Social Disorder and the Trauma of the Earth Community: Reading Hosea 4:1-3 in Light of Today’s Crises

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When elephants fight, the grass (reeds) gets hurt

ABSTRACT

The world currently faces terrible issues of corruption, conflicts, political instabilities, violence and injustices causing traumatic experiences for humans and nature. Likewise, Hos 4:1-3 offers a link between the corruption of the Israelite society and the wounds of the Earth community. These three verses are generally read as a רִיב genre, in which Yahweh brings a lawsuit against the people of Israel. However, scholars mostly focus on the crimes and fate of humans, and ignore or silence the expression of trauma of the Earth as mourning and its non-human members as languishing. Using the framework of trauma studies, the insights of “Cosmic Covenant” from the book of Murray (1992) and the Earth Bible principles of interconnectedness and voice, this article aims to explore a unique aspect of Hosea’s rhetoric of trauma establishing the relationship between people’s misdeeds and the wounds of the natural world.

KEYWORDS: Trauma; Earth community; Ecological hermeneutics; cosmic covenant: creation reversal; Interconnectedness.

A INTRODUCTION

The world is confronted with critical issues of violence, conflicts, corruption, political instabilities and injustices resulting in traumatic experiences for
humans and nature. Likewise, Hos 4:1-3 offers a link between the failure of the society of Israel and the wounds of the Earth community (earth, humans and non-humans creatures). Trauma studies describe a trauma situation as a state in which the subject is rendered helpless by forces that overwhelm ordinary ways of living. \(^3\) The mourning earth and its dwellers in Hos 4 seem to be in line with this definition.

In Hos 4:1-3, the earth mourns (אׇבַל) while all its inhabitants (כׇּל־יוֺשֵׁב) languish (אֻמְלַל) because of Israel’s break of moral order. When used with human subjects, the root אׇבַל is found in funeral (Joel 1:9), judgment and lament contexts (Isa 19:1-15). In Isa 19:8-10, for instance, the root אׇבַל is paralleled to אָמַל (to mourn); אָנַה (to lament); בושׁ (to be ashamed/confused); דָּכָא (to be crushed, to be oppressed, to be in despair); and אָגוֹמֵר (to be distressed). However, when אׇבַל is used with the subject אֹזְרִים (earth/land), it is paired with יׇשׁ and אֻלְמַל, \(^4\) and carries relations with drying up (Jer 12:4) and withering (Amos 1:2; Joel 1:10-12). \(^5\) All these verbs are typical to the signs of trauma.

It seems that the physical sign of a drought was applied to a psychological or mental condition and to the human rituals connected with it. \(^6\) There is a kind of convergence between the signs of a drought and mourning as it is shown in Ps 102:5: “My heart is stricken and withered (בַּשׁוַי) like grass…” Just as in mourning rituals, the earth fasts or is deprived of water, the green plants wither and dust is everywhere during drought. Here is a situation of weakness intruding nature and undermining its normal way of acting and living.

Therefore, does the use of the verb אׇבַל and its related concepts in Hos 4:1-3 denote a state in which the earth and its members are rendered helpless by forces that overwhelm ordinary ways of living? In other words, can we describe the situation of the earth and its dwellers here in Hos 4:1-3 as traumatic? First, the concepts אׇבַל, אֻמְלַל, and אָסֵפוּ always occur in connection with extremely negative events that severely interfere with an individual’s ability to live a normal life (see Jer 12:4; 1 Sam 6:19; Isa 33:9). Second, Hos 4:1-3 embodies a gradual transition from a physical (concrete) meaning of the root אׇבַל (to dry up) to its application to a mental state of helplessness. \(^7\) In other

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\(^4\) See also Isa 19:8-10; 24:4-7; 33:9; Jer 14:2; Lam 2:8 and Joel 1:10-12.


words, the physical waning of the earth and its inhabitants can be termed as an expression of trauma.

This article explores whether Hosean depiction of the traumatic experience of the Earth community in response to a social dysfunction can be insightful to us today. Using the framework of trauma studies and the Earth Bible principles of interconnectedness and voice, this paper aims to explore a unique rhetoric of trauma in which Hosea establishes an inextricable relationship between human crimes and the wounds of the natural world.

B APPROACHES TO HOSEA 4:1-3

This part contains various approaches to Hos 4:1-3. It offers three categories that are representative, but not comprehensive interpretations. These are מִרְב genre reading, feminist approaches and ecological reading. Both the feminist and ecological readings are covered in the Earth Bible hermeneutics. Thereafter, the section concludes with our approach combining insights of the Earth Bible hermeneutics and trauma studies.

1 Lawsuit or Controversy (רִיב) Genre Approach

These verses are generally read as an example of the מִרְב genre. The Hebrew word מִרְב is read as either a lawsuit or controversy. Those who favour the lawsuit reading see in Hos 4:1-3 the portrait of the prophet playing the role of an accuser in a lawsuit that YHWH initiates against the people of Israel. The use of the same word in 2 Sam 15:2 and Mic 6:1-2 supports this legal reading. A lawsuit refers to a situation where two opposing parties cannot mutually solve their dispute and decide to refer their issues to the courts. According to Hos 4:1-3, God brings a “covenant lawsuit” against his people and uses parts of the Decalogue (Exod 20:13-15 or Deut 5:17-19) to argue the case.

However, those supporting the “controversy” or “quarrel” definition, argue that it is not clear that Hos 4:1-3 is precisely a covenant lawsuit. According to DeRoche, the term “lawsuit” is a modern concept that has no real Hebrew equivalent. He also previously said that the immediate context of Hos 4:1 does not support the legal meaning since Hos 4:1-3 lacks juridical terminology. In the same vein, Eidevall reads מִרְב in Hos 4:1 as portraying

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the metaphorical quarrel or controversy between YHWH and the inhabitants of the land.

In both cases, the idea refers to conflict between two parties. It is obvious that the elements present in the ריב “belong naturally to every sort of quarrel in which one party feels himself to be let down by another.” Therefore, while both interpretations offer important insights of the text, they exclusively focus on the crimes of humans and their prosecution. In this sense, other scholars inaugurated the eco-justice interpretations of the text involving ecological and eco-feminist insights.

2 The Earth Bible Hermeneutics

Loya reads Hos 4:1-3 through the lens of three of the six ecojustice principles of the Earth Bible Project, namely the celebrative voice of Earth and its inhabitants, the principle of interconnectedness and Nature’s intrinsic worth. According to the Earth Bible Project, before reading a text, one has to “recognize Earth as a subject in the text with which we seek to relate empathetically rather than as a topic to be analysed rationally.”

In this sense, Loya praises Earth for her active role in the text. YHWH brings the ריב against Israel, and Earth is the agent through which this judgment is executed in Hos 4:1-3. Likewise, eco-feminists praise Hosea 4 for its earthly perspective. They read Hosea in comparison with the putative Canaanite fertility religion that does not devalue but gives sacral relevance to the body, sexuality and nature.

In a different perspective, Wittenberg focuses on the relationship between justice and order as background of Hos 4:1-3. Hosea teaches that ignoring the law of Yahweh in the scramble for power and wealth damages the harmony of Israelite society and inevitably leads to disaster. For him, the message of Hos 4:1-3 about the relationship between human misdeeds and

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13 Kirsten Nielsen, *Yahweh as Prosecutor and Judge: An Investigation of the Prophetic Lawsuit (Rib-Pattern)*, JSOTSup 9 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1978), 25.
17 Loya, “Therefore the Earth Mourns,” 53.

cosmic disaster gives a surprising vision for a theological response to climate change.20 This article lines up with this interpretation but extends it with insights from trauma studies.

3  Ecological Framework and Trauma Theory

This article combines insights from ecological hermeneutics and trauma studies as a theoretical framework of the analysis of Hos 4:1-3.

3a  Ecological Framework

This article links up with Murray’s insights on the “Cosmic Covenant” on one side, and the works of the Earth Bible project on the other. However, contrary to the Earth Bible Project, the word Earth is not capitalised throughout the article. It only viewed as a victim alongside human and non-human members of the Earth Community.

(i) Cosmic covenant (Murray 1992)

Murray insightfully revealed that the text of Hos 4:1-3, the rib genre, is a true portrait of a broken covenant that God imposed on cosmic elements at creation.21 Murray questions why churches and theologians are anthropocentric, solely focusing on the Mosaic-Davidic covenants and ignore the all-embracing covenant: the cosmic covenant, the created order.22

This covenant or wisdom was established (יתן) at/in creation to govern the created order as stipulated in Prov 8:22-31. According to this text, God possessed wisdom as an attribute or faculty that he used to order elements of creation.23 In this sense, at the end of his works, God looked at “the order he has made” and declared that it was very good (Gen 1:31). For Schmid, just as the Egyptian Maat, this order is maintained by the observance of justice upon the earth.24

In this way, when this order is broken in Gen 6-8, God renewed and decreed it will be an eternal covenant (ברית עולם) to govern relationships in the cosmos, nature and society (Gen 9:1-7). Therefore, wherever humans do justice

in the socio-political spheres, those actions promote the proper integration of social and cosmic orders. The contrary results in adverse consequences against the entire creation just as is the case in Hos 4:1-3.

(ii) The Earth Bible Project’s Insights

This article also agrees with the work of Loya in the Earth Bible series, but focuses on the Earth community as a whole rather than praising Earth against human beings. In conjunction with the hermeneutics of suspicion and retrieval, this article makes use of the principle of interconnectedness and voice, two of six eco-justice principles of the Earth Bible Project to unlock ecological wisdom from Hos 4:1-3.

The element of suspicion involves that the reader suspects that biblical texts, written by humans and written for human readers, reflect primarily the interest of humans. The new ecological awareness suspects then this anthropocentric habit of the author and interpreters of the text.

By hermeneutics of retrieval or trust, this study involves features that can enable the recovery of ecological insights from the text. In this sense, the author is guided by the Earth Bible principle of interconnectedness suggesting that “Earth is a community of interconnected living things that are mutually dependent on each other for life and survival.”

In addition, the analysis makes use of the principle of voice entailing that “Earth is a subject capable of raising its voice in celebration and against injustice.” In this article, this ecological awareness is combined with insights from trauma studies since the aim is to read the dysfunction in the natural word as an expression of trauma.

3b Insights from Trauma Studies

In addition to ecological insights, this article specifically analyses the text through the eyes of trauma. The presentation of Hos 4:1-3 is clearly dominated by the rhetoric of accusations (רִיב-genre) embedded with expressions of lament and mourning. Nissinen argues that an original “summon to lamentation” text of Hos 4:1-3 was altered into a lawsuit/quarrel genre during the process of redaction. Lament and mourning are both emotional expressions of trauma.

28 The Earth Bible Team, “Guiding Ecojustice,” 43.
In fact, trauma does not mean only suffering, but an overwhelming threat that can leave long-lasting, harmful, psychological effects or destroy social bonds or group identity. In this sense, a traumatic experience often resists integration into the narrative of a community/individual. Thus it is expressed through lament/mourning as it appears in the book of Lamentations. The victim is unable to make sense out of the experience within the normal sets of his or her life story. This means that trauma exists as a force that remains outside the normal story of life and is unable to be coherently understood or articulated.

In Hos 4:1-3, the victim includes the earth, humans and non-human members mourning and lamenting as result of ethical corruption and violent actions among the people of Israel upon the land. Commenting on the text, DeRoche speaks of Hos 4:1-3 as a “reversal of the creation” implying a non-integrated event undermining the ordinary way of acting of the cosmos as planned in Gen 1:1-2:4a. This argument is emphasised by historical clues of the book of Hosea.

3c Traumatic Historical Clues of Hosea 4:1-3

The existing debates about the authorship and date of Hos 4:1-3 centre on v. 3 which is seen either as originating with Hosea or as a later addition. While Sellin considers Hos 4:3a as a Hosean passage but attributes Hos 4:3b to late pre-exilic/exilic material expressing a vision of judgment, Jeremias claims that the whole v. 3 is a Judean addition. Others argue that the whole Hos 4:3 is an exilic reflection of the wound of the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem in 597 BCE.

However, in accordance with Hayes, we notice that there is an internal logic in a unified unit (Hos 4:1-3) in which the effects of the crimes introduced

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33 The reoccurrence of the word אֶֽרֶץ (earth) in v. 1a and in v. 3 reinforces the link between the actors, those “who dwell in the land” (the people of Israel), and the respondents “all who dwell in it” which refers to the Israelites and to all other living creatures as well.
34 DeRoche, “Reversal of Creation,” 403.
35 Ernst Sellin, Das Zwölfprophetenbuch (Leipzig: Diechertsche, 1929), 1:52.
36 Joachim Jeremias, Der Prophet Hosea (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983), 60.
37 Hayes, Earth Mourns, 40.
by עלכן (Hos 4:3) follows the indictment, introduced by כי (Hos 4:1-2).\(^{38}\) This shows that v. 3 is an integral part of the theological thrust of Hos 4:1-3 and cannot be excluded from the rest. It is, thus, advised to read Hos 4:1-3 as part of Hosean material that emerged in a socio-cultural and historical situation leading up to the defeat of Israel (722 BCE) by the Assyrian empire.\(^{39}\)

This was a period of uncertainty and upheaval in the Northern Kingdom. The mourning of the land and the languishing of all her inhabitants in Hos 4:3 as a reaction to the crimes of Israel could fit well with both political and social trauma of the nation during the period prior to the fall of Samaria and the physical effects of the invasion.\(^{40}\) The warning of Hos 1:4 on “bloodshed in the valley of Jezreel” by Jehu (see also 2 Kgs 9-10) would confirm this historical context.

The expression ‘bloodshed strikes against bloodshed’ in Hos 4:2b refers thus to internal problems portraying Israel as a decaying society prior to the defeat of 722 BCE.\(^{41}\) The expression is a kind of a culmination of the list of Israel’s anarchy typifying extreme randomness in Israel. In this way, the expression “all who dwell in it languish” in Hos 4:3 suggests that both human and non-human members are shocked, wounded and overwhelmed by the situation.

The experience of trauma may lie at the heart of Hosea’s prophecy of the mourning, languishing and perishing of the earth community in Hos 4:1-3. The word “trauma” derives from a Greek term meaning “wound,” and refers to events that pose an extreme threat and overwhelm ordinary means of coping.\(^{42}\) Various features of the words and actions of Hosea may be understood as indicative of the prophet’s own experience of the trauma/wounds of his historical time, with its realities of corruption, injustice, crime and uncertainty culminating in the massive onslaught of the Assyrian empire in 722 BCE.

C TEXT AND TRANSLATION OF HOSEA 4:1-3

1 The Masoretic Text

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\text{שֶׁמֶשׁ בַּכְּרֵיָהוֹת}
\text{כּו בְּעַד לֵיהוֹת}
\text{עִם יִשְׂרָאֵל}
\text{כּו אַרְאֶהָ אֲנִי יָרְדֵּנָה}
\text{אֱלֹהִים אֲנִי יָרְדֵּנָה}
\]

\(^{41}\) Hayes, *Earth Mourns*, 49.
2 Translation

This translation is based on the NRSV (1989) with some changes deriving from our reading of the textual problems of the MT.

1 Hear the word of the LORD, O people of Israel; For the LORD has a dispute with the inhabitants of the land. There is no faithfulness or loyalty, and no knowledge of God in the land.

2 Swearing, lying, and murder, and stealing and adultery break out (upon the land); bloodshed follows bloodshed.

3 Therefore the land mourns, and all who live in it languish; together with the wild animals and the birds of the air, and even the fish of the sea are perishing.

D THE LITERARY STRUCTURE OF HOSEA 4:1-3

This unit clearly starts a new section contrasting with the marriage metaphor of Hos 1-3 in which YHWH speaks only to an individual (Hosea), while in Hos 4:1-3, the focus shifts to all Israel. Through these verses, God brings arib against the people of Israel. The structure of the unit is plainly displayed: vv. 1-3 accuse Israel of certain crimes (attitudes/actions), and v. 3 points out the mourning and languishing of the earth community as result of those criminal behaviours.46

43 LXX adds here the expression ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς (upon the land), which is בָאׇרֶץ in Hebrew. It was omitted through haplography by confusing its sound with the verb פׇּרׇצוּ. Although the difference is minor with the MT, the addition of the expression “upon the land” reinforces the central role of the land in the passage. LXX had probably been attracted by the occurrence of the word in Hos 4:1. Still the MT is preferred as lectio brevior assuming the LXX addition.

44 Contrary to Hayes, Earth Mourns, 38, interpreting in future all the verbs in v. 3, this article is in line with David N. Freedman, Hosea (Garden City: Doubleday, 1980), 330, and Jeremias, Hosea, 59, viewing this verse as immediate results of social disorder.

45 In accordance with Hayes, Earth Mourns, 38, the preposition ב should not be read as stating accompaniment of the preceding expression “all who live in it” but parts of its content (humans and non-humans languish).

46 Hayes, Earth Mourns, 39.
In this sense, Wolff and Jeremias view Hos 4:1-3 as a heading or thematic introduction of both the following unit (the reproach of the priests, Hos 4:4-10) and the second part of the book (Hos 4-11) furthering the failings and offenses of Hos 4:1-2. Still, because of its distinctive genre, Hos 4:1-3 can also be apprehended as a separate unit.

E ECOLOGICAL AND TRAUMA RETRIEVAL OF HOSEA 4:1-3

1 The Corruption of the Human Society

1a רִיב with the Inhabitants of the Land

The expression “the inhabitants of the land” in Hos 4:1 refers to humans (people of Israel) with whom YHWH has a ḥabaštah because of their fail- ures and crimes on earth. The preposition (therefore or for this reason) in Hos 4:3 shows the link between human crimes that are pointed out by YHWH (Hos 4:1-2) and the mourning of the earth and all its members (Hos 4:3). Here is a language of trauma where the victims are overwhelmed by external forces crushing their normal way of living.

The basic mourning pattern of action-reaction is also highlighted: כל who dwell in it (v. 3) traumatically react to the attitudes/crimes of inhabitants of the land (the inhabitants of the land) causing the bleeding of the earth (v. 2). While the last Hebrew expression refers to the people of Israel, the first includes not only non-human creatures (animals, birds and fish, v. 3b) but also the Israelites themselves, whose crimes will bring them harm.

By causing the reversal of creation through their crimes/attitudes as described in Hos 4:3, human beings should no longer expect to live normally upon the earth. In the OT, justice, politics and nature are interrelated as part of one comprehensive creation order. That is why after the breach of the Eden covenant, God decreed that the land will yield “thorns and thistles” (Gen 3:17-19). In other words, instead of being friendly and yielding abundant fruit, the land will be a subject of frustration and trauma for humans. This agrees with the Earth Bible principle of interconnectedness.

47 Wolff, Hosea, 65.
48 Jeremias, Hosea, 59.
49 This position was pioneered by Edwin M. Good, “The Composition of Hosea,” SEÅ 31 (1966): 53, arguing that Hos 4:1-3 is a genuine Hosean oracle that was arranged by the editor to serve as an introduction to the rest of ch. 4 and perhaps the rest of the book.
50 The word ṭab is understood in this article as “dispute” or “quarrel” (see DeRoche, “Yahweh’s Rib,” 570.
51 The material of LXX adds (upon the earth/land) on v. 2b.
52 Hayes, Earth Mourns, 41.
Therefore, the rib of YHWH includes the crimes of Israel and their consequences upon the earth.

1b The Absence of אֱמֶת and חֶסֶד

These two Hebrew words embody the ethical norms that maintain a society. The word אֱמֶת is often translated by truth in connection with the word אׇמַן. However, the meaning “to be true” entails the notion of stability, reliability, durability and faithfulness since truth is something that is constant and unchangeable. In this sense, all the occurrences of אֱמֶת refer to something on which one can rely or which will prove to be true in future (see Jos 2:12; Prov 11:28).

Therefore, when they are paired (אֱמֶת וְחֶסֶד), the first, אֱמֶת, emphasises the permanence, certainty and lasting validity of the second חֶסֶד (Josh 2:14; Prov 3:3; 14:22; 16:6; 20:28). This enduring quality of חֶסֶד is deplored in Hos 6:4 accusing Ephraim that his “חסד is like a morning cloud, like the dew that goes away early.” In this sense, when אֱמֶת is paired with חֶסֶד or שׇלְם it refers to a good deed/kindness on which one can rely (Gen 24:29; Jos 2:14) or a sure peace which is desired and promised in future (Esth 9:30).

In this sense, the expression אֱמֶת וְחֶֽסֶד (there is no reliability or trustworthiness) is coupled with אֱמֶת וְחֶֽסֶד (and no loyalty/kindness) to give an impression of a society of randomness that is likely to cause trauma. These two Hebrew words (אֱמֶת וְחֶֽסֶד) occur in Ps 85:11 (MT) as qualities of a restored land:

חֶֽסֶד וְאֱמֶ֥ת נִפְגָּ֑שׁוּ צֶ֖דֶק וְשָׁל֣וֹם

Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other.

The image of חֶֽסֶד וְאֱמֶ֥ת meeting and שָׁל֣וֹם kissing each other depicts an ideal society in which life is possible. The couple אֱמֶת and חֶֽסֶד in Hos 4:2 can be viewed as part of social norms that function to preserve and promote life. Their absence means a chaotic and anarchic society as listed in Hos 4:1-2.

54 This is why the word אֱמֶת is always presented as auxiliary to אׇמַן in many theological dictionaries. See Alfred Jepsen, "אׇמַן; אָמֵן; אֱמוּנׇה; אֱמֶת," TDOT 1:292-323.
55 Jeremias, Hosea, 60.
56 In the LXX, which is the text followed by many translations, including the NRSV, it is Ps 84:10.
57 Wittenberg, “Knowledge of God,” 500.
The expression דעת אלהים occurs twice in Hosea, namely Hos 4:1 and 6:6. In both cases, YHWH deplores cultic and ethical attitudes of his people. In this sense, the opposite of ידיע (to know), the verb שכנ “to forget” the knowledge of Yahweh is the main reason for the indictment against the priests in Hos 4:6.

Therefore, while דעת אלהים is paralleled with חסד in Hos 6:6, in Hos 4:1, the charge of אין דעת אלהים (there is no God’s knowledge) is a synonym of the lack of אמה and חסד. The knowledge of God which is here declared missing in Israel is thus not esoteric, but pragmatic, reflected in attitudes and actions toward others.

Wolff argues that the expression דעת אלהים in Hos 4:1 does not refer to another sphere in addition to the ethics of אמה and חסד, but that what makes them possible in Israel. It should be known that the ethic of אמה and חסד is not limited only to human sphere, but includes nature as well. This is visible in many biblical texts teaching a positive relationship with the natural world. The charge that there is no knowledge of God in the land means that Israel has forgotten that both humans and nature are part of God’s order that has to be maintained by the observance of אמה and חסד.

Swearing, Lying, Stealing and Adultery

All these ethical crimes (lying or swearing falsely, stealing and adultery) point to a lack of reliability and compassion for the neighbour. Their presence is synonym of a failing society. The verb פרץ with its connotation of sudden incursion, the breaking of barriers, and poor growth, increases the impression of a society that has ceded its common life to random behaviours.

The crimes of “cursing, killing, stealing, and adultery” are identical with those used in the prohibitions of the Decalogue, namely Exod 20:13-15. All these crimes weaken the society and pollute the earth. The book of Leviticus clearly includes adultery and corruption among acts causing the pollution of the

58 Wolff, Hosea, 182.
59 Wittenberg identifies three dimensions of God’s knowledge: forgetting YHWH in favour of Baal; forgetting where the gifts of the land come from; and forgetting the Torah of YHWH. In my view, all the three dimension can be summarised by the first dimension: forgetting YHWH in favour of Baal (Wittenberg, “Knowledge of God,” 5494-501).
60 Wolff, Hosea, 67.
61 Hayes, Earth Mourns, 49.
62 Scholars are divided on whether Hosea drew on the traditions of the Decalogue or the written text itself since it is not sure that the Decalogue in its current form was available by the composition of the book of Hosea. For further details, see J. Andrew Dearman, The Book of Hosea (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 150.

earth (Lev 18:24-30). Hosea claims that Israel did not have the moral resources to withstand the Assyrian onslaught.

The conclusion is that the lack of אמת and חסד which are presumed inActs 18:16 leads to total dysfunctions illustrated by the breaking out (פרץ) of cursing, lying, murder, stealing and adultery upon the earth (Hos 4:2). The verb פרץ usually refers to destructive actions such as the breaking into a house, the bursting out of water and breach of defence works. Hosea 4:2 gives a picture of a society in total disorder with all community relationships disrupted.

1e Bloodshed Strikes against Bloodshed

The expression "דם בדם נגע" (bloodshed strikes against bloodshed) culminates the social disorder in Israel. The various senses of the verb "גע" (to touch, reach, strike) entails

that not only does blood “touch” or “reach” bloodshed, implying that it is everywhere, but bloodshed “strikes” bloodshed, illustrating the way violence breeds violence and heightening the sense of Israel as a war zone.

The image of דמים not only suggests the lack of respect to the neighbour, but also precludes another theme in the tradition of Israel: the pollution of the earth or the defilement of the land as stipulated in the Holiness Code in Leviticus. The pollution of the earth is expressed by the roots טמא (to be unclean, Lev 18:25), and חנף (to be polluted, Isa 24:5; Jer 3:1) as well as the expression הארץ והארץ (the earth vomits).

Likewise, human bloodshed is regarded as a fundamental act of defilement of the earth in the book of Num 35:33a declaring:

You shall not pollute/defile the earth (אֶת־הָאָרֶץ וְלֹא־תַחֲנִיפוּ) in which you live, for blood (הַדָּם) pollutes/defiles the earth (יַחֲנִיף אֶת־הָאָרֶץ).

The sanction of bloodshed crime is given in the story of Cain and Abel. Not only Cain (humans) was cursed from the ground upon which Abel was

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63 See also Deut 24:1-4.
64 Wittenberg, “Knowledge of God,” 503.
66 Hayes, *Earth Mourns*, 49.
killed, but also the earth became “infertile” (Gen 4:11-12). It is as if the blood of Abel weakened the fertility potential of the earth. That is why, after the flood, God prohibits the shedding of human blood (Gen 9:5-6). Furthermore, letting the dead corpse hang on the ground pollutes the land according to Num 35:31-34.

The summation of bloodshed and other crimes (lying, stealing and adultery) cause the land to mourn; a mourning termed in the same Hebrew word that means to become dry or wither (אָבַל). The LXX’s gloss on Hos 4:2 clearly establishes a link between the crimes of Israel, blood, and the trauma of the earth:

ἀρὰ καὶ ψεῦδος καὶ φόνος καὶ κλοπή καὶ μοιχεία ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς καὶ
αἷματα ἐφ᾽ αἷμασιν μίσγουσιν
Curse and falsehood and murder and theft and adultery have been poured upon the earth, and blood deeds mix with bloody deeds.

The following section is devoted to read the mourning of the earth as an expression of trauma.

2 The Traumatic Response of the Earth

2a Present/Future Trauma of the Earth Community!

Scholarly interpretations of Hos 4:1-3 diverge about whether v. 3 describes a present distress/trauma in the natural order because of Israel’s ethical failure or whether the distress/trauma is God’s future judgment over Israel. Literary evidences in other earth mourning texts would support the second option.

However, contrary to its pairs in which the mourning of the earth is presented as God’s judgment, in Hos 4 the situation is quite different. The use of the preposition לע-כן rather than לעכן in Hos 4:3 is insightful. Although both can be translated by “therefore,” לעכן generally introduces the necessary result of an action, usually in the present. The syntax of the imperfect of Hos 4:3 (תֶּאֱבַל) is similar to that of Gen 32:33 (שָלֵא רָעָה):

עַל־כֵּן לֹא־יֹאכְלֲֻךָ בְנֵֽי־יִשְׂרָאֵ֜ל,
therefore, the Israelites do not eat … (Gen 32:33).

עַל־כֵּ֡ן׀תֶּאֱבַ֣ל הָאָ֗רֶץ,
therefore, the earth mourns … (Hos 4:3).

69 Frymer-Kensky, “Pollution,” 408.
71 Wolff, Hosea, 65.
72 Hayes, Earth Mourns, 45.
In this sense, Hos 4:1-3 differs from Amos 1:2 in which the drought of the land is caused by the roar of YHWH. What stands out in Hos 4 is the implication that ארץ is inseparably linked with the quality of Israel’s life upon the land.73 That is why, in addition to the Hebrew text that has the word ארץ only in vv. 1 and 3, the LXX also adds the ארץ in v. 2 of Hos 4:1-3, a variant underlining the link between human actions and the fate of the earth. The land that was given by God to Israel for life was never intended to sustain this mockery over which the earth mourns. The charge of YHWH against Israel seems to include not only their crimes, but also the damage/trauma their attitudes and acts have brought upon the earth.

2b The Earth Mourns

Traumatic events are viewed as dangerous to self or others, and overwhelm the victim’s ability to respond adequately.74 In this sense, the earth mourns as response to human crimes upon it. The earth’s mourning is conveyed by the verb אבל (Hos 4:3). אבל means “to mourn” when used with human subjects (Joel 1:9; Jer 14:2), while the situation is complex when it is paired with ארץ. In a number of prophetic texts where אבל occurs, it bears association with “drying up”75 and is coupled with other related verbs. In Amos 1:2 and Joel 1:10, for instance, אבל is paired with יבש (to wither) to suggest drought.

It seems that drought is the physical background of the psychological meaning of אבל as “to mourn” when paired with human subjects.76 The drying up of the earth is a kind of traumatic earthly way of reacting to an overwhelming situation. O’Connor77 argues that victims of a traumatic disaster “cannot absorb, understand, or grasp violence as it is happening because traumatic violence overwhelms the senses.” Thus, the earth dries up or mourns.

The drought makes the earth to act in an abnormal way: the mourning of the earth is synonymous of “stripping” or “being naked,” which has the connotations of a shameful state of the earth (Hos 2:12-14). Trauma victims experience the sense of “shame,” being out of control, devastated, defeated and helplessness.78 According to Hos 2:12-14, the external signs of the earth’s pollution is to wither, a state of joylessness or mourning: the land becomes like a desert, naked and unable to support life.

78 Schiraldi, Post-Traumatic, 394.
According to Smith-Christopher, a disaster is traumatic “only when events exceed the ability of the group to cope, to redefine and reconstruct their world.”79 The earth’s mourning situation in Hos 4:3 is actually the visible sign of the inability of the earth to function in a normal way due to awful human actions and attitudes upon it.

The earth’s mourning in Hos 4:3 can also be termed as the loss of the normal way of speaking. Trauma studies argue that traumatic events are not only absorbed, but also destroy the victim’s language. Chaney says that trauma is “wound in a language,” “the unspeakable” that language sometimes fails to express.80 Most victims of war and rape in the East of the Democratic Republic of the Congo were mourning, lamenting, crying and accounting cliché’s, such as “it was beyond words.”81

The earth mourning (אֶרֶץ) in Hos 4:3 is a traumatic way of voicing the “unspeakable” since mourning, screaming or groaning is typical of a pre-language state disconnected from traditional ways of speaking.82 The physical meaning of אֶרֶץ as “to dry up” expresses the earth’s inability to cope with an overwhelming external force. The mourning earth is in accordance with the Earth Bible principle of voice.

All its Inhabitants Languish (אֹמְלַל)

Here in Hos 4:3, the verb אֹמְלַל (languish) is paired with אבל in order to account a vast sorrow affecting all elements of creation, including humans, animals, birds and fish. In other words, the verse raises the image of a severe drought, through which אֶרֶץ becomes dry, and humans, animals, birds and fish weaken and die. The expression כל־יוֹשֵׁב (all its inhabitants) connotes that all the living beings are wounded. אבל and אֹמְלַל imply the cessation, or decrease of the normal life, entailing a breaking off of natural productivity and growth.83

The physical meaning of the root אֹמְל means “to waste away or to be weak” in the sense of losing fertility and life-bearing potential (Isa 16:8; 1 Sam 2:5; Jer 15:9). In the context of Hos 4, it may even entail a declining of fauna population. In this sense, the verb אֹמְל is often paired with אבל in mourn-

81  Kambale Sikiryamuva (38 years old), interviewed in Butembo on 23 May 2016.
83  Hayes, Earth Mourn, 45.
ing and lament contexts in which the weakening or declining sense is metaphorically widened to include a psychological meaning. To be weak or waste away is typical of a traumatised person.

Therefore, there is insightful trauma parallelism between the “dryness (יבשׁ) of the Nile River” in Isa 19:5-10 and the languishing or weakening of humans. The verb אֻמְלָלוּ is paralleled with بلا (to mourn), ייבשׁ (to be ashamed or confused) and אגמי נפשׁ (to be sad). Likewise, the languishing of the earth community in Hos 4:2 implies a kind of depression in the natural world. The Cambridge Dictionary defines the verb to languish as “to exist in an unpleasant or unwanted, and overwhelming situation often for a long time.”

2d Fish Perish (יֵאׇסֵפוּ)

The verb יֵאׇסֵפוּ is used in the last part of v. 3 regarding the trauma of fish: they are perishing. The verb יֵאׇסֵפוּ means “to be gathered or harvested.” The verb occurs in pual (an intensive passive form) to suggest not only the severity of the action, but that the victims are overwhelmed by an external force. The pual יֵאׇסֵפוּ brings out agricultural aspects of a drought.

While crops are normally harvested at the end of a season, in Hosea the verb יֵאׇסֵפוּ refers to an abnormal harvest which is caused by drought (אבל). The verb יֵאׇסֵפוּ evokes the removal of all that the earth produces and all that covers and beautifies the earth. The earth experiences failure, bareness and shame because of human crimes, a result of the lack of knowledge of God that sustains the maintenance of אֶמֶת and חֶסֶד.

Through drought, the land returns to its pre-creation state of waste and void, incapable of sustaining any form of life.

2e Trauma as the Reversal of Creation

The words associated with the mourning of the earth, the languishing of all its inhabitants and the perishing of fish in Hos 4:3 convey not only a great drought, but the faltering of all creation. Humans and non-human members suggest the totality of the living beings. Hosea 4:3 recalls all the living beings of the two creation accounts (Gen 1-2). Although, the Priestly and Yahwist cre-

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84 Hayes, *Earth Mourns*, 43.
86 Hayes, *Earth Mourns*, 44.
ation stories postdate Hos 4:3, the three categories of animals (land animals, birds and fish) recall the traditional phraseology used in creation texts.88

Just as in Gen 6 where creation is undone by the flood, Hos 4:3 and later Zeph 1:2-3 portray de-creation by drought. In fact, both flood (wet chaos)89 and drought (dry chaos)90 portray the return to a pre-creation state in the HB.91 The pairing of אֶרֶץ with the verb שׇׁחׇת (to be ruined, spoiled and corrupted) in Gen 6:11 recalls the defilement theme of Hos 4:2 in which אֶרֶץ is spoiled by violence, especially bloodshed.

However, while in Gen 6 God unleashes the flood to destroy אֶרֶץ, human acts and attitudes de-create the earth in Hos 4:3: they cause the drought of the earth as well as the languishing of all its inhabitants. Human actions/attitudes are so disastrous that the earth community cannot integrate them in its real existence, and thus relies on mourning (drying up) and languishing (weakening) that can be termed as the trauma of the earth community.

The verb אַבַל, having a dual meaning of “to mourn” and “to dry up,” and אֻמְלַל that connotes “declining” and “cessation of fertility” suggest that all humans, fauna and fish are affected by drought. In other words, the dry chaos removes all forms of life (humans, plants, animals, birds, fish), and אֶרֶץ becomes again a formless void.92 The land and all its mourning inhabitants are the “formal reversal” of the image of cosmic harmony previously stated in Hos 2:18.93

That is why DeRoche speaks of the undoing or reversal of creation order in Hos 4:3.94 The words ecocide, geocide and biocide are now used to mean adverse alterations, often irreparable, to the environment.95 It is in this sense

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88 See Gen 2:19 and Gen 1:26. Similar creation phraseology is visible in both the Atrahasis and Gilgamesh Epics: “the Beast of the field, the fowl of the sky.” These animals are named in the flood narratives as “birds, beasts and crawling things of the earth” in both P (Gen 6:20) and J (Gen 7:23) accounts.
89 It is like the flood was a divine purgation of a polluted earth (Frymer-Kensky, “Pollution,” 409).
90 Many occurrences on the word מִדְבַּר (desert) or “dry land” related to a region which is hostile to life, uncertain and dangerous, the domain of outlaws and wild animals (see Jer 2:6).
92 Hayes, Earth Mourns, 59.
93 Murray, Cosmic Covenant, 50.
94 DeRoche, “Reversal of Creation,” 401
that Hos 4:3 interplays אָבַל and אֻמְלַל in order to highlight great wounds experienced in the natural order.

F THE EARTH MOURNING IN OTHER PROPHETIC TEXTS

A number of prophetic texts establish a link between the mourning of the earth and the crimes of human beings. Jeremiah 4:23-28, for instance, shows the image of a desolate land deserted by humans and birds. The mourning picture is even more vivid in Jer 14:2-6: “Judah mourns and her gates languish; they lie in gloom on the ground, and the cry of Jerusalem goes up.” Thereafter follows a description of wounds of the farmers due to drought, and its drastic effects on the beasts of the field.

In these texts, however, the trauma of the earth is caused by the speech of YHWH. God plagues the earth because of human crimes. In contrast, Hos 4:1-3 creates an impression of a land directly reacting to the acts done upon it. That is why the situation in Hos 4:3 can be termed as a traumatic reaction of the earth community. In Hos 4:1-3, YHWH has a רׅיב with Israel because of their crimes and the wounds their acts have caused upon the earth.

G CONCLUSION

This article tries to read the de-creation of the earth community in Hos 4:1-3 as the expression of trauma in the natural world. All the signs of trauma are present in the text: traumatic events are external events, they overwhelm the victims and leave them in a traumatic situation of helplessness. Finally, Hos 4 can be insightful to modern people that humans are interconnected with the earth community. Their actions upon the earth cause trauma of the earth and non-human members, but will affect them as well.

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96 These are some of them: Amos 1:2, Jer 4:23-28; 12:1-4, 7-14; 14:1-6; 23:9-12; Isa 24:1-20; 33:7-9 and Joel 1:1-20 etc. For a better analysis of the mourning texts, see Hillers, “Roads,” 121-134; and Hayes, Earth Mourns.

https://michaelalexanderchaney.com/2013/10/05/trauma-is-a-wound-in-language-metamoments-that-crash-narrative/.


