rain, agricultural abundance, land ownership, and social power, all of which were secured through ritual offerings of harvested crops. In practice, Baal worship functioned to legitimate the economic domination of farmers by elite male rulers, who presented their control over land and labor as divinely sanctioned.[8] The "Baalism" embraced by the ruling class thus reflected their desire to assert mastery and maintain power.[9] Priests, driven by their own interests, were scarcely distinguishable from criminals (6:7–7:2) and actively encouraged the people's participation in systemic injustice (4:4–9). Political leaders likewise abandoned trust in

exposing the corruption of public worship. She focuses in particular on the elite class aligned with the royal court, criticizing their violence against marginalized groups—especially farmers—through practices of land seizure and the commercialization of agriculture. For additional socio-scientific approaches to the marriage metaphor in Hosea, see: Taek Joo Woo, "Key Factors in the Formation of 8th Century Written Prophecy," in *New Horizons in Understanding 8th Century Prophetic Literature: A Socio-Scientific Critical Reading* (Daihan Christian Literature Society, 2005), 99–100, 108–113; and Taek Joo Woo, "Gomer's Promiscuity and Socio-Scientific Biblical Interpretation," " in *New Horizons in Understanding 8th Century Prophetic Literature: A Socio-Scientific Critical Reading* (Daihan Christian Literature Society, 2005),248, 270

5 Leo Perdue, "Hosea and the Empire," in *Postcolonialism and the Hebrew Bible: The Next Step*, ed. Roland Boer (Society of Biblical Literature, 2013), 174

6 David M. Carr, *Holy Resilience: The Bible's Traumatic Origins*, trans. Joon Hee Cha (Gameunsa, 2022), 52.

7 Woo "Gomer's Promiscuity and Socio-Scientific Biblical Interpretation," 257. Woo agrees with Yee that Hosea critiques the promiscuity of the ruling elite from the beginning. Elsewhere, he notes that eighth-century prophets, including Hosea, commonly used third-person plural participles to designate the upper ruling class as "those who do…" See Woo, "Key Factors in the Formation of 8th Century Written Prophecy," 118.

8 Woo, "Gomer's Promiscuity and Socio-Scientific Biblical Interpretation," 265.

9 Ibid., 270.

God and sought security through military alliances with Assyria, Aram, and Egypt (5:13; 7:11; 8:9), further entrenching dependence on imperial power rather than divine justice.

Within this context, the marriage metaphor in Hosea 1–3 functions as a subversive critique of elite male authority. If Gomer symbolizes the ruling class, then her promiscuity represents the political, economic, and religious infidelity of elite men who pursued power, wealth, and security through exploitation and imperial alliances. The metaphor feminizes these elites, rendering them objects of shame and moral failure within a patriarchal symbolic order. At the same time, the children born of Gomer's promiscuity may be read as representing the common people of the Northern Kingdom, whose suffering results from the unfaithfulness of those in power.[10] The names of the children—Lo-Ruhamah ("Not pitied"), Lo-Ammi ("Not my people"), and Jezreel ("God sows")—signal the withdrawal of divine protection, the breakdown of covenantal identity, and the impending collapse of the ruling dynasty. The people believed that worshipping Baal would enable them to gain independence from Assyria.[11] Hosea thus sought to decolonize the minds of the common people by proclaiming that it was not Baal, nor Assyria, but God alone who governed history and could bring deliverance.[12]

Yet while the marriage metaphor effectively exposes the moral bankruptcy of elite male rulers and resists imperial ideology, it does so by reinscribing violence onto a feminized body. As the following section will argue, the metaphor's power to critique male elites is inseparable from its troubling portrayal of Gomer as a woman whose body and sexuality become sites of punishment and control.

3. The Marriage Metaphor and the Feminized Elite Male Gomer

Hosea's marriage metaphor raises particular challenges for contemporary female readers,[13] especially when male readers identify themselves with God: "When men model themselves after God, God in turn bestows divine attributes upon men."[14] In other words, by equating Hosea with God through the metaphor, male readers who interpret the text from Hosea's perspective may feel justified in exercising control and domination over women, as if endowed with divine

10 Park, "Hosea, Gomer and their Children," 9.

11 Carr, *Holy Resilience: The Bible's Traumatic Origins*, 45.

12 Perdue, "Hosea and the Empire," 186.

13 Renita J. Weems, "Gomer: Victim of Violence or Victim of Metaphor," *Semeia* 47 (1989), 87–104, especially 100–101. Also see: T. Drorah Setel, "Prophets and Pornography: Female Sexual Imagery in Hosea," in *From Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Letty M. Russell (Westminster Press, 1985), 86–95. J. Cheryl Exum, *Plotted, Shot, and Painted: Cultural Representations of Biblical Women* (Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 101–128. Rhiannon Graybill, *Are We Not Men? Unstable Masculinity in the Hebrew Prophets* (Oxford University Press, 2016), 49–69. Graybill analyzes the exposed and violated female body in Hosea 1–3 by comparing Gomer and Hosea to male and female figures in horror films. For a broader history of interpretations of Hosea, see Yvonne Sherwood, *The Prostitute and the Prophet: Hosea's Marriage in Literary-Theoretical Perspective* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996).

14 Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language*, trans. Ae-sung Jung (Dasan Books, 2001), 257. Also citing Mary Daly's famous statement, "If God is male, then the male is God." Quoted in Elizabeth Johnson, *Quest for the Living God: Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God*, trans. Park Chong & Byung-ryul Ahn (Book in the Gap, 2013), 159. While religious language and metaphor are indispensable, problems arise when God is perceived as male—or as king or lord—since such images confine the divine within restrictive frameworks. Weems draws on McFague's argument that "God is no longer like a husband, but is understood as the husband," highlighting the dangers of equating God with masculinity. Weems, "Gomer: Victim of Violence or Victim of Metaphor," 100.

authority. This reflects a broader issue: the portrayal of Gomer as a promiscuous woman mirrors the patriarchal reality of Hosea's time, in which women were socially subordinate to men. Within the constraints of his historical context, Hosea's theology incorporates and reflects this perspective, constructing the marriage metaphor accordingly.[15] Over time, however, literary devices such as religious symbols, jokes, metaphors, and analogies—originally used to caricature individuals or groups in society—tend to lose their framing as literary tools. As a result, the metaphor may be conflated with reality, leading to the perception that women, like Gomer, are inherently promiscuous and naturally subject to control—even through violence.[16] This transformation underscores the enduring relevance of critically examining Hosea's marriage metaphor: while it was originally a sophisticated literary device to critique elite male rulers, it also risks reinforcing harmful gender norms if read uncritically.

Why did Hosea employ a marriage metaphor, and why choose Gomer? Traditional interpretations link these choices to the subordinate position of women in ancient Israel. In societies that dichotomize masculinity and femininity, feminizing an opponent or rival serves as a strategy to disempower and "other" them. By feminizing the elite male ruling class through Gomer, Hosea exposes these men to the loss of social status, honor, and privilege. In a culture where men were systematically elevated above women, the loss of masculinity constituted a profound humiliation. Portraying men as promiscuous women was considered especially shameful in male-dominated society.[17]

Under Assyrian imperial occupation, which resulted in the loss of much of the Northern Kingdom's territory, Hosea's marriage metaphor and the violence directed at Gomer mirror the mechanisms by which Assyria subjugated weaker states. The Assyrian Empire presented itself as a dominant male power, feminizing subject nations to render them powerless. Royal inscriptions threatened those who resisted the king by declaring they would be "turned into women," while other records describe Assyrian invasions as acts of sexualized violence.[18] Hosea's feminization of elite male rulers through the figure of Gomer employs a comparable logic.

Men in colonized or conquered nations frequently equate national defeat with the loss of masculinity, associating imperial domination with male power and their own dispossession with femininity. This perceived deficiency of masculine capacity to defend the nation is often interpreted as the cause of conquest, producing humiliation through feminization.[19] Such shame is then projected onto the control of women's bodies and sexuality, making women the tangible objects of social and political control.

15 Gale A. Yee, "Hosea," In *Women's Bible Commentary: Old Testament*, ed. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe, trans. Ewha Womans Theological Institute (Daihan Christian Literature Society, 2015), 515

16 The Hebrew term translated as "promiscuous" is sometimes understood to refer to a prostitute or temple prostitute. However, it conveys a broader sense of sexual immorality and reckless behavior, manifested through acts of promiscuity. See Phyllis Bird, "'To Play the Harlot': An Inquiry into an Old Testament Metaphor," In *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel*, ed, Peggy L. Day (Fortress Press, 1989), 80.

17 Yee, *Poor Banished Children of Eve*, 98–99.

18 Carr, *Holy Resilience: The Bible's Traumatic Origins*, 56–57.

19 For example, see Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 152

Why, then, did Hosea adopt the same metaphorical strategies as Assyria? David Carr interprets this as an effort to process the trauma of imperial domination. Hosea appropriated the imperial metaphor to resist Assyria, asserting that Israel's allegiance should be to God rather than the empire. He sought to clarify that Israel's suffering was not the consequence of God's defeat by Assyria. Whereas the Assyrian Empire feminized weaker states and subjected them to violence, Hosea employed similar imagery to assert that the only power Israel should fear was God.[20]

The metaphor also conveys hope: if Israel returns to God, a new reality emerges. History is ultimately governed by God, not Assyria. Through this lens, Hosea resists Assyrian ideology while providing a form of empowerment to the oppressed.[21] Israel's fate depends on its recognition of God's sovereignty and its commitment to God's covenant. The hope of restoration is thus expressed through the marriage metaphor, as Hosea subverts Assyrian propaganda that disaster follows rebellion. Israel's suffering, he asserts, results from unfaithfulness to God rather than foreign domination. Just as the Assyrian king demanded loyalty, Hosea demands Israel's love and devotion to God.[22] Through the Gomer metaphor, Hosea simultaneously critiques the elite male rulers and offers hope for the oppressed. He urges the ruling class to place their trust solely in God while highlighting the injustices inflicted upon common people through political and economic exploitation. Ultimately, the marriage metaphor functions as both a critique of social oppression and a proclamation of divine hope, emphasizing the potential for spiritual and social renewal.

4. Violence Toward Gomer

A noticeable feature of Hosea's feminization of elite males is that the metaphor becomes increasingly obscured for later readers. Subsequent audiences tend to focus not on Israel's trauma under Assyrian domination or the greed and injustices of the male elites, but on Gomer—the "promiscuous" woman who betrays the man who loves her. The male elites, originally equated with Gomer, are effectively erased. Gale Yee describes this as a "symbolic alibi": the female metaphor of Gomer conceals the sins of the male elites, leaving readers primarily with the image of women subordinated to men.[23]

This effect is further explained by the dual nature of metaphor. Metaphors highlight certain aspects while concealing others. For instance, war-related terminology in chess emphasizes strategy while obscuring the brutality of actual warfare. Similarly, Hosea's marriage metaphor highlights the land's unfaithfulness and subsequent punishment but obscures both Gomer's alleged promiscuity and the role of Hosea—or God as represented by Hosea—behind the metaphor. Questions about Hosea's unilateral actions—why Gomer loved others, what she

20 Carr, *Holy Resilience: the Bible's Traumatic Origins*, 49-52.

21 Ibid., 52.

22 Ibid., 55-56.

23 Yee, *Poor Banished Children of Eve*, 100. See also, Park, "Hosea, Gomer and their Children," *Korean Feminist Theology*, 9.

gained, or what Hosea/God did or failed to do—are largely hidden.[24] Although the text critiques the ruling elite, readers' attention is drawn primarily to Gomer's promiscuity and the violence inflicted upon her.

From Hosea 2:2 through 2:13, the prophet speaks in the first person, describing merciless violence against Gomer. The children are mobilized to expose her alleged promiscuity: "Plead with your mother, plead! For she is not my wife, and I am not her husband. Tell her to remove her prostitution from her face and the adultery from between her breasts" (2:2). Harsh words extend to the children: "I will not show love to her children, because they are the children of adultery" (2:4). Gomer, having allegedly betrayed Hosea and committed adultery with Baal, intends to follow him (2:5). The narrative presents punishment for her alleged promiscuity as abuse toward her and her children—a metaphor for the suffering of the common people under elite exploitation. Yet readers often focus exclusively on Gomer's promiscuity. Her only direct "voice" appears in 2:5, yet it is embedded within Hosea's speech, leaving her perspective largely unexpressed.

The physical violence inflicted upon Gomer in the wilderness is coercive and unrelenting. She is threatened with exposure, abandonment, and death: I will strip her naked and expose her as in the day she was born, and make her like a wilderness, and turn her into a parched land, and kill her with thirst" (2:3). Even here, her suffering is framed as deserved punishment.[25] Verses 2:6–11 shift to God's voice, reinforcing the violence as divine punishment for Israel's unfaithfulness.[26] This merging of Hosea's and God's voices equates patriarchal sexual violence with divine retribution, a reading particularly troubling for contemporary audiences given parallels to real-life domestic abuse.[27]

Reconciliation follows in the wilderness. As Gomer's children are restored (1:10), she is depicted as a passive figure who endures and ultimately reconciles with Hosea. Hosea persuades her to leave Baal and return (2:14–23). In this divine wilderness, Hosea and Gomer enter a renewed relationship: "In that day," declares the Lord, "you will call me 'my husband'; you will no longer call me 'my master'" (2:16). The alternation between Hosea and God reinforces their identification. Yet the narrative remains Hosea-centered, reconstructing Gomer's experience through his lens. Women are described indirectly, often as "grammatical metaphors," their voices silenced. They are depicted in binary terms—good or evil—and "represented as objects awaiting disposal."[28] Although the text frames Gomer's suffering as a consequence of

24 Juhwan Kim, "The Highlighting and Concealment of Metaphor in Hosea 1:2–2:15," *Theological Forum* 79 (March 2015), 195–224.

25 For example, when Gomer's promiscuity is read literally, her punishment is justified, and women more broadly come to be regarded as embodiments of evil. See, Marie-Theres Wacker, "Hosea—The God-Identified Man and the Women of Israel/Israel as Woman," *Journal of Korean Society of Old Testament Studies* 13 (2002), 155

26 Michael Carden, "Hosea," *Queer Bible Commentary*, trans. Editorial Committee, (Rainbow Theology Research Institute, 2021), 696–697.

27 Yee, "Hosea," 525–526. For example, Hosea isolates Gomer from her lovers, subjects her to physical and emotional violence, and then speaks to her tenderly. As a result, Gomer becomes dependent on her abuser and unable to leave, perpetuating the cycle of abuse.

28 Sharon H. Ringe, "When Women Interpret the Bible," In *Women's Bible Commentary: Old Testament*, ed, Carol A.

her alleged unfaithfulness, the sins of Israelite society and the elite men remain concealed. The result is an emphasis on negative perceptions of female sexuality, portraying promiscuity as inherent to women.

Despite Gomer's betrayal, Hosea/God's persistent love and promise of salvation are conveyed through the marriage metaphor.[29] Yet in contemporary society, biblical authority can continue to justify violence. If the metaphor is read uncritically, it raises questions about its appropriateness. Modern readers must ask: "What makes a metaphor suitable?" and "Whose experiences does it represent, and whose does it exclude?"[30] Additionally, can Hosea/God's call for a renewed relationship—after Gomer endures violence—be understood as genuine "radical love"?[31] Would a human Gomer, subjected to such cruelty, have welcomed a renewed relationship with joy? Can "love framed within violence"[32] truly be called love? Imagining her unheard voice remains critical for contemporary readers. Carol Fontaine offers one way to recover Gomer's voice, presenting a radical reimagining:

"Divorce, my daughters! Divorce your tradition, for its god is not a true mate…You will answer me as on the day of your birth, and you will not call me "Father" or "Son" but "Mother!", "Sister!", "Lover!"… And on that day, I will set you free from your bondage, and you will not say "My husband", but you shall say, "My friend"![33]

Fontaine's words critique the metaphor and challenge the traditional masculine framing of God. By amplifying Gomer's hidden voice, contemporary readers are invited to engage with narratives of love without violence, expanding the possibilities for understanding and expression across diverse perspectives.

Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe, trans. Ewha Womans Theological Institute (Daihan Christian Literature Society, 2015), 39.

29 Although the prophet Hosea did not fully transcend the limitations of his time-so that women's subordination remains embedded within the marriage metaphor-if his critique primarily targets the elite male ruling class, this opens the door to a more nuanced and positive understanding of his work. In this reading, Hosea may be exposing the ways in which women suffer as a consequence of the sins of men in power. Moreover, in Hosea 11 and 13, God is depicted as nurturing Israel with motherly love, which has been interpreted positively as suggesting the possibility of addressing God not only as Father but also as Mother. Kyung Sook Lee, "A Feminist Theological Perspective on the Prophet Hosea," *Korean Feminist Theology* 12 (1992), 11–14.

30 Yee, "Hosea," 529–530. Also see, Exum, *Plotted, Shot, and Painted: Cultural Representations of Biblical Women*, 119. Exum, along with other contributors to *Women's Bible Commentary*, argues that prophetic texts such as Hosea, Micah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel depict violence against women. Even when understood metaphorical, these portrayals of female sexuality objects of violence and control constitute what she terms "prophetic pornography." See also, Weems, "Gomer: Victim of Violence or Victim of Metaphor," 93, and Kathleen M. O'Connor, who likewise examines metaphors in Jeremiah that personify women as Judah and Jerusalem. While these metaphors reflect the suffering of women, they also depict women as symbols of evil, thereby shifting responsibility for national destruction onto them. See, Kathleen M. O'Connor, "Jeremiah," In *Women's Bible Commentary: Old Testament*, ed. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe, trans. Ewha Womans Theological Institute (Daihan Christian Literature Society, 2015), 452–453.

31 For discussions of God's "radical love," see, Soon Young Kim, "Reading Hosea 1–3 from a Feminist Perspective," *Journal of Korean Society of Old Testament Studies* 28 (2022), 64. Yani Yoo, "Reading Hosea from a Queer-Feminist Perspective: From Stigma and Wounds to Healing," *Journal of Korean Society of Old Testament Studies* 29 (2023), 415.

32 Carden, "Hosea," 696.

33 Carol R. Fontain, "A Response to 'Hosea,'" in *Feminist Companion to the Bible: The Latter Prophets*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 68.

5. Conclusion

This paper has reexamined interpretations that understand Gomer in Hosea 1–3 as a "symbol of feminized elite males," situating this metaphor within the socio-political context of eighth-century BCE Northern Israel. It has explored how, amid the systemic oppression of the common people, Hosea employed the marriage metaphor to critique the elite, linking their abuses to the figure of the "promiscuous" Gomer in order to disempower them and call them back to God. Simultaneously, this study has shown that the marriage metaphor functioned as a form of resistance to Assyrian imperial ideology. Contrary to Assyrian claims that the Northern Kingdom's suffering resulted from rebellion, Hosea asserts that their misfortune stemmed from unfaithfulness to God. Through this lens, God, rather than foreign powers, governs the course of history, offering the people of Israel a message of enduring hope. Yet this analysis also underscores that the violence inflicted upon Gomer transcends metaphor, revealing how male-perpetrated violence against women can be rationalized under the guise of divine authority or love.

A critical issue arises, however, when Gomer is interpreted primarily as a symbol of elite males: the risk of reinforcing rigid gender binaries. If interpretations are grounded in socially constructed notions of masculinity and femininity, questions emerge regarding the broader spectrum of violence not limited to women. Recent scholarship provides a path forward, offering reinterpretations that move beyond fixed gender categories and conventional readings of Gomer and Hosea. These approaches portray Gomer as an autonomous figure capable of pursuing her own love, while Hosea is depicted as a prophet who, in accepting God's word, enters a dependent or even obsessive relationship with her independent agency.[34] Such perspectives open new avenues for addressing the limitations of traditional interpretations and enrich our understanding of the text. Ultimately, this paper emphasizes the importance of approaching the biblical text in ways that resist justifying violence or oppression. Rather than serving as a tool for domination, the biblical text has the potential to support human dignity, survival, and flourishing across all communities. By engaging critically with the text, contemporary readers can reimagine narratives of love, justice, and restoration in ways that are inclusive, life-affirming, and ethically responsible.

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34 Yoo "Reading Hosea from a Queer-Feminist Perspective: From Stigma and Wounds to Healing," 391-424. See also, Carden, "Hosea," 694–712.

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