



# ‘Judgement was executed upon her, and she became a byword among women’ (Ezek. 23.10)

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## Chapter 8

### “JUDGEMENT WAS EXECUTED UPON HER, AND SHE BECAME A BYWORD AMONG WOMEN” (EZEK. 23:10): DIVINE REVENGE PORN, SLUT-SHAMING, ETHNICITY, AND EXILE IN EZEKIEL 16 AND 23

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Ezekiel 16 and 23, two “marriage metaphor” texts, have frequently drawn critical attention from feminist biblical scholars due to their inclusion of shocking, retributive violence against the personified Samaria and Jerusalem, the “wives” of Yahweh. This chapter aims to develop an ethnicity-focused feminist approach to reading Ezekiel’s deployment of sexualized imagery of the two female cities, whose “whoring” with foreign men and subsequent divinely decreed punishment by mutilation and public stripping serves as a figurative explanation of the conquest and ultimately the exile of Israel and Judah. While I acknowledge that both descriptions of Samaria and Jerusalem are predominantly metaphorical, I argue that by considering the texts as examples of slut-shaming the reader’s eye is drawn to rarely acknowledged passages in the biblical accounts where the prophet reveals his underlying concern with the behavior of real women. As part of the public shaming of the feminized cities, not only are their bodies to be exposed to their foreign lovers but, crucially, this punishment is to be witnessed by other women—Ezekiel 16.41; 23.10, 48—and thus to function as a warning to the female population against apostasy, adultery, and sexual interaction with foreign men.

My examination of the text will be divided into two sections. First, I will consider the “fantasy” element of chs 16 and 23, in which Ezekiel describes the crimes of personified Jerusalem and Samaria as a metaphor for religious infidelity in Israel and Judah, arguing that these sections also belie both a concern with the emasculation of Israelite and Judahite men and an equally strong anxiety around female sexual interaction with foreign men. Second, I will analyze the ways in which the description of God’s punishment of Jerusalem in Ezekiel 16, and Samaria and Jerusalem in Ezekiel 23, functions as a form of divine “revenge porn” and “slut-shaming” that points toward the “reality” of life during the exilic period. These two terms have developed in recent years to describe the frequent public sexual shaming of women on the internet in response to perceived promiscuous behavior. Revenge porn, the act of sharing explicit images of a woman without her consent, usually following a breakup, is most frequently perpetrated by men.

Slut-shaming, however, the act of negatively judging sexual images and behavior of women, which can include the making but also consuming of revenge porn, also has a very strong female voice. I will argue that precisely when the prophet begins to describe Yahweh's revenge against the women's ethnically troubling sexuality, in which he uses foreign men and foreign women as his weapons, Ezekiel's metaphor ruptures, and the reader slips from "fantasy" to "reality" as the prophet moves from condemning personified Jerusalem and Samaria to brutalizing her daughters, real women of the cities, for their pursuit of foreign men.

### *Ezekiel, exile, and ethnicity*

While considerable work has been done on the pornographic representations of the female body in Ezekiel 16 and 23 and their connection to domestic violence, adultery, and misogyny,<sup>1</sup> attention to central issues of foreignness, colonization, and power, all of which are integral to the exilic environment and experience of the prophet, have been less regularly brought to bear on interpretation of the marriage metaphor. There are a number of notable exceptions, but a review of three will suffice here to indicate the ways in which recent scholarship on exile and masculinity in Ezekiel provide an important foundation from which my own argument will develop.

The first was written in 2000 by Corinne L. Patton, in which she develops a critique of and response to a number of feminist readings of Ezekiel 23, claiming that work to date had not given due attention to the historical setting of the original text.<sup>2</sup> In her own analysis, Patton continues to "use the lens of gender" to focus her

1 For example, Fokkelien van Dijk-Hemmes, "The Metaphorization of Woman in Prophetic Speech: An Analysis of Ezekiel 23," in *On Gendering Texts: Female and Male Voices in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Athalya Brenner and F. van Dijk-Hemmes (Biblical Interpretation Series 1; Leiden: Brill, 1993), 167–76; J. Cheryl Exum, "The Ethics of Biblical Violence Against Women," in *The Bible in Ethics: The Second Sheffield Colloquium*, ed. John W. Rogerson et al. (JSOTSup 207; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 248–71, rev. and updated in "Prophetic Pornography," in *Plotted, Shot and Painted: Cultural Representations of Biblical Women* JSOTSup 215; Gender, Culture, Theory 3 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 101–28; Mary Shields, "Multiple Exposures: Body Rhetoric and Gender Characterizations in Ezekiel 16," *JFSR* 14 (1998); T. Drorah Setel, "Prophets and Pornography: Female Sexual Imagery in Hosea," in *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Letty M. Russell (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985), 86–95; Renita Weems, "Gomer: Victim of Violence or Victim of Metaphor?" *Semeia* 47 (1989): 87–104; Renita Weems, *Battered Love: Marriage, Sex, and Violence in the Hebrew Prophets* (OBT; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995).

2 Corinne Patton, "Should Our Sister Be Treated Like a Whore? A Response to Feminist Critiques of Ezekiel 23," in *The Book of Ezekiel: Theological and Anthropological Perspectives*, ed. M. S. Odell and J. T. Strong (SBLSymS 9; Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 222.

reading, but compliments this with a second lens, the lens of the historical situation of Ezekiel 23, when Jerusalem had just "been attacked, pillaged, raped, if you will, by the Babylonians."<sup>3</sup> Using this reading strategy, Patton argues that contrary to many feminist critiques which posit that the prophet's descriptions of the brutal punishments of Samaria and Jerusalem condone aggression against women, there is, in fact, within Ezekiel 23 an "awareness of and horror at sexual violence."<sup>4</sup> She goes on to expand upon this point by arguing that "all members of Israelite society were aware of the fate of women (as beloved wives, innocent sisters, honored elders) at the hands of an enemy who wins."<sup>5</sup> On this basis, Patton argues that the marriage metaphor was deliberately chosen precisely because the horror of the sexual violence that the female family members of the Judeans had experienced conveyed the horror of Ezekiel's own situation in Babylon. By representing himself and his fellow men as God's unfaithful and battered wife, the prophet holds up a "mirror" to the exiles. In doing so Ezekiel is not only calling the group a "bunch of women," but also drawing attention to their responsibility for the suffering of their wives, daughters, sisters, and mothers because of the men's moral failings that brought about the exile.<sup>6</sup>

While I support Patton's call to contextualize the reading of the chapter in the world of exile and diaspora, I believe her relatively sympathetic reading of the text's troubling sexual violence as solely metaphorical of the male condition and male suffering erases an important aspect of Ezekiel's prophecy. By arguing that the text is only concerned with a male audience and addressing their experience at the hands of the Babylonians, Patton glosses over some significant details that indicate Ezekiel may have used the marriage metaphor to address the female population, too. In particular, I find her interpretation of Ezekiel 23:10 and 23:48 especially weak, as Patton argues that these verses do not refer to a female audience for Ezekiel at all, but are just another example of the prophet feminizing his male listeners and readers.<sup>7</sup> It is precisely this position I intend to argue against, below.

Gale Yee further develops some of the insights from Patton in her own analysis of Ezekiel 23's colonial context, in which she situates "the pornographic imagery of Ezek. 21:1–35 historically in the collective trauma of disgraced priestly elite males, who suffered colonization, conquest and exile during the first quarter of the sixth century B.C.E."<sup>8</sup> Taking a rather more critical tone than Patton, Yee argues that by constructing a marriage metaphor in which two female personified cities are punished for their infidelity, Ezekiel undertakes an "act of transgendered self blame," articulating his guilt, and the guilt of the male community, as the guilt of promiscuous, adulterous women.<sup>9</sup> For Yee, the use of the marriage metaphor is

3 Patton, "Should Our Sister Be Treated Like a Whore?," 229.

4 Patton, "Should Our Sister Be Treated Like a Whore?," 228.

5 Patton, "Should Our Sister Be Treated Like a Whore?," 232.

6 Patton, "Should Our Sister Be Treated Like a Whore?," 232–3.

7 Patton, "Should Our Sister Be Treated Like a Whore?," 232.

8 Gale A. Yee, *Poor Banished Children of Eve: Women as Evil in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2003), 133.

9 Yee, *Poor Banished Children of Eve*, 132.

precisely that, a metaphor, in which the “blame falls *metaphorically* on the bodies of women” (my italics).<sup>10</sup> As with Patton’s work, Yee is primarily interested in the insights Ezekiel’s metaphor offers us into his self-blame and his mutilated masculinity, concluding that “Ezekiel 23 may be considered a testament to the nation’s *emascularity*, a nation stripped of its masculinity.”<sup>11</sup>

In an article from 2004, Daniel L. Smith-Christopher also picks up on the issue of colonization in Ezekiel, this time in relation to the marriage metaphor in ch. 16, and in particular on vv. 37–39, which describe the stripping of woman Jerusalem by Yahweh and her foreign lovers as punishment for her perceived sin.<sup>12</sup> In this insightful paper, Smith-Christopher, like Patton and Yee, draws attention to common scholarly failings to recognize the historical reality of the “violence, bloodshed, vengeance and terror” that saturates Ezekiel’s vision in ch. 16.<sup>13</sup> In response to this perceived silence in previous work on the marriage metaphor, Smith-Christopher reviews a range of ancient Near Eastern military tactics represented in a range of Mesopotamian and Neo-Assyrian reliefs to contextualize his reading of Ezekiel 16.13–39, and he concludes that “the ‘humiliation’ of ‘Jerusalem’ as female must be directly connected to the ideology of, and practice of, Assyrian and Babylonian warfare.”<sup>14</sup> He argues that the usual practice of warfare included the stripping of the conquered by the conquerors, including male prisoners of war like Ezekiel, as a means of feminizing and disempowering the colonized nation. Thus, for Smith-Christopher, rather than a titillated male gaze, Ezekiel’s marriage metaphor represents:

a triumphalist “imperial gaze” of the conquerors over the humiliated and stripped male soldiers who foolishly tried to resist the superior forces. Ezekiel himself may have been fully aware of his “feminization” of this imperial gaze in order to deepen the impact of his metaphor—and not at all involved in merely a “male attempt” to appeal to a supposed practice of publicly stripping and humiliating women as punishment for adultery.<sup>15</sup>

Once more, with Smith-Christopher’s work, sexual violence in the form of stripping becomes focalized through the lens of male self-blame and emasculation.

Following this review of three works on Ezekiel’s marriage metaphors and his exilic context, two key points of similarity have emerged. First, a shared commitment to reading the marriage metaphors as indicators of the emasculation

10 Yee, *Poor Banished Children of Eve*, 122.

11 Yee, *Poor Banished Children of Eve*, 121.

12 Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, “Ezekiel in Abu-Ghraib: Rereading Ezekiel 16:37–39 in the Context of Imperial Conquest,” in *Ezekiel’s World: Wrestling with a Tiered Reality*, ed. S. L. Cook and C. L. Patton (SBLMS; Leiden: Brill, 2004), 141–57.

13 Smith-Christopher, “Ezekiel in Abu-Ghraib,” 149.

14 Smith-Christopher, “Ezekiel in Abu-Ghraib,” 153.

15 Smith-Christopher, “Ezekiel in Abu-Ghraib,” 155.

of Ezekiel and his Judahite male contemporaries. Second, while Patton, Yee, and Smith-Christopher each pay attention to the specific power dynamics at play in the imperial context of Ezekiel's prophecy, they do not give any extended attention to the prophet's ethnically motivated sexual anxieties. Rather Patton, Yee, and Smith-Christopher are predominantly concerned with examining the prophet's reaction to political power dynamics between the male Judean exiled elite and the conquering nations in chs 16 and 23. My aim is to build on their work, by arguing here, in a volume that is focused on women and exile, that one particular aspect of Ezekiel's experience of emasculation at the hands of enemy men deserves further attention, rather than passing mention. That is the particular sexual anxiety Ezekiel appears to have developed over the ethnic threat to Israelite and Judahite identity posed by potential unions between the women of Samaria and Jerusalem, and invading male forces.

After all, while Ezekiel's experience of exile would clearly have impacted on his sense of masculinity, it would also no doubt have made a significant impact on other aspects of his identity. Separated from his land and his Temple, the Judean priestly prophet's sense of religious, political, and ethnic belonging would have been in turmoil, too. Consequently, Kenton Sparks and Dalit Rom-Shiloni argue that it is precisely because of this trauma that we find such a particular concern in Ezekiel to develop a specific image of Israel's ethnic identity that would come to be echoed in the work of later post-exilic writers.<sup>16</sup> For Sparks, the concern with ethnicity in the exilic parts of Ezekiel is twofold. First, he argues that the prophet was deeply concerned, working from exile, to make an ethnic distinction between his own community in Babylon, and the Judean remnant. Sparks highlights this particular theme in both Ezekiel 11:1–25 and 33:23–24, where the prophet emphasizes the role of the exiled community, those who have been "scattered," as the future Israel, in contrast to those left behind in "the waste places in the land of Israel" (Ezek. 33:24).<sup>17</sup> Alongside this perceived internal ethnic threat coming through in the book of Ezekiel, there was an equally grave concern with the "the cultural threat of assimilation in the Babylonian context" as the "enticement of Mesopotamian economic prosperity during the Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenid periods were considerable."<sup>18</sup> Assimilation was therefore "much more than a passive threat."<sup>19</sup>

Along similar lines, Dalit Rom-Shiloni has argued that "Ezekiel's prophecies demonstrate the post-traumatic reactions of an exile, a refugee."<sup>20</sup> Unlike Sparks,

16 Kenton L. Sparks, *Ethnicity and Identity in Ancient Israel: Prolegomena to the Study of Ethnic Sentiments and Their Expression in the Hebrew Bible* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1998) and Dalit Rom-Shiloni, "Ezekiel as the Voice of the Exiles and Constructor of Exilic Ideology," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 76 (2005): 1–45.

17 Sparks, *Ethnicity and Identity in Ancient Israel*, 289.

18 Sparks, *Ethnicity and Identity in Ancient Israel*, 314 n. 92.

19 Sparks, *Ethnicity and Identity in Ancient Israel*, 314 n. 92.

20 Rom-Shiloni, "Ezekiel as the Voice of the Exiles and Constructor of Exilic Ideology," 4.

who reflects on both the inner and outer boundaries of Ezekiel's ethnic identity building, Rom-Shiloni predominantly focuses on his concern to mark the distinction between Judean remnant and the exile community. In particular Rom-Shiloni observes a contrast between the originary stories presented in Ezekiel 16 and Ezekiel 20, arguing the former was produced to explain the ethnic roots of the Judean exiles, while the latter, in which she discerns more hope, was provided as the history of the exile community. She argues that the focus on the connection between the community left behind in the land and the Canaanites serves to present them as ethnically separate from, and inferior to, those who went into exile. Consequently, for Rom-Shiloni the family metaphor functions as a means of presenting the Judean remnant as utterly and thoroughly corrupt, condemned to death without any hope of restoration.<sup>21</sup> This, she argues, is in direct contrast to the alternative political metaphor provided in Ezekiel 20 in which the prophet demonstrates that "the continuous covenant relationship is guaranteed for the future as well: God is the Exiles' King."<sup>22</sup>

Building on the work of Rom-Shiloni, Katherine Southwood, in her major work on ethnicity in Ezra 9–10, has also concluded that there are some considerable links to be found between ethnic attitudes to foreign "others" both from neighboring nations as well as from those who remained in Judah displayed by Ezekiel, with Ezra's clear desire to delineate ethnically between the "people of the land" and the Golah.<sup>23</sup>

Though my own particular focus here will not be on Ezekiel's inner ethnic anxieties, but rather his outer ethnic concerns, the work of both Sparks and Rom-Shiloni provide important indicators of the major concern the prophet had with constructing and maintaining a particular ethnic identity while in exile. It is precisely through this very specific contextual lens that I wish to analyze Ezekiel's marriage metaphor. In what ways does gender feature in the prophet's expression of his concern over ethnic identity in exile? How did this impact upon his description of women? Do chs 16 and 23 offer any indicators of the place of women in diaspora?

### *From fantasy to reality: Ezekiel imagining female sexuality in exile*

I will begin my argument first by analyzing the metaphorical frame that Ezekiel establishes in his description of the crimes of Jerusalem and Samaria in chs 16 and

21 Rom-Shiloni, "Ezekiel as the Voice of the Exiles and Constructor of Exilic Ideology," 29.

22 Rom-Shiloni, "Ezekiel as the Voice of the Exiles and Constructor of Exilic Ideology," 29.

23 Katherine E. Southwood, *Ethnicity and the Mixed Marriage Crisis in Ezra 9–10: An Anthropological Approach* (Oxford Theological Monographs; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), especially p. 159 n. 64.



23 in order to demonstrate the particular ethnic focus we find in each. In the second section of my analysis, I focus on the points in both texts where the metaphor ruptures and the prophet slips from talking about metaphorical crimes that cross national and ethnic boundaries and their punishment, into managing the behavior of the women left after the catastrophe.

### *The fantasy*

In work that considers the relationship between Ezekiel 16 and Ezekiel 23, the former has predominantly been understood by scholars to be the more religiously focused of the "marriage metaphors."<sup>24</sup> Sharon Moughtin-Mumby, however, in her survey of these metaphors in Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel suggests that "many sharpen the superficial distinctions between Ezekiel 16 and 23", including the tendency to see a focus on cultic, rather than political, crimes in Ezekiel 16, "almost certainly in an attempt to explain why a single prophetic book might include two narratives so similar in character."<sup>25</sup> Analysis of Ezekiel's description of woman Jerusalem in ch. 16, however, will demonstrate that he is as preoccupied with her troubling of political and ethnic boundaries through her relations with her foreign neighbors, as he is with her religious infidelities.<sup>26</sup>

From the very outset, the text belies a concern with the ethnic origins of Jerusalem. Having described Yahweh's commissioning of Ezekiel to alert the city to her "abominations," the deity then commands that the prophet should remind her of her mixed background (Ezek. 16.2-3):

Mortal, make known to Jerusalem her abominations, and say, Thus says the Lord God to Jerusalem: Your origin and your birth were in the land of the Canaanites; your father was an Amorite, and your mother a Hittite.

It seems, then, that part of the "abomination" of Jerusalem is her foreign parentage. This observation is echoed by Marvin Pope who notes that throughout the text, "her aberration [is attributed to] her hereditary defect of character" (cf. Ezek. 16:44-45).<sup>27</sup> Writing on Ezekiel from an entirely different, feminist perspective,

24 Sharon Moughtin-Mumby, *Sexual and Marital Metaphors in Hosea, Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Ezekiel* (Oxford Theological Monographs. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 157.

25 Moughtin-Mumby, *Sexual and Marital Metaphors*, 157. She cites Brownlee's assertion that the two texts must originally have had entirely different subject matter.

26 It is worthwhile noting that while Hosea and Jeremiah give some attention to the issue of political allegiance, this is minimal in comparison to Ezekiel who is interested in "foreignness" in a more thorough and all-encompassing way.

27 M. H. Pope, "Mixed Marriage Metaphor in Ezekiel 16" in *Fortunate the Eyes That See: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman in Celebration of His Seventieth Birthday*,



Julie Galambush also highlights the multiple ways in which the introduction of Jerusalem is of a woman/city who is entirely foreign: “Jerusalem begins her life as excluded, ‘other,’ in terms of her family membership, her national identity, her community status, and her ritual purity.”<sup>28</sup> There is, in vv. 2–4, no real focus on religious crimes, aside from, perhaps, the presentation of the exposed baby as impure because it remains covered in its mother’s blood. Rather, Ezekiel’s expansion on the abnormal “biography” of Yahweh’s wife, which is not present in either Hosea or Jeremiah, betrays a specific focus on the boundaries between the nation of Israel and other nations, which, according to his metaphor, were clearly very permeable in her early years.<sup>29</sup>

Despite her questionable stock, the desolate, abandoned foreign child, Jerusalem, draws the attention of Yahweh. Unwanted by her Amorite and Hittite parents, and apparently left out to die, Yahweh decides to give life to the girl. While this divine action is often understood as an act of compassion, there is nothing in the text to actually help the reader qualify Yahweh’s motives for saving the child. Rather than dwelling on this particular moment in Jerusalem’s life, the text moves at a rapid pace from description of a bloody, naked baby, to the image of the now sexually mature body of a woman who has grown up at Yahweh’s command (Ezek. 16:6–7). Marvin Pope notes, against the work of many other scholars, that between vv. 4–7 Yahweh provides no care for the baby and that God appears to abandon the girl—or at least the story of her childhood—in favor of recounting his sexual interaction with her once she has matured.<sup>30</sup> Linda Day, commenting on the same verses, also notes the “egotistical” element of the presentation of the childhood of Jerusalem, in which she is depicted as a “masterwork” of Yahweh.<sup>31</sup>

This “masterwork” is not completed by the adoption of the child. Rather it is only through Jerusalem’s sexual encounter with God that her identity changes from a desolate foreigner to a desirable Israelite. Yahweh reminisces to Jerusalem that

ed. Astrid B. Beck and David Noel Freedman (Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 1995), 395.

28 Julie Galambush, *Jerusalem in the Book of Ezekiel: The City as Yahweh’s Wife* (SBL Dissertation Series 130; Atlanta, GA: Scholars, 1992), 91.

29 “Biography” is Moshe Greenberg’s terminology—in his commentary he recognizes this as a distinctive feature of Ezekiel’s “marriage metaphor” but does not comment much further on its broader indication of Ezekiel’s concern with national identity boundaries. See Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20* (Anchor Bible, 221 Garden City, NY/London: Doubleday, 1983), 299. He argues that Ezekiel’s “impulse” to include this information was due to his development of theodicy: “by starting from the very origins of the people (Hos. 2: 5 may have suggested this) the effect of the denunciation is heightened.” It seems to me, however, that it is equally in keeping with Ezekiel’s heightened interest in social and ethnic boundaries being ruptured by Exile, not just a concern with “foreign” religious practice.

30 M. H. Pope, “Mixed Marriage Metaphor in Ezekiel 16,” 393.

31 Linda Day, “Rhetoric and Domestic Violence in Ezekiel 16,” *Biblical Interpretation* 8.3 (2000), 209.

the second time he passed by her "you were at the age for love. I spread the edge of my cloak over you (וּאִפְרַשׁ כְּנָפִי עֲלֶיךָ), and covered your nakedness" (Ezek. 16:8). In his commentary on Ezekiel, Moshe Greenberg explains that "covering a woman with a garment expresses acquiring her," citing Ruth 3.9 as a parallel example.<sup>32</sup> In this text Ruth approaches Boaz on the threshing room floor and asks that he might "spread" his "cloak" over her (וּפְרַשׁתְּ כְּנָפְךָ עַל אִמְתְּךָ). Interestingly, the moment that Boaz grants her wish not only marks that Ruth acquires a husband but also a crucial point in her assimilation into the Israelite community.<sup>33</sup> Likewise, in Ezekiel the phrase highlights an occasion on which an Israelite male, through sexual intercourse with a foreign woman, allows her to be incorporated into his ethnic group. In the case of Ezekiel 16.8, it is after this encounter that Yahweh begins to remove the signs of Jerusalem's desolate foreignness and begins her transformation into his queen: "Then I bathed you with water and washed off the blood from you, and anointed you with oil" (Ezek. 16:9).

This cleansing and clothing ritual marks a second stage in the transition of the woman's identity from foreigner to Israelite. While this second element of the transition clearly focuses on the shift of the woman from a state of ritual impurity to purity, with Yahweh washing away Jerusalem's impure blood to allow her to move into a state of appropriate holiness,<sup>34</sup> the notion of cleansing and clothing also comes with different connotations for the transformation of the identity. First, the cleansing of the woman by Yahweh is reminiscent of the regulations for dealing with a captive foreign bride in Deuteronomy 21:10–13, in which washing is not specified, but the warrior is commanded to "bring her home to your house: she shall shave her head, pare her nails, discard her captive's garb."<sup>35</sup> Though the language and the tone of the texts are very different, the process of transformation that Yahweh makes Jerusalem undergo can be read as a glorified version of the process of transformation legislated for in Deuteronomy. In both cases markers of the woman's previous life must be removed in order for her to become Israelite. As Susan Niditch remarks on the captive bride, "The shaved hair, together with cutting of the nails and removal of clothing, are powerful symbols of the transformation

32 Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20*, 277.

33 See K. E. Southwood: "As a result of Naomi's intervention, Ruth is able to remarry; one of the most prominent indicators of assimilation" in "Will Naomi's Nation be Ruth's Nation?: Ethnic Translation as a Metaphor for Ruth's Assimilation within Judah," *Humanities* 3 (2014): 102–31 (p. 117).

34 For further discussion on this particular theme, see Galambush, *Jerusalem in the Book of Ezekiel*, 91–109.

35 "Clothes of captivity" (שְׂמֹלֶת שְׁבִיָּה)—this could mean the clothing she had on when she was captured, or the clothing she had been put into during captivity. It seems more likely to me that it would be the former, given that it is well known that stripping was part of warfare, both, it would seem, as a means of shaming captives, but also as a means of removing markers of their identity.

of the social body”—they remove her from her old life.<sup>36</sup> In many ways, the literal removal of the woman’s blood in Ezekiel functions as an erasure of her family roots, her blood ties.<sup>37</sup> Thus, borrowing Niditch’s language, I argue that in Ezekiel, as in Ruth and in Deuteronomy, “permanent and indelible cultural and ethnic identity is thus understood as male. Women are . . . imagined as gardens for men’s seed and become fully identified as belonging to an ethnic group after belonging to a man and being ‘marked,’ in a sense, by a man of that group.”<sup>38</sup> Clearly, in Ezekiel 16 vv.1–8, as well as Ruth and Deuteronomy, we have examples of what would, for the Israelite males, constitute a “good” ethnic transition, from foreign woman to adored Israelite wife whose beauty and sexuality is harnessed and possessed by her Israelite husband, Yahweh.

Yet, if the ethnic identity of women was so liminal and fluid, as the opening of Ezekiel 16 suggests, female bodies also had the potential to be a source of great anxiety and competition for men, as they function as sites of ethnic contestation between distinct groups of men. Gale Yee also notes that for Ezekiel, in his colonial context, women would function as the “boundary” markers of ethnic identity.<sup>39</sup> It is precisely for this reason that “male-generated laws and customs define with whom and under what circumstance women can have sexual relations.”<sup>40</sup> As Yee writes, “Women become the literal and metaphorical sites where *male* controversies and struggles are played out, in which they have little voice or representation.”<sup>41</sup> The focus on the “conversion” of Jerusalem in Ezekiel 16:1–14, and its emphasis on the liminality of female ethnic identity, not just religious identity, I argue is unique to Ezekiel’s marriage metaphor and I suggest is a product of his own traumatic and liminal location in the aftermath of war and exile.<sup>42</sup>

Overall, then, not only does Ezekiel 16:1–14 serve as a metaphor for God’s election of Jerusalem but it also offers a strong indicator of Ezekiel’s attitudes to women and ethnicity, which will be crucial for our overall understanding of the marriage metaphor. These opening verses of the chapter demonstrate that Ezekiel’s representation of the election of Jerusalem relied on the assumption that female ethnic identity was fluid. While this meant Ezekiel could use the female body in

36 Susan Niditch, *“My Brother Esau Is a Hairy Man”*: Hair and Identity in Ancient Israel (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 130.

37 Interestingly, in preparation for her “seduction” of Boaz, Ruth the Moabite washes and anoints herself.

38 Niditch, *“My Brother Esau Is a Hairy Man”*, 131 on Deuteronomy 21. Clearly this perception seems to differ from those texts that see foreign women, or some groups of foreign women, as to be rejected entirely.

39 Yee, *Poor Banished Children of Eve*, 118.

40 Yee, *Poor Banished Children of Eve*, 118.

41 Yee, *Poor Banished Children of Eve*, 119.

42 Nothing like this kind of issue appears in Hosea or Jeremiah, where, as Galambush has observed, the female personification of Jerusalem “is presented as having no identity other than as Yahweh’s wife,” Galambush, *Jerusalem in the Book of Ezekiel*, 81.

his metaphorical representation of Jerusalem's origins, if the ethnic identity of women was so liminal, it could clearly also function as a source of great anxiety and competition for men.

This anxiety is played out in the following verses, as the beautiful woman Jerusalem begins to abuse the beauty and glory gifted to her by Yahweh on the occasion of their marriage by using them to pursue foreign lovers (vv. 15–22).<sup>43</sup> Initially the sexual dealings that Yahweh describes Jerusalem enjoying with foreign men function very clearly as a metaphor for the people of Jerusalem's cultic and religious failings before the exile. Ezekiel initially equates the crime of "whoring" (זנה) to the building of shrines (v. 16), the making of idols (v. 17), and the giving of food (v. 19), echoing both Hosea (2:5–13) and Jeremiah (2:20, 23–25, 28, 33–34; 3:1–10) quite directly. Interestingly, in the marriage metaphor in each of these books the lovers are unnamed and unknown.

While vv. 15–22 demonstrate a more general concern with Jerusalem taking up religious practice "other" than correct Israelite religious practice, as Zimmerli notes, from v. 26 the text branches out in a new direction.<sup>44</sup> It is this new direction in the description of the crimes of woman Jerusalem that is particular to Ezekiel and might tell us something more about his specific experience of exile. Here the text departs from Hosea and Jeremiah, as Ezekiel develops a sharp focus on the female gaze of Jerusalem as it falls on foreign male bodies: "You played the whore with the Egyptians, your lustful neighbors (יְרֵבֶשֶׁכַּ גְּדֹלֵי בִשָּׂר) multiplying your whoring, to provoke me to anger" (Ezek. 16:26) While Hosea and Jeremiah had, to a certain extent, made a connection between the foreign alliances made by Israel and the metaphor of sexual relationship, Ezekiel, in the words of Moshe Greenberg, "not only adopted this imagery from his predecessors, but spelled out

43 Here we find another intertextual echo that opens up Ezekiel's description of Jerusalem further. In Isa. 3:16–26, the daughters of Zion trust in their own attractions, and ultimately lose their way. Disaster ensuing from vanity is a common theme throughout Ezekiel, where beauty is understood to be a gift from God that is often abused by those upon whom it has been bestowed. It does seem, however, to be gendered within the book, with male trust in beauty being linked to wisdom and pride in Ezek. 28, whereas female trust in beauty is here portrayed very much in terms of sexual lasciviousness and promiscuity. On the matter of this issue of two different, gendered presentation of beauty, note the shared vocabulary between Ezek. 16 and Ezek. 28. For a full treatment of this issue in connection to ideas of nation see John T. Willis, "National Beauty and Yahweh's Glory as a Dialectical Key to Ezekielian Theology," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 34, no. 1 (2012): 1–18. In the context of her feminist critique Mary Shields notes that the beauty of the woman is a direct reflection of the strength and power of God, but she does not see this within the wider presentation of human beauty throughout the book: Mary E. Shields, "Multiple Exposures: Body Rhetoric and Gender Characterization in Ezekiel 16," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 14, no. 1 (1998): 10.

44 Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 344.

the ‘sexual attractiveness’ of the lovers in characteristic vividness.”<sup>45</sup> Although the “sexual attractiveness” of Egypt is emphasized in order to highlight the political appeal the country may have held for Judah, it cannot be denied that the metaphor simultaneously seems to indicate Ezekiel’s assumption that to Judahite women, like Jerusalem, the Egyptians were perceived as desirable, “big-membered neighbors.”<sup>46</sup> Here, then, I argue that yet another layer to Ezekiel’s ethnic anxieties becomes apparent in the prophet’s horror and terror of the hypersexualized and animalistic foreign male “other” who distracts Judahite women away from their husbands. The same focus on female desire for foreign male flesh is apparent, though in a slightly less explicit way, in Ezekiel’s description of Jerusalem’s sexual dealings with the Assyrians and Chaldeans (vv. 26–29). Here, the woman’s desire is understood to be so deep that Jerusalem is willing to behave like a prostitute, acting as if she had no husband, but willing to forgo any payment other than her own pleasure (vv. 30–31).<sup>47</sup> Ezekiel, as a male living in exile, under imperial rule, is highly likely to have felt deeply emasculated and traumatized after the experience of deportation. A by-product of this emasculation appears to be a deep-rooted concern with the greater appeal of his more masculine, more powerful foreign conquerors, and the potential power they had to lure Judahite women away from their husbands, just as the nations of Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon had lured Yahweh’s wife away from him. Given that the prophet clearly understood that women “literally and symbolically designate the ‘porous frontiers’ through which nation, ethnicity, and culture can be penetrated,” it is little wonder he developed such an exaggerated male gaze on female desires.<sup>48</sup>

This reading of Ezekiel 16 is strengthened by next turning to read Ezekiel 23. Here Ezekiel’s marriage metaphor involves not one but two wives of Yahweh, who have been led astray. Samaria and Jerusalem, renamed as the terrible sisters, Oholah and Oholibah, are presented as sexually deviant from the very beginning of the chapter. Unlike ch. 16, there is no honeymoon period for Yahweh and his wives in ch. 23. Rather the chapter opens:

Mortal, there were two women, the daughters of one mother; they played the whore in Egypt; they played the whore in their youth; their breasts were caressed there, and their virgin bosoms were fondled. Oholah was the name of the elder and Oholibah the name of her sister. They became mine, and they bore sons and daughters. As for their names, Oholah is Samaria, and Oholibah is Jerusalem.

Thus, the history of Samaria and Jerusalem is not qualified as a history of the once successful marriage of Yahweh to the cities, but rather a catastrophic failure in

45 Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20*, 299.

46 Galambush, *Jerusalem in the Book of Ezekiel*, 66.

47 Day, “Rhetoric and Domestic Violence in Ezekiel 16,” 211.

48 Yee, *Poor Banished Daughters of Eve*, 118.

which "the Egyptians are the first in a series of male racialized Others who play an erotic role in this national history."<sup>49</sup>

Ezekiel 23.3, then, presents an image of the young—we do not know how young—women having their breasts fondled by the foreign men. Here, as in the description of the Egyptians in ch. 16.26, Ezekiel offers his audience further access to his imaginative perception of the female gaze and female sexual experience. The presentation of this verse, particularly within the wider context of a chapter that portrays female sexuality as insatiable and nymphomaniacal, contains an assumption on the part of the prophet that the women enjoyed this attention from the Egyptians. Fokkeliën van Dijk-Hemmes argues that the text offers a kind of double vision—while in the women's eyes this sexual encounter with Egypt in their youth would likely have amounted to child abuse, Ezekiel seems to view it as a threatening example of the lascivious *enjoyment* the two females derived from their encounters in Egypt.<sup>50</sup> Ezekiel's assumption that the women took pleasure in their sexual encounter with Egyptian men is unquestionable when v. 3 is read alongside v. 21: "Thus you longed for the lewdness of your youth, when the Egyptians fondled your bosom and caressed your young breasts." Clearly, this is partly due to the function of the metaphor, as van Dijk-Hemmes points out:

the imagery of women is indispensable for conveying a message which is a "contradiction in terms": the people are guilty of their own past enslaving in as much as women are, by definition, guilty of their own sexual misfortunes.<sup>51</sup>

Ezekiel's fascination with female desire for sexualized Egyptian bodies reaches its peak later in the chapter, where the prophet describes Oholibah, "remembering the days of her youth, when she played the whore in the land of Egypt and lusted after her paramours there, whose members (בשר המורים) were like those of donkeys, and whose emission was like that of stallions (וורמת סוסים זרמתם)" (Ezek. 23:19–20). Many have argued that this animalistic presentation of the Egyptians' genitalia is intended to both demonize the foreign nation and simultaneously emphasize the absolute depravity of the women's insatiable sexual desires which mirrors the absolute depravity of Judah, and the depth of its political failings.<sup>52</sup> Fokkeliën van

49 Yee, *Poor Banished Children of Eve*, 122.

50 Fokkeliën van Dijk-Hemmes, "The Metaphorization of Woman in Prophetic Speech: An Analysis of Ezekiel XXIII," *Vetus Testamentum* 43, no. 2 (1993): 162–70.

51 van Dijk-Hemmes, "The Metaphorization of Woman in Prophetic Speech," 167.

52 For example, Greenberg, 480: "The oversize genitals of Egyptians figure as well in 16:26 (evidently a commonplace, expressing a popular notion of their lewdness), and are here compared in size and seminal discharge to those of equines, proverbially lascivious, Jer 5:8." See also Galambush, *Jerusalem in the Book of Ezekiel*, 116: "Ezekiel's simile that the Egyptians' penises are 'like those of asses' (v. 20) is sometimes interpreted as denigration of the abnormal lust of the 'foreigners' (see, e.g., Wevers, *Ezekiel*, 136). More likely, the comparison is intended to insult Jerusalem (and may even reflect some jealousy of the Egyptians' endowments) depicting *her* lust as abnormal, even bestial (cf. Lev. 18:23; 20:15–16, which

Dijk-Hemmes, however, points toward another potential layer of meaning that can be discerned in Ezekiel's representation of the Egyptian bodies when she notes that, "Instead of reflecting female desire, it betrays a male obsession."<sup>53</sup>

But what is this male obsession? Both Tracy M. Lemos and Gale Yee have convincingly argued that Ezekiel's perception of the female sexual gaze reflects an internalized male jealousy and fear over the superior masculinity and sexual appeal of conquering nations, which we observed taking root in Ezekiel 16, brought about through the emasculating experience of being conquered and deported. In particular, Lemos provides a wide range of evidence from the ancient Near East that suggests very frequently Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians, and Israelites would use animalistic and sexual imagery to *positively* represent their own virility.<sup>54</sup> Thus, Lemos writes, Ezekiel's explicit description of the well-endowed Egyptians represents the prophet's "acknowledgement of the superior claim to masculinity held by the Egyptians, the Assyrians, and the Babylonians, the handsome foreigners that Jerusalem found so irresistible," while the Israelites, "by their own standards of masculinity . . . were disgraced and emasculated. In the midst of their Babylonian conquerors, they had become 'women.'"<sup>55</sup>

I argue, however, that an important aspect of this emasculation is brought forward through a more direct and literal interpretation of the metaphor. Not only does Ezekiel imagine himself as part of an unfaithful, feminized nation, but it seems entirely possible that the imagery of the unfaithful Israelite or Judahite woman who runs after powerful foreign men would be a source of real and powerful terror for males living in exile, away from their homeland, with their ethnic and national identity in peril and their masculinity in shreds. Given that Ezekiel, more than any other prophet who uses the marriage metaphor, is concerned first with ethnic boundaries as demonstrated above, and second with the sexual prowess and physical and material attractions of his specifically male conquerors, it does not seem beyond reason to read the account of Oholah and Oholibah's sexual encounters with Egyptians, and, as we shall see Assyrians and Chaldeans, as reflecting a genuine fear of the Judean's loss of control over their women's bodies.

Not only are the physical attributes of Ezekiel's foreign enemies portrayed as being sexually appealing but he also, when discussing the women's attraction to Assyria and Babylon, shifts his focus to their strong military appearance and their

prescribes the death penalty for bestiality)." See also Paul M. Joyce, *Ezekiel: A Commentary* (LHBOTS 482; London: T&T Clark, 2007), 162. Lemos provides a discussion of these scholarly tendencies in T. M. Lemos, "The Emasculation of Exile: Hypermasculinity and Feminization in the Book of Ezekiel," in *Interpreting Exile: Displacement and Deportation in Biblical and Modern Contexts*, ed. Brad E. Kelly, Frank Ritzel Ames and Jacob Wright (Society of Biblical Literature. Ancient Israel and Its Literature, 10; Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 379–80.

53 Dijk-Hemmes, "The Metaphorization of Woman in Prophetic Speech," 168.

54 Lemos "The Emasculation of Exile," 377–93.

55 Lemos "The Emasculation of Exile," 389–90.



uniforms. Thus, the war for power between Yahweh and his enemies is managed through the vision and the desires of personified Samaria, Oholah, who "lusted after her lovers the Assyrians, warriors clothed in blue, governors and commanders, all of them handsome men, mounted horsemen" (Ezek. 23:5–7) and Oholibah, Jerusalem, who not only chased after the "handsome young men" of the Assyrian army but also fell for the carved, painted images of the Babylonian soldiers (Ezek. 23:12–15)! In each case the clothing, the attire, and the military prowess of the soldiers is emphasized. In much the same way that Jerusalem's "clothes" were her markers in Ezekiel 16, and it was her adornments that made her dangerously attractive to other nations, here in Ezekiel 23 it is the attire of the men that draw Yahweh's adulterous wives to them. The verb "lust" (√לזג) is found elsewhere only once, in Jeremiah, but is used repeatedly in Ezekiel 23 to describe this particular female desire for the foreign male body (vv. 5, 7, 9, 12, 16, 30). As Zimmerli notes in his commentary, "unlike in 16:15, where the woman's beauty, as a cause of wanton immorality, is mentioned, in ch.23 all emphasis is placed on the description of the lovers and their desirable features."<sup>56</sup> This is echoed by Kamionkowski when she suggests, "Ezekiel 23's innovation is in its preoccupation with the lovers, the other men, and with violence. The text is filled with hypervirility, and is more concerned with the symbols of masculinity than it is with the misconduct of the women."<sup>57</sup> While I agree with the observations of both Zimmerli and Kamionkowski regarding the apparent obsession of Ezekiel with the appeal of foreign male bodies, I cannot accept that this limits the prophet's interest in the crimes of the two personified women as the latter suggests. In fact it seems to me that quite the opposite is the case. Ezekiel's obsession with the foreign male body is the foreign male body precisely as it is viewed through the eyes of the female cities.

To conclude this section, I argue that throughout Ezekiel 16 and Ezekiel 23's metaphorical representations of Jerusalem and Samaria, it is clear that for the prophet the women's bodies were the sites on which the conflict between Yahweh and his foreign neighbors took place. While initially, from the descriptions of the crimes of Jerusalem and Samaria, these women seem simply to be figurative representations of the cities and territory that were being contested, I have argued that the description of their crimes hints toward a very real concern with the sexual lives of women in exile, and the conflict between Ezekiel and his fellow Judahite men, and their Babylonian conquerors. As I will now demonstrate, this is greatly heightened in Ezekiel's description of the wanton wives' punishments in chs 16 and 23. It is in these parts of the chapters that I argue Ezekiel's metaphor slips and in doing so it confirms my hypothesis posited above, that his metaphor rests on a genuine terror of women's desire for, and intercourse with, foreign men. When Yahweh begins to slut-shame his wives for their promiscuous behavior with foreign men by exposing their bodies to sexual abuse and public humiliation, this

56 Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, 484.

57 S. Tamar Kamionkowski, *Gender Reversal and Cosmic Chaos: A Study on the Book of Ezekiel* (JSOTSup, 368; London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 147–8.

mode of divine revenge porn functions not only to send a message to the men of Jerusalem about their political and religious infidelities but also as a warning to women against getting too close to the enemy.

### *The reality*

So far, so metaphorical. The lascivious, promiscuous behavior of Yahweh's city brides, though presented in rather different ways in Ezekiel 16 and 23, has, I have argued, demonstrated the prophet's deep-seated identification of the female body as the site of contestations between males. In this case, the battle being fought between Yahweh and his foreign neighbors over the sexual favor of wives Samaria and Jerusalem has functioned predominantly at a metaphorical level. Nonetheless, it has demonstrated that for this particular prophet, the ethnic and political identity of the cities, and consequently of the people, were equally if not more important than their religious infidelities. When the reader moves to the sections on the punishment of the two cities in chs 16 and 23, it becomes clear that the audience Ezekiel hopes to speak to is not just the males, whom he aims to emasculate into religious and political submission, but in fact, when the metaphor slips, the speech is directed straight at women.

The central strategy for punishing Jerusalem's crimes in Ezekiel 16:36–41 is through shame—this is elicited in the woman through sexual abuse and exposure:

Because your lust was poured out and your nakedness uncovered in your whoring with your lovers . . . I will gather all your lovers, with whom you took pleasure, all those you loved and all those you hated; I will gather them against you from all around, and will uncover your nakedness to them, so that they may see all your nakedness.

Here the punishment for Jerusalem is presented as a of kind “like for like” retaliation— because the woman exposed her naked genitalia to her foreign lovers, Yahweh promises to gather Jerusalem's lovers around her, and uncover her nakedness in front of them (Ezek. 16:36–37). There has been wide debate over how best to interpret the account of stripping in this pericope: some have suggested it reflects a regular form of punishment for adultery in ancient Israel; others have argued against this literal reading by focusing on the literary function of the stripping in the wider scheme of the metaphor.<sup>58</sup> Many scholars have also framed this as part of Ezekiel 16 in their wider reading of chs 16 and 23 as pornography. It is this particular aspect of interpretation that I want to nuance here, as the generic description of Ezekiel 16 and 23 as pornography lacks

58 For a full discussion see Peggy Day, “The Bitch Had It Coming To Her: Rhetoric and Interpretation in Ezekiel 16,” *Biblical Interpretation* 8, no. 3 (2000): 231–54.

accuracy.<sup>59</sup> To uncritically label explicit prophetic texts as pornography is to ignore the complex and wide-ranging debates concerning the definition of pornography and discussion around the extent to which pornography can ever be feminist. In their important work on "porno-prophetics," scholars like T. Drorah Setel,<sup>60</sup> Athalya Brenner,<sup>61</sup> and Fokkeli van Dijk-Hemmes<sup>62</sup> made important progress in developing ethical readings of troubling, sexually explicit content of Hosea, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, in particular. Their work, however, tended to rely on stringent anti-pornography strands of feminism that argued all pornography was necessarily violent and misogynistic. In recent years, however, feminist theory focused on pornography has called into question whether "all pornographic materials subordinate or encourage or even portray violence toward women," with an increasingly strong pro-pornography strand of feminism emerging.<sup>63</sup> Consequently, there has been an increasing concern to complicate the category "pornography" by identifying various "types" or genres within it, which, I argue can be informative for our readings of Ezekiel 16 and 23. Thus, feminist theorists have begun to follow

social science researchers in drawing more fine-grained distinctions within the general category of pornography (i.e., the sexually explicit material whose primary function is to produce sexual arousal in those who view or read them). They often distinguish between 1) violent pornography; 2) non-violent but degrading pornography; and 3) non-violent and non-degrading pornography, since there is some evidence to suggest that some of these materials (e.g., in categories 1 and 2) may be harmful in ways that other material (e.g., category 3) is not.<sup>64</sup>

59 For a similar critique from T. M. Lemos, see "'They Have Become Women': Judean Diaspora and Postcolonial Theories of Gender and Migration," *Social Theory and the Study of Israelite Religion Essays in Retrospect and Prospect*, ed. Saul M Olyan (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), 81–110.

60 T. Drorah Setel, "Prophets and Pornography: Female Sexual Imagery in Hosea," in *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Letty M. Russell (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985), 86–95.

61 Athalya Brenner, "On 'Jeremiah' and the Poetics of (Prophetic?) Pornography," in *On Gendering Texts: Female and Male Voices in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Athalya Brenner and Fokkeli van Dijk-Hemmes (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 178–93; and "Pornoprophetics Revisited: Some Additional Reflections," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 70 (1996): 63–86.

62 van Dijk-Hemmes, "The Metaphorization of Woman in Prophetic Speech," 167.

63 Angela Carter was an early proponent of the possibility of the "moral pornographer," in direct opposition to the strong anti-pornography stance of Dworkin and MacKinnon. See Angela Carter, *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History* (London: Virago, 1979). See also a discussion on the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/pornography-censorship/#RecLibDis>

64 <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/pornography-censorship/#RecLibDis>

One distinct subcategory of “violent pornography” that has been identified in recent years is “revenge pornography,” a “genre” that now proliferates the internet, and which I argue provides an analogy to the sexually explicit imagery found in the book of Ezekiel.<sup>65</sup> The following description of revenge porn is provided on the CPS website:

In April 2015, the Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015 created a new criminal offence of Revenge Pornography, making it a criminal offence to disclose private sexual photographs and films without the consent of an individual who appears in them and with the intent to cause that individual distress. A typical case of revenge pornography would involve an ex-partner uploading an intimate image of the victim to the Internet or sending it to their friends and family. It is carried out with the intention of causing distress, humiliation and embarrassment to the victim.<sup>66</sup>

What is implied by this quotation, but not made explicitly clear, is that the usual aim of revenge porn, as the term suggests, is to punish the victim (most often a woman), for perceived infidelities and promiscuities by exposing their body for ridicule, judgment and shaming.<sup>67</sup> A helpful clarification of the terminology, particularly in view of my aim to bring greater accuracy to the use of terms like “pornography” in interpreting biblical material, is provided by Scott Stroud:

Many revenge porn posters, who submit either pictorial content or subsequent comments, seem upset at the alleged conduct or character of the pictured

65 On Hunter Moore’s site, isanyoneup.com, see Scott R. Stroud, “The Dark Side of the Online Self: A Pragmatist Critique of the Growing Plague of Revenge Porn,” *Journal of Mass Media Ethics* 29, no. 3 (2014): 168–83 and Samantha Bates, “Revenge Porn and Mental Health,” *Feminist Criminology* 12, no. 1 (2017): 22–42 (p. 23). From a report in the *Economist* in 2014: “At least 3,000 porn websites around the world feature the revenge genre, and the number is rising, says John Di Giacomo of Revision Legal, a Michigan based law firm. Women’s charities in Britain and America say more victims are contacting them for help all the time. (Men are occasionally targeted, too.) In Japan the number of cases reported to police more than tripled, to 27,334, between 2008 and 2012.” Anon, “Misery merchants; Revenge porn,” *The Economist* 412.8894 (July 5, 2014): 5051. <http://www.economist.com/news/international/21606307-how-should-online-publication-explicit-images-without-their-subjects-consent-be> Last accessed: 26 February 2016.

66 [http://www.cps.gov.uk/news/latest\\_news/female\\_sentenced\\_for\\_revenge\\_porn/](http://www.cps.gov.uk/news/latest_news/female_sentenced_for_revenge_porn/)

67 There is some discussion over the gendering of revenge porn—see Stroud, “The Dark Side of the Online Self,” 179. There are, however, strong statistics to suggest that overwhelmingly online women are subject to particular abuse, which is often connected to sexual abuse such as rape threats. See [http://www.pewinternet.org/2014/10/22/online-harassment/pi\\_2014-10-22\\_\\_online-harassment-02/](http://www.pewinternet.org/2014/10/22/online-harassment/pi_2014-10-22__online-harassment-02/)

individuals and seek revenge. Many posters assert that a given pictured individual was a cheater or "deserved" the shame that came with his or her nude.<sup>68</sup>

Although scholars such as Robert Carroll and Johanna Stiebert have wanted to suggest that the imagery of the sexual shaming of Jerusalem is akin to the "ravings of a drug-crazed fanatic," which function in Ezekiel's prophecy as a kind of antilanguage or social critique that relies on grotesque and exaggerated imagery, it seems to me that in fact Yahweh's desire to inflict disturbing sexualized punishment on his unfaithful wife is horrifyingly close to the *real* behavior exhibited by a jilted lover in the twentieth or twenty-first century.<sup>69</sup> Indeed, in a study by Samantha Bate on the effects revenge porn has on victims' mental health, she provides a number of first person accounts of the type of abuse a number of women underwent. This chapter is not the place to recount the harrowing details, but the abuse included male ex-partners sharing sexually explicit images with victims' new partners (cf. Ezek. 16:37); sexually explicit images with victims' peers (cf. Ezek. 16:39–41); sexually explicit images of the victim being raped by their ex-partner (cf. Ezek. 16:37).<sup>70</sup> Death threats, rape threats, or the promise of extreme violence often accompany revenge porn.<sup>71</sup> When explaining why the male perpetrators of these crimes committed such acts, Bate concluded that in many this type of behavior was deeply connected with their desire to regain power and control over their victims, not just to punish them.<sup>72</sup> As Helen Lewis puts it in an opinion piece on the rapid rise of revenge pornography online, "This is a form of terrorism . . . What we are witnessing are deliberately outrageous acts, designed to create a spectacle and to instill fear in a target population."<sup>73</sup>

To return now to Ezekiel 16:37, there are clearly some significant differences between revenge pornography described above and the work of the ancient prophet. Perhaps most obviously, the former relies on modern technologies such as digital photography and the internet, while the latter is an ancient literary composition. Furthermore, Yahweh is the rejected lover, while Ezekiel is the one who

68 Scott R. Stroud, "The Dark Side of the Online Self," 168–83.

69 Robert Carroll, "Desire Under the Terebinths: On Pornographic Representation in the Prophets—A Response," in Athalya Brenner, ed., *A Feminist Companion to the Latter Prophets*, *The Feminist Companion to the Bible* 8 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 300 and Johanna Stiebert, *The Construction of Shame in the Hebrew Bible: The Prophetic Contribution* (JSOTSup, 346; London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002).

70 Samantha Bates, "Revenge Porn and Mental Health."

71 For example, "He said he would destroy me," says Annmarie Chiarini, a lecturer from Maryland." Anon, "Misery merchants; Revenge porn," 5051.

72 Samantha Bates, "Revenge Porn and Mental Health," 23.

73 Helen Lewis "Online Abuse, Leaked Nudes and Revenge Porn: This Is Nothing Less than Terrorism against Women," *New Statesman* 143.5226 (2014): 25. <http://www.newstatesman.com/culture/2014/09/online-abuse-leaked-nudes-and-revenge-porn-nothing-less-terrorism-against-women> Last accessed: February 26, 2017.

produces the revenge pornography. Yet this seems fitting of the role of a prophet—it is his job to communicate Yahweh’s experience to his people, so it makes sense that the prophet would be the one who produces revenge porn, rather than the deity! And he creates this particular type of pornographic image, I would argue, for precisely the same reason the revenge porn posters share images today: to respond to feelings of betrayal, emasculation, and anger.

While these differences are significant, there are more fundamental similarities that do commend the comparison. Both rely on highly “visual” strategies of shaming. While modern revenge porn usually involves the exposure of a female’s body either in a photograph or sometimes a video, imagery we see with our eyes, Ezekiel constructs a picture of the exposure of Jerusalem’s body that he expects the reader to “see” in their mind’s eye. Both modern revenge pornography as well as Ezekiel’s imagery serve a punitive and cautionary function. And both types of pornography involve violence, shaming, and retaliation. Thus, in Ezekiel 16:37, when Ezekiel describes how Yahweh will “uncover your nakedness to them, so that they may see all your nakedness,” it is not in order to titillate his audience, but to provide a cautionary image of what happens to the type of wife/nation who chases after “big-membered” foreign lovers. The community were to “look” on the naked body of Israel and take heed from the fate they “saw” through his image-filled prophecy. At one level of the metaphor Ezekiel produces this revenge pornography to shame and humiliate the Judean men who are represented by Jerusalem, and to warn them of the devastating consequences of their religious and political infidelities. It also seems to me that Ezekiel, who as I have already demonstrated is so deeply affected by the potent masculinity of his foreign neighbors and their ability to influence the prototypical Israelite woman, Jerusalem, is surely also building into his work a genuine response to the threat of ethnic disintegration. If women’s bodies are the site on which males stake their ethnic claim, then the rape and revenge porn Yahweh commits against Jerusalem perhaps reflects a tacit acceptance by Ezekiel of the male right to reclaim sexual power over women who leave the community.<sup>74</sup>

Perhaps then, this horrendous fantasy, though not yet a reality, bears some reflection of Ezekiel’s true feelings about the dire crime of Israelite women diluting their ethnic group identity during the exile. I do not, however, want to suggest that this revenge porn found in Ezekiel 16 in any way corresponded to or was derived from legal punishments for adultery—Peggy Day has provided a strong enough rebuttal of that particular theory. I would, however, argue that just as revenge porn is not

74 For an extended discussion on the importance of power, and in particular Yahweh’s power in Ezekiel 16 see Mary E. Shields, “Multiple Exposures,” p.12 n. 27. Shields focuses mainly on the power play she sees taking place between Yahweh and his wife Jerusalem, while I see the central struggle taking place *over* the woman’s body, between Yahweh and his foreign competitors.

current legal punishment for adultery or infidelity, it is clearly a powerful part of the fabric of how women's bodies are policed in contemporary society, with much of this policing being reliant on creating a message of fear for women about how they should behave. Furthermore, I believe that on the basis of the rest of the chapter's focus on the relations between Jerusalem and *foreign* men, Ezekiel's focus is not on infidelity or adultery generally, but on a particular type of adultery, the type involving the blurring of ethnic boundaries that Jerusalem's affairs brought about.

Another helpful description for the behavior that is described within Ezekiel's revenge pornography is slut-shaming. Slut-shaming, or "slut bashing" as Leonora Tanenbaum labels it, involves a particular type of abusive behavior—verbal, physical, psychological—by which women, and also, though to a lesser extent, men, are abused because of their perceived promiscuity.<sup>75</sup> Tanenbaum offers this definition of the term: "Slut-bashing is a particular form of bullying, I argue, because it is verbal harassment conducted repeatedly over time in which a girl is intentionally targeted because she does not adhere to feminine norms."<sup>76</sup> Women can be slut-shamed for any level of perceived sexual deviance, from wearing revealing clothing, to being raped—which is often reframed as a fate the female victim "deserved" because of her sexuality.<sup>77</sup>

Clearly, then, in Ezekiel 16:37 not only do we have an example of revenge porn, but also punitive slut-shaming. Throughout Ezekiel 16, Yahweh repeatedly calls his wife Jerusalem a whore because of her sexual behavior and goes to great effort to embarrass and shame her for her behavior. This clearly reaches its peak in Ezekiel 16:37 when the verbal abuse shifts to physical abuse and Jerusalem is to be stripped in retaliation for her behavior. The use of slut-shaming as a mechanism of punishment continues later in the chapter, in what are perhaps the most disturbing parts of Ezekiel 16's sexual metaphor, vv. 40–41:

I will deliver you into their hands, and they shall throw down your platform and break down your lofty places; they shall strip you of your clothes and take your beautiful objects and leave you naked and bare. They shall bring up a mob against you, and they shall stone you and cut you to pieces with their swords. They shall burn your houses and execute judgements on you in the sight of many women.

What is most intriguing about this pericope is that, in addition to a shift of the perpetrators of the stripping from Yahweh to Jerusalem's lovers (although

75 Revenge pornography, then, would be counted as a type of "slut-shaming." See Leora Tanenbaum, *I Am Not a Slut: Slut-Shaming in the Age of the Internet* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2015).

76 Tanenbaum, *I Am Not a Slut*, 68.

77 Tanenbaum provides a number of different cases of slut-shaming in connection to a wide variety of perceived "crimes" that she has encountered in her research in a variety of settings. Tanenbaum, *I Am Not a Slut*, 63–140.



Yahweh is still ultimately responsible for this), women participants are included in the process of slut-shaming. Mary Shields has commented that “it is suggestive that the woman’s beauty goes forth ‘among the nations’ (v. 14) but that her punishment takes place ‘in the sight of many women’ (v. 41) rather than nations.”<sup>78</sup> I would suggest that this focus on the “sight” of women is intended to invert the lascivious gaze of Jerusalem described earlier in the chapter. Just as she is stripped in retaliation for her own exposure of her body to foreign lovers, so her sexualized gaze that Ezekiel imagined in v. 26 is punished by Jerusalem being subject to *judgmental* female gaze. Interestingly, in modern studies of slut-shaming, women have been found to be more likely to slut-shame other women than men. Indeed, Tanenbaum’s extended study on the use of slut-shaming as a means of social control shows that this was highly prevalent behavior among other women, although men do also “slut-bash.” She writes “although I have found that most slut-bashers in schools are girls, boys also participate.”<sup>79</sup> Likewise, a Demos survey of Twitter UK found that “The study, which specifically monitored the use of the words “slut” and “whore” by UK Twitter users over a three-week period, found 6,500 unique users were targeted by 10,000 explicitly aggressive and misogynistic tweets and in a number of other surveys concerned with sexually abusive language and slut-shaming, it was found that women were as likely, if not more likely to be the perpetrators.”<sup>80</sup>

In vv. 40–41, then, we have divine encouragement for women to participate in the shaming of female bodies, and the policing of female sexuality. Here Ezekiel is calling for the sexual female gaze, that he imagined fell so favorably on his conquerors, to be converted in all women in to a gaze of judgment and horror. Simultaneously, the image of the stripped woman Jerusalem appears to be presented as a kind of cautionary tale, warning women against her particular brand of sexual freedom. We will return to this issue below, in connection to Ezekiel 23:10 and 48.

Before doing so, some further examination of the use of slut-shaming in Ezekiel 16 is warranted, as additional support for reading Ezekiel and Yahweh as using women to slut-shame other women comes through analysis of the repeated mention of other personified cities and nations and their “daughters,” which appear throughout ch. 16. While it is quite usual for women to be personified as cities or spaces, it is unusual, indeed unique, in the marriage metaphor, apart from in Ezekiel, for female cities to be involved in the shaming of one another. In Jeremiah, and in Hosea, the woman’s body is exposed to her foreign lovers as revenge for her sexual infidelity, so in all three we encounter

78 Mary E. Shields, “Multiple Exposures,” p.12 n. 27.

79 Tanenbaum, *I Am Not a Slut*, especially p. 97. See also Elizabeth A. Armstrong, Laura T. Hamilton, and J. Lotus Seeley “‘Good Girls’: Gender, Social Class, and Slut Discourse on Campus,” *Social Psychology Quarterly* 77, no. 2 (2014): 100–22.

80 <https://www.demos.co.uk/press-release/staggering-scale-of-social-media-misogyny-mapped-in-new-demos-study/>

a type of divine revenge porn, but nowhere in the former two is the policing of the female city's or nation's behavior done by other female nations. Initially this metaphorical use of "revenge porn" and "slut-shaming" may seem like another fairly straightforward strategy for demonstrating the absolute thoroughness of Jerusalem's failure in the eyes of Yahweh.<sup>81</sup> By comparing Jerusalem to "her infamously wicked sisters" Sodom and Samaria, it is clear that "Jerusalem is worse than her sisters and must therefore suffer her shame."<sup>82</sup> However, on closer inspection of the verses in which woman Jerusalem is shamed by other female cities, it becomes clear that an unambiguous interpretation of these texts as *metaphor* becomes problematic.

For example, in v. 48 Lord God declares: "As I live, says the Lord God, your sister Sodom and her daughters have not done as you and your daughters have done." This description is unusual, as Zimmerli points out "it is not properly clear why Samaria and Sodom are not mentioned alone, but with their daughters."<sup>83</sup> What does Ezekiel mean by the "daughters" of Samaria and Sodom, then? Given that the Hebrew phrase "son(s) of x" (. . . בְּנֵי), with "x" being a nation, is the usual way to refer to a member or members of a particular nation, for example in v. 26 the Egyptians are in fact "the sons of Egypt," it seems to me that Ezekiel must be describing Samaria or Sodom and her female inhabitants.

The language thus confirms the break in Ezekiel's metaphor suggested by Ezekiel 16.37, indicating that a purely metaphorical reading of this chapter of the prophet's book is not feasible. Instead, it is clear that the prophet, in a number of places, is not only condemning the sexual infidelities of Jerusalem but also the same crimes being committed by her daughters. Jerusalem, and the women of Jerusalem blur into one another, and it seems he is equally worried about the implications Judahite women's sexual conduct has for real ethnic boundaries as he is about the implications of Jerusalem's behavior for the stability of national boundaries. Indeed, I would argue that Ezekiel fully believes the proverb "like mother, like daughter" (Ezek. 16:44) and so sees the "daughters of the city," the women of Jerusalem, as prone to, and punishable for, the same types of infidelities with foreign men, as their mother.

An even clearer picture of divinely encouraged and prophetically supported slut-shaming emerges from Ezekiel 23. The description of Jerusalem's punishment in Ezekiel 23:26 is, in many ways, very similar to the account supplied in Ezekiel 16. The prophet's description slips between the punishment of an actual city through war and plunder and the punishment of Yahweh's wife through being stripped, abused, stoned, and eventually murdered by her lovers (vv. 23–49). Once again, then, it is in the prophet's account of the revenge on the figurative cities that his work fluctuates "between cities and women (real or imaginary)," and in

81 Galambush, *Jerusalem in the Book of Ezekiel*, 106–7.

82 Galambush, *Jerusalem in the Book of Ezekiel*, 107.

83 Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, 350.

particular in the moments in vv. 10 and 48 where Yahweh promises that Oholah and Oholibah will become examples to other women:<sup>84</sup>

Addressing Oholah in v. 10: “Judgement was executed upon her, and she became a byword among women.”

Addressing Oholibah in v. 48: “Thus will I put an end to lewdness in the land, so that all women may take warning and not commit lewdness as you have done.”

Even more so than in ch. 16, here Ezekiel is no longer concerned with setting an example for his male companions through his metaphor, but using it as a way to establish an environment in which women police the behavior of other women and are terrified of the punishment that would await them if they breached the boundaries of their ethnic group. That the figure of the “whore,” Oholah, will be made a “byword,” literally “a name” (v. 10), among women offers an explicit confirmation of the important function slut-shaming has in Ezekiel 23.<sup>85</sup> Interestingly, Greenberg sees this warning as applying to the gentile women of Samaria, rather than to Israelite women, because of Ezekiel’s intention to portray Israel as more corrupt than other nations.<sup>86</sup> So, the women of gentile nations will recognize the thorough depravity of Jerusalem, while Judahite women will not. This does not, however, make good sense in the context of the chapter as a whole which is quite clearly intended to be addressed to Judahites via Ezekiel, nor in the broader context of an account so heavily focused on the behavior of Yahweh’s people. Zimmerli reads this verse in parallel with ch. 16, arguing that here Ezekiel 23 “then takes over from 16:41 the statement that this judgement makes Oholah a subject of women’s gossip,” highlighting the importance of women internalizing and communicating the horror of the judgment that was passed on Jerusalem.<sup>87</sup>

The didactic aim of Ezekiel reaches its pinnacle in v. 48, where it becomes clear that the whole of the marriage metaphor functions in a specific way for a female audience. Here Yahweh reiterates that just as Oholah would become a “byword” among women, so Jerusalem’s fate at the hands of the Babylonians will serve as a warning to other women. Its position at the very conclusion of the chapter seems to indicate its overall importance, as the prophet concludes his work by stating that Jerusalem will be brutally and sexually punished for her desire for foreign men, and that she shall be treated in such a way as to be a warning to women. In one of the few, brief scholarly

84 Robert Carroll, “Whorusalamin: A Tale of Three Cities as Three Sisters,” in *On Reading Prophetic Texts: Gender-Specific and Related Studies in Memory of Fokklien Van Dijk-Hemmes*, ed. Bob Becking and Meindert Dijkstra (BIS 18; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 62–82, esp. p. 71.

85 Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21–37: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Anchor Bible, 22A; London: Yale University Press, 2004), 477.

86 Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21–37*, p. 478.

87 Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, 485.

acknowledgments of Ezekiel's concern with inappropriate ethnic mixing between Israelite and Judahite women and their foreign neighbors in Ezekiel 23, Andrew Mein writes:

The warning to real women is the sting in the tail of an oracle which has up to that point been an allegory of male behavior. But it is clear that women's sexual freedom would pose a threat to the community of exiles. If women were to have sought husbands or lovers outside the community (or, perhaps more plausibly, their fathers were to have married them to outsiders), then it might have proved increasingly difficult to maintain a distinctively Jewish culture and identity.<sup>88</sup>

For me this "sting," however, forms part of a much wider concern with the monitoring of the female body in Ezekiel 16 and 23. Repeatedly we have seen that the prophet was deeply concerned to present the female body as dangerously ethnically porous, as well as to portray the impressive masculinity of foreign men that he imagined through the eyes of Judahite women, and finally also concerned to ensure that women witness the brutal sexual violence that would await them if they chose to cross ethnic boundaries and sleep with the enemy.

It is worth noting here, very briefly, that this anxiety would likely have been shared by numerous Judean men. After all, as T. M. Lemos has briefly observed in her study of the emasculating experience of exile, "Perhaps some Judean women, like the Babylonians, would have seen their conquered husbands as weak and dishonored."<sup>89</sup> It is also equally likely that the women of an exiled community, if given the opportunity, may choose to improve their lot, at least economically and in social standing, by beginning a relationship with a Babylonian man.<sup>90</sup> They could stay with them and maintain respectability among their own kind, but what does respectability mean among a deeply humiliated people? Indeed, documentary evidence does suggest that Ezekiel's worry about the threat of intermarriage on his community's identity was very real, as we now have documentary evidence to suggest that Judean women did indeed marry into the Babylonian community during the sixth century, offering further contextual support for reading Ezekiel 16 and 23 through an ethno-sexual lens.<sup>91</sup> For Lemos, this point is not particularly important, and she seems to mention it in passing in her overall argument concerning the marriage metaphor as an indicator primarily of the damaged masculinity of

88 Andrew Mein, *Ezekiel and the Ethics of Exile* (Oxford Theological Monographs; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 174.

89 Lemos, "They Have Become Women," 101.

90 Lemos, "They Have Become Women," 101.

91 Kathleen Abraham, "West Semitic and Judean Brides in Cuneiform Sources from the Sixth Century BCE: New Evidence from a Marriage Contract from Āl-Yahudu," *Archiv Für Orientforschung* 51 (2005): 198–219. See also T. M. Lemos, *Marriage Gifts and Social Change in Ancient Palestine, 1200 BCE to 200 CE* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 237–44.

Judahite men.<sup>92</sup> I hope, however, to have shown that this issue of the control of the females within their female group is *intimately* tied up with Ezekiel's experience of humiliation and degradation in exile.

### *Conclusion*

Throughout this chapter I have argued that a careful reading of Ezekiel 16 and 23 with an eye to themes of ethnicity and gender suggests that in these texts there is a deeply complex process of meaning making going on that is implicitly and explicitly concerned with constructing a narrative for monitoring the behavior of women in exile. Thus, not only does Ezekiel's metaphor function as a predominantly masculine literary device, made by men, for men, concerning their masculinity, as scholars like Patton, Yee, and Smith-Christopher Lee have argued, but I hope to have demonstrated that it also functions on a second important, historically rooted, register. As much as Ezekiel was concerned about the religious and political dealings of the nation in chs 16 and 23, he was also concerned about women, ethnicity, and Israelite male control over Israelite female bodies. In my interpretation, the reality of Ezekiel 16:41, Ezekiel 23:10, and 48, the "sting in the tail of the metaphor," are not just momentary slips in the overall literary structure. Rather they provide the key to recognizing an entire layer within the chapters that is aimed at controlling female sexuality through revenge porn and slut-shaming, as a response to the perceived ethnic threat posed by the potent appeal of foreign masculinity. Thus I conclude that in Ezekiel 16 and 23 we encounter a multifaceted deployment of the marriage metaphor in ways that speak to a male audience and help to explain their trauma, as well as providing a warning for women against abandoning their community while living during the period of exile.

92 Lemos, "They Have Become Women," 101.