A Stranger in My Own Land:
Can a Sojourner Belong to the Household?

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Abstract: Occasionally, the biblical term גר has been taken to refer to a "dependent worker" or "client" based on the thought that household membership can be gained through work provided to the household. Mention of household membership tests the identity of the sojourner in the ancient world as stranger or foreigner; a social category listed with widows and orphans—whose status is also defined by the household—as deserving of protection. Given its centrality as a basic social unit in the ancient Near East, we might expect that purchase in a household would grant a status that dissolves the social distance and attendant consequences (fragility of income, lack of patrimony, object of suspicion) thought to be borne by גרים. In what sense, then, is a "dependent worker" who secures membership in the household a גר? This article reconsiders how distant a person must be from the society within which he resides to make him a גר, shifting the semantic emphasis of this term away from origin and towards social integration.

Keywords: stranger, ger, client, dependent worker, household, social structures, biblical law, foreigner, sojourner

> People are strange when you're a stranger…
> Jim Morrison, 1967

Jim Morrison's truism expresses the subjective relativity of being a stranger. Anyone can feel strange if another makes them so, just as anyone can be regarded as a friend. It is a conceptual not a geographic horizon. This subjectivity makes attempts to grasp the varied biblical terminology for the stranger—תושב, גר, נכרי, זר—challenging.[1] Such a challenge is especially present in attempts to define גר, with each description insufficient for capturing the range of nuances at work in the texts. It is an expression that has received particularly intense scholarly scrutiny, especially its appearance in biblical law codes, in search of ancient Israel's policies towards the migrant. But while biblical uses of גר/גרים do seem to share a sense of the referents' relocation, the variety of contexts for which the term is employed produces an ambiguity surrounding the estrangement that גר is supposed to imply: to whom is the גר a stranger, in what way, and for how long?

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[1]   See, for example, P.D. Miller, "Israel as Host to Strangers," *Israelite Religion and Biblical Theology. Collected Essays* (ed. P.D. Miller) (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press 2000); P. Pitkänen, "Ancient Israelite Population Economy: Ger, Toshav, Nakhri and Karat as Settler Colonial Categories," *JSOT* 42/2 (2017) 139–153.

This article takes a different approach to the גר by looking at Israel's social organization. By examining the social structures and values by which someone is judged to be a stranger or outsider, the range of social distance attributed to גר as a sojourner within Israel may be better understood. Following a discussion of Israel's socioeconomics, this perspective will then be brought to bear on etymology, revisiting a century-old rendering of גר as "client," still offered in many lexicons, in order to locate this status in Israel's society.[2] This comparison will suggest a different semantic emphasis to account for the term's varied connotations. Finally, a brief review of some rhetorical devices in the biblical texts that employ גר will test whether the proposed social location elucidates the term's literary location. My proposal is that גר/גרים was one of Israel's terms for institutional dependents or clients and semantically it is *separate from questions of origin*. The connotations of relocation and being a stranger become attached to the term because of the outsider status that such dependency implies in a society organized around family membership. Before examining this social organization, however, a brief word on how scholarship has approached defining גר to illustrate the difficulty in accounting for the term's nuances and the need for a new approach.

1. Definitions of גר

This term attracts an assortment of lexical classifications, a fact that John Spencer understates: "there is some variation in the way lexicographers have tried to capture the meaning of גר."[3] Attempts to cover the meaning in all biblical occurrences lead to sweeping definitions. Markus Zehnder's effort is typical: "Broadly speaking, the word גר designates a person of foreign origin who has settled permanently among the Israelites, or perhaps an internally placed person or migrant from within the territories covered by Israel and Judah."[4]

This seems so broad that it risks dissolving the definition. גר means either a foreigner, or perhaps not a foreigner, is not far from being the conclusion, and this equivocation is not surprising given the range of contexts and occurrences of this word and its cognates in the Hebrew Bible. The term has resisted univocity when interpreted simply with reference to origin. Drawing the line between Israelite and non-Israelite fails to account for the admittedly few occasions when Levites are found "sojourning" (גור) among fellow Israelites (Judg 17:7, 9; 19:1). Proposals that the meaning of גר has changed over the course of Israel's history appeal to some measure of circular reasoning to date biblical texts and

2   W.R. Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites. First Series The Fundamental Institutions* (Edinburgh: Black 1889) 75–76; G.F. Moore, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Judges* (ICC; Edinburgh: Clark 1895) 385; cf. L.E. Stager, "Archaeology, Ecology, and Social History: Background Themes to the Song of Deborah," *Congress Volume Jerusalem 1986* (ed. J.A. Emerton) (VTSup 40; Leiden: Brill 1988) 229–230.

3   J.R. Spencer, "Sojourner," *AYBD* VI, 103.

4   M. Zehnder, "Literary and Other Observations of Passages Dealing with Foreigners in the Book of Deuteronomy: the Command to Love the גר Read in Context," *Sepher Torath Mosheh. Studies in the Composition and Interpretation of Deuteronomy* (eds. D.I. Block – R.L. Schultz) (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson 2018) 192.

could equally suggest that the term has not been fully understood.[5] And distinguishing uses of the verb from the noun of the legal material to account for the apparent range of referents seems like special pleading.[6] Finally, attempts to tackle an atmosphere of hostility towards the גר and an associated social inferiority implied by some texts has led to overstated translations—"immigrant," or even "refugee"—which seems to claim too much socially and politically for this label.[7] As David Baker admits, "there is no single word in English that adequately covers the semantic range of this Hebrew word."[8]

These discussions operate under the assumption that the term גר/גרים expresses an outsider relationship to Israelite society. But how extensive are the circles of intimacy dividing insider from outsider? In the decentralized, locally structured socioeconomic landscape of Iron Age Israel, the dividing horizons between family and stranger were narrower than a simple Israelite/non-Israelite dichotomy.[9] The dominance of these patrimonially defined social contours is underappreciated in discussion of the stranger in the Hebrew Bible, an omission that contributes to the difficulty in understanding the גר's referents. If being a גר is about who belongs and how within Israelite society, then an assessment of the values and norms of this society is required to find a way through the גר's referential ambiguity.

2. Circles of Intimacy

Being a stranger is about who belongs in a society. And so, discussion of the stranger in Israel can be informed by some sense of the social structures by which Israel lived its life;

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5   C. Bultmann, *Der Fremde im antiken Juda. Eine Untersuchung zum sozialen Typenbegriff "ger" und seinem Bedeutungswandel in der alttestamentlichen Gesetzgebung* (FRLANT 153; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1992); R. Martin-Achard, "גר sojourner," *TLOT* I, 309; C. van Houten, *The Alien in Israelite Law* (JSOTSup 107; Sheffield: JSOT Press 1999) 20.

6   J.E. Ramírez Kidd, *Alterity and Identity in Israel. The [ger] in the Old Testament* (BZAW 283; Berlin: De Gruyter 1999) 130.

7   F.A. Spina, "Israelites as *gērîm*, 'Sojourners' in Social and Historical Context," *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth. Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman in Celebration of His Sixtieth Birthday* (eds. C.L. Meyers – M.P. O'Connor) (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns 1983); M.D. Carroll, "Welcoming the Stranger: Towards a Theology of Immigration in Deuteronomy," *For Our Good Always. Studies on the Message and Influence of Deuteronomy in Honor of Daniel I. Block* (eds. J.S. DeRouchie – J. Gile – K.J. Turner) (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns 2013) 441–461; R. Boer, *The Sacred Economy of Ancient Israel* (LAI; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox 2015) 119.

8   D.L. Baker, *Tight Fists or Open Hands? Wealth and Poverty in Old Testament Law* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 2009) 181–182; see also M.A. Awabdy, *Immigrants and Innovative Law. Deuteronomy's Theological and Social Vision for the גר* (FAT 2/67; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2014) 1–2.

9   I have presented this landscape in more detail when looking at the implications of social identity for the book of Judges: see B.J. Clifton, *Family and Identity in the Book of Judges* (Studies in Cultural Contexts of the Bible 7; Paderborn: Brill Schöningh 2022) esp. 41–56; see also D. Fleming, *The Legacy of Israel in Judah's Bible. History, Politics, and the Reinscribing of Tradition* (New York: Cambridge University Press 2012); B.C. Benz, *The Land Before the Kingdom of Israel. A History of the Southern Levant and the People who Populated It* (HACL 7; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns 2016).

the principles, in other words, by which people recognized to whom they owed loyalty and support and from whom they could expect it.[10] As social circles recede from this intimacy, the potential for being a stranger increases, for strangers are primarily those from whom loyalty cannot be expected. What produces, it seems, the confusion when preferring "stranger" as the meaning of גר is that for the Near East this circle of intimacy is small, limited even to the family or lineage. In which case, a stranger can be anyone outside the familial circle, notwithstanding shared social, cultural, or territorial claims. And, because lineages were largely coresident in the socioeconomic landscape, strangers could simply be those from other settlements.[11] Gary Beckman explains.

> In third-millennium B.C.E. Sumer, whose city-states shared a common language and religious system, the inhabitants of the city of Umma nonetheless held even the men of neighbouring Lagash to be foreigners, if not so alien as the people of the Zagros mountains to the east.[12]

As Beckman suggests, even if you share something comparable to "nationality," a stranger can be anyone outside of your familial and/or residential network. This is because the social bonds by which life operates are much stronger and more cogent within family obligations.[13] Commitments to more extensive associations such as tribe or nation are less compelling, often temporary, and even overlap.[14] Such larger groups assembled only briefly in response to pressing situations, such as labour for a harvest, for building projects, or mustering for conflict.[15] These alliances of ordinarily independent groups did not constitute an enduring network of solidarity and security as the coresident family did. When the principal circle of intimacy is so restricted, the conceptual horizon beyond which one is foreign is not far away.

This assessment has two related implications for understanding the גר. First, the reduced circle of intimacy must mean that the stranger cannot be limited to national or ethnic distinction. On the above account, Spencer's broad description of גר as "not native to

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10   C.A.O. van Nieuwenhuijze, *Sociology of the Middle East. A Stocktaking and Interpretation* (Leiden: Brill 1971) 389.

11   Cf. L.E. Stager, "The Archaeology of the Family in Ancient Israel," *BASOR* 260 (1985) 20.

12   G. Beckman, "Foreigners in the Ancient Near East," *JAOS* 133/2 (2013) 203.

13   S.E. Grosby, *Biblical Ideas of Nationality. Ancient and Modern* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns 2002) 205.

14   C.H.J. de Geus, *The Tribes of Israel. An Investigation into some of the Presuppositions of Martin Noth's Amphictyony Hypothesis* (SSN 18; Assen: Van Gorcum 1976) 133, 145; S. Bendor, *The Social Structure of Ancient Israel. The Institution of the Family (Beit 'Ab) from the Settlement to the End of the Monarchy* (Jerusalem: Simor 1996) 31; Benz, *The Land*, 109.

15   On a tribe assembling for a harvest see C.L. Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve. Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2013) 51; J.D. Schloen, *The House of the Father as Fact and Symbol. Patrimonialism in Ugarit and the ancient Near East* (Studies in the Archaeology and History of the Levant 2; Leiden: Brill 2001) 140; on building projects see L.G. Herr, "The House of the Father at Iron I Tall al-'Umayri, Jordan," *Exploring the Long Durée. Essays in Honor of Lawrence E. Stager* (ed. J.D. Schloen) (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns 2009) 197; on military musters see E.J. van der Steen, "Judha, Masos and Hayil: The Importance of Ethnohistory and Oral Traditions," *Historical Biblical Archaeology and the Future. The New Pragmatism* (ed. T. Levy) (London: Equinox 2010) 174; Fleming, *Legacy of Israel*, 233.

the area" is as likely to mean another settlement as it is another people.[16] What is more, the concepts of nationality and ethnicity are wont to carry modern connotations inappropriate for the ancient Near East's complex social horizons. Secondly, if the circle of intimacy need not extend beyond coresident lineages or households, the composition and dynamics of this household and its interaction with wider society must play a part in identifying the stranger. It is thus worth looking further at this household and at what part those outside the circle play in the larger story, attempting to locate the גר in the social landscape.

3. Socioeconomics

Israel's fondness for family structures as the most cogent and enduring social circle of security and loyalty continued throughout the Iron Age even in the presence of wider socio-polities as monarchic systems emerged.[17] So influential, in fact, is this perspective in the ancient Near East that administrative structures from tribe and temple to king and emperor, employed kinship nomenclature to describe these further-reaching institutions.[18] Preference for family has a lot to do with the socioeconomics of an agrarian pastoral society.[19] Ownership of land (or at least use of it) was vital for raising crops and grazing livestock, a patrimony safeguarded by households across generations (cf. 1 Kgs 21:3).[20] This subsistence strategy also brought generations together to work and protect their land with a resultant influence on settlement patterns: villages and residential communities were largely composed of lineages.[21] We can see how the principles of social organization—production and trade, security and stability, institutions such as marriage or hospitality with their attendant customary and legal obligations—these principles would be governed by a familial, localized perspective.[22] Developing and protecting this microcosm, in turn, would demand that this attitude of solidarity *not* be replicated towards those outside the extended family who represent a potential threat to patrimony and who pursue their own interests.[23] Households

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16 Spencer, "Sojourner," 103.

17 Grosby, *Nationality*, 205; Fleming, *Legacy of Israel*, 68.

18 F.M. Cross, *From Epic to Canon. History and Literature in Ancient Israel* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press 1998) 3; Schloen, *House of the Father*, 1; C.R. Chapman, *The House of the Mother. The Social Roles of Maternal Kin in Biblical Hebrew Narrative and Poetry* (AYBRL; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press 2016) 20–21.

19 See D.I. Kertzer, "Household History and Sociological Theory," *ARS* 17/1 (1991) 155–179.

20 Baker, *Tight Fists*, 76.

21 Stager, "Archaeology of the Family," 20; K. van der Toorn, *Family Religion in Babylonia, Ugarit and Israel. Continuity and Changes in the Forms of Religious Life* (Leiden: Brill 1996) 204; Schloen, *House of the Father*, 150.

22 P.M. McNutt, *Reconstructing the Society of Ancient Israel* (LAI; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox 1999) 70; J. McCorriston, *Pilgrimage and Household in the Ancient Near East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2011) 135; Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve*, 103.

23 J.K. Campbell, "Honour and the Devil," *Honour and Shame. The Values of Mediterranean Society* (ed. J.G. Peristiany) (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson 1965) 142; H.A. McKay, "Lying and Deceit in Families: the Duping

form little worlds, shaping social interaction with reference to their own locus of security and meaning, while beyond the kinship circle people are approached with a measure of mistrust.[24] Protection of patrimony draws lines of social vigilance. It is important to note too that kinship circles in the ancient Near East seemed not to be limited by biology.[25] Despite, or perhaps, because of the ubiquity of family terminology for social structures, relationships could be formed by consent, enabling outsiders to be drawn into the family.

These structures seemed to operate throughout the Iron Age whether life is regarded as urban or rural and whether settlements are considered to be grouped within a ruling administration such as a territorial kingdom or governed by an empire.[26] And there is no reason to assume that this socioeconomic pattern did not continue to be recognizable beyond the Iron Age, particularly considering the presence of such patterns in more recent times.[27] In this way, discussion of the semantics of גר in light of this context can surely begin without relying on conclusions regarding each biblical texts' literary history.[28]

Drawing on this context, then, it appears likely that membership of a household (or at least its protection) was important for securing prosperity, safety, and legacy in ancient society.[29] Moreover, household affiliation could be *sought* since kinship could be fictive; an organizing principle rather than a biological datum.[30] The concern for the *personae miserae*—the widow and orphan—in ancient Near Eastern legal material confirms that lack of patrimony constitutes a problem for recognition and rights, rendering those members of society without land or family inheritance in need of protection and mercy.[31] If society operates with reference to patrimonial socioeconomics, then status becomes related to having a stake in the land.[32] As Laura Culbertson reviews the ancient Near East, "if there

of Isaac and Tamar," *The Family in Life and in Death. The Family in Ancient Israel. Sociological and Archaeological Perspectives* (ed. P. Dutcher-Walls) (LHBOTS 504; London: Clark 2009) 28.

24   F.S. Frick, "Ecology, Agriculture and Patterns of Settlement," *The World of Ancient Israel* (ed. R.E. Clements) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1989) 90.

25   P. Kalluveettil, *Declaration and Covenant. A Comprehensive Review of Covenant Formulae from the Old Testament and the Ancient Near East* (AnBib 88; Rome: Biblical Institute Press 1982) 204–205; Cross, *From Epic to Canon*, 7.

26   For scepticism regarding an urban/rural dichotomy, see Schloen, *House of the Father*, 63, 135; Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve*, 42; for the endurance of local structures within kingdoms, see Fleming, *Legacy of Israel*, 33.

27   Campbell, "Honour and the Devil"; Kertzer, "Household History"; Nieuwenhuijze, *Sociology*; Schloen, *House of the Father*, 150, 183; R.R. Wilk – W.L. Rathje, "Household Archaeology," *American Behavioral Scientist* 25/6 (1982) 627–629.

28   Cf. Clifton, *Family and Identity*, 55–56; Bendor, *Social Structure*, 39.

29   Stager, "Archaeology, Ecology," 230; R.A. Di Vito, "Old Testament Anthropology and the Construction of Personal Identity," *CBQ* 61/2 (1999) 223; McCorriston, *Pilgrimage*, 15–16.

30   McNutt, *Reconstructing*, 76.

31   F.C. Fensham, "Widow, Orphan, and the Poor in Ancient near Eastern Legal and Wisdom Literature," *JNES* 21/2 (1962) 139; Baker, *Tight Fists*, 188–189. It is, of course, relevant that, in Israel, the גר is also one of these *personae miserae*.

32   R. Westbrook, "Patronage in the Ancient Near East," *JESHO* 48/2 (2005) 212–213.

is any meaningful dichotomy to society it involves household affiliation versus no household affiliation."[33]

Culbertson's dichotomy, however, warns us not to expect that everyone could lay claim to an inheritance. Notwithstanding the commonplace usage of household terminology to describe all manner of social institutions, membership of a patrimonial household by descent or lineage was not universal. Not everyone could be heirs to hereditary landed property. Thus, while the social ideal of an ancestral estate may have been normative for the ancient Near East's agrarian societies, we should not assume that this aspiration was universally achieved.[34] The point of Mic 4:4, for example, seems to be that *not* everyone had their own vine and fig tree.[35] Personal ownership of viticulture is an eschatological aspiration, demonstrating both the desirability of patrimony in the land but also that this desire was still a dream for many.

It is hardly surprising that many people in the ancient Near East were not landowners or heirs to an estate. For one thing, agrarian subsistence strategies are dependent upon ecology and climate, effecting resources that either allow family groups to grow or force them to contract.[36] There can be external economic and political influences, not to mention internal interests, that effect a household's size and composition.[37] Landless people were a constituent part of a landed society.[38] But given the ubiquity of the household as a form of social structure, what place did these household-*less* people find in a society nominally organized at least around estates and lineages?

David Schloen notes that because Iron Age Israel was (mostly) a nonmonetized agrarian society where debts were paid in kind or through labour, there was no economic market independent of production to support survival. He explains, "landless persons survived not as wage labourers but as dependent household workers (slaves or clients) who joined complex-family sharecropping households by adoption or in some form of servitude."[39] The landless could join a household, but as a client.[40] Building on Culbertson's social dichotomy that contrasts household affiliation with the *lack* of affiliation, a further descriptive

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33   L. Culbertson, "Slaves and Households in the Near East," *Slaves and Households in the Near East* (eds. L. Culbertson – I. Chatterjee) (Chicago, IL: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago 2011) 13.

34   C.L. Meyers, "Women and the Domestic Economy of early Israel," *Women in the Hebrew Bible. A Reader* (ed. A. Bach) (New York: Routledge 1999) 35; Schloen, *House of the Father*, 120.

35   "They will sit, each man under his vine and under his fig tree, and they will not be afraid because the mouth of Yhwh Sabaoth has spoken" (Mic 4:4). A similar promise is found in the parallel texts 2 Kgs 18:31 // Isa 36:16 as an enticement from Assyria to abandon Jerusalem.

36   Wilk – Rathje, "Household Archaeology," 627.

37   Schloen (*House of the Father*, 117–120) provides a detailed account of such households' demographic fluidity; see also Stager, "Archaeology of the Family," 20; G.C. Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (JSOTSup 141; Sheffield: Sheffield University Press 1993) 138; Bendor, *Social Structure*, 37; Herr, "House of the Father."

38   W. Domeris, *Touching the Heart of God. The Social Construction of Poverty among Biblical Peasants* (LHBOT 466; London: Clark 2007) 69.

39   Schloen, *House of the Father*, 120.

40   Cf. Zehnder, "Literary," 197.

layer appears that allows us to distinguish between a role as a servile dependent *within* a household and household membership.[41] Kristin Kleber has looked at the ubiquity and yet multiplicity of dependent labour in the Near East.

> In almost every society of the ancient world, one finds distinct categories of the servile population who live as institutional dependents but are not slaves. At the same time, no society created a collective designation for this group comparable to the broad term "slave"; different groups bore different status terms.[42]

To summarize this social landscape, Iron Age Israel was socially structured with reference to its basic socioeconomic unit, the coresident household, rendering affiliation to a household a major requirement for status, security, and prosperity. Because of the minimally monetized economy, for those who were landless, a major method of benefiting from the agrarian subsistence strategy was to live as workers dependent on an institution or household. Institutional dependency seems to be a phenomenon of great variety in the ancient Near East with no collective designation for these relationships or social ranks in any society's lexicon. A lack of collective terminology may explain why this sector of society is not so evident in textual witnesses and must rather be identified through inferences drawn from the socio-culture.

I suggest that the subject under discussion – the Hebrew Bible's "stranger" or גר—is a term describing an institutional dependent or client in Israel's idiolect, with the idea of estrangement only contingently implied. This is not far from Cynthia Chapman's understanding, who explains that "when a גר is listed as a member of a *bayit*, he is usually found as a labourer, someone whose membership in the household is secured through work he provides to the household."[43] In light of the social landscape, moreover, it is evident from this description whence connotations of relocation and of estrangement arise in uses of גר. If institutional dependency mainly results from the absence of household patrimony, then a settler moving away from his coresident lineage would face this situation. And stepping outside the circle of intimacy that protects and sustains you is to become a stranger. Looking at the biblical terminology with Israel's socioeconomic context in mind, then, it seems that there is a significant overlap between the dependent worker and the גר. Can this term's etymology support such a proposal?

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41   It is not impossible that membership could develop out of servitude, a process that may be described in Exod 21:6; Deut 15:16–17; cf. Culbertson, "Slaves and Households," 11. There is no space to discuss this possibility here.

42   K. Kleber, "Neither Slave nor Truly Free: the Status of the Dependents of Babylonian Temple Households," *Slaves and Households in the Near East* (eds. L. Culbertson – I. Chatterjee) (Chicago, IL: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago 2011) 108.

43   Chapman, *House of the Mother*, 236–237, n. 21.

4. The גר as Dependent Worker or "client"

The overlap of the above description of a dependent worker with that of a גר has been observed by scholars before.[44] More than a century ago, W. Robertson Smith thought that the operative sense behind גר is the need for protection in the absence of family.[45] George Moore followed Smith to explain the perplexing status of the Judahite Levite in Judges 17:7.[46] He developed Smith's suggestion of dependence by glossing the verbal form גור found in vv. 7–9 to mean becoming a "client" of a new household (cf. 17:8–10).[47] While this language appeals to the vocabulary of patronage, more familiar from the classical world, the mechanism of clients and patrons nevertheless seems to have existed within ancient Near Eastern institutions.[48] And as Roland Boer remarks, "the step from the head of the kinship-household to the patron is small" (cf. Judg 17:11).[49]

More recently, Mark Awabdy has noted the etymological support for "client" as a translation for גר drawn from cognate semitic languages.[50] The verbal root *'gr* "hire, engage, pay wages" appears in Northwest Semitic epigraphy, comparable with Akkadian *agāru* and Arabic *ağara*, with the meaning of hiring people for labour.[51] Thus, the noun *gr* in Northwest Semitic carries the sense "protégé, client," namely, those who have been hired—the landless, in other words.[52] This connotation also seems to be behind the Ugaritic noun *ảgrt* "mistress" or "she who hires."[53] The Ugaritic verb *g-r* "lodge, take refuge, be protected, settle," on the other hand, seems to take its meaning rather from the activity of those *being* hired, whence connotations of migration begin to arise.[54] This Ugaritic verb seems to relate to another Akkadian root *gurru* with the interesting nuance "allot (fields to settlers)."[55] The sense of "settling" or "taking refuge" found in Ugaritic *g-r* is interesting in light of the apparent dependency of the landless on the landed in the ancient Near East's socioeconomics. Finally, the Ugaritic noun *gr* "protected; guest, foreigner" draws broadly on this context, suggesting connotations of dependency within the notion of migration.[56] The idea of hiring labour, of protection and refuge in these words' semantic fields could well arise from a social landscape that developed a protective, albeit servile system of institutional dependency

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44 Cf. Stager, "Archaeology, Ecology," 229–230; Bultmann, *Der Fremde*.

45 Smith, *Religion of the Semites*, 75–76.

46 "There was a young man from Bethlehem of Judah from the family of Judah (משפחת יהודה) and he was a Levite and he sojourned (גר) there" (Judg 17:7).

47 Moore, *Judges*, 385.

48 Cf. Westbrook, "Patronage"; Kleber, "Neither Slave nor Truly Free."

49 Boer, *The Sacred Economy*, 105.

50 Awabdy, *Immigrants*, 2.

51 *CAD* I, 146–148; *DNWSI* I, 10–11; E.W. Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon* (ed. S. Lane-Poole) (New York: Ungar 1955) I, 23.

52 *DNWSI* I, 232

53 *DULAT* I, 27.

54 *DULAT* I, 302.

55 *CAD* V, 140.

56 *DULAT* I, 302–303.

for those falling outside family support. Taking גר to be a term for such a labourer also in biblical Hebrew aligns with this etymology.

The meaning "client" certainly remains in lexical discussions of גר.[57] Despite its persistent presence, however, tracking this meaning in the lexicons reveals that it is quickly lost in the ensuing article, much in the way that, although acknowledged, the nuance recedes in exegetical treatments. Yet, in light of the likely socioeconomic context that was current over the course of the biblical texts' production, revisiting this sense when examining the texts seems warranted. It is time to review a few biblical uses of גר, cognizant of the nuance "client" or "dependent worker."

5. Review of Biblical Texts

Each passage in which גר appears is worthy of discussion, in light of the social perspective argued above. There is no space here to be so comprehensive, thus three rhetorical devices in which the term גר operates in conjunction with a comparable term will be briefly examined: first, three texts in which גר appears with אזרח as a *merism* (Lev 18:26; Josh 8:33; Ezek 47:22); secondly, an example of a *hendiadys* employing גר and תושׁב (Gen 23:4); finally, two psalms using גר metaphorically in poetry (Ps 15:1; 61:5). Through the rhetoric and the context of these occurrences, it should be possible to clarify the meaning for which the term has been employed. It must be said, however, that the translations given in each case are glosses for the purpose of discussion. They may even be overstated in order to draw out the social nuances and these glosses are not necessarily offered as English lexical equivalents for the reviewed terms.

Merism: גר and אזרח

Fourteen times גר appears in conjunction with אזרח, the latter often rendered as "native" or "citizen."[58] The Hebrew terms are most often found together in laws requiring that the same action or conditions be applied to both groups.[59] In these legal passages it seems that the use of both terms constitutes a *merism*, an expression in which a whole spectrum is indicated with reference to its polarities. גר and אזרח would thus be antonyms, allowing further conjecture on their nuances in light of this rhetoric. Although defined as "native" in BDB, the lexicon groups the noun under its verbal cognate, זרח "arise," and so poetically

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57 In addition to the above dictionaries and lexicons, see *HALOT* I, 201; Martin-Achard, "גר," 307; Spencer, "Sojourner" 103. BDB (I, 158) nuances גר as one with "no inherited rights," a gloss that also supports the notion of dependency due to lack of household affiliation.

58 *HALOT* (I, 201) gives "protected citizen" for גר, in contrast to its gloss "full citizen" for אזרח (II, 28); see also *DULAT* I, 302–303. Such a liberal deployment of "citizen" overstretches the semantic field, confuses the merism, and draws in unnecessary political connotations (cf. *DCH* II, 372 which gives גור "sojourn" in contrast to אזרח "native").

59 For further discussion see R. Rendtorff, "The *gēr* in the Priestly Laws of the Pentateuch," *Ethnicity and the Bible* (ed. M.G. Brett) (Leiden: Brill 1996) 81–84.

glosses אזרח as "one arising from the soil"; Ps 37:35 is also referenced in this lexical discussion, which describes a tree "growing in its natural soil."[60] For the merism to work, אזרח must be held to be the opposite of גר, in which case the latter term would broadly refer to one who does not arise from the soil. A גר in other words, is one who has no land, an inference we have already drawn from the socioeconomic landscape. The common connotation "citizen" for the one arising from the soil (אזרח) also supports the idea that some stake in the land is necessary to have a purchase in society, although "citizen" carries anachronistic politico-national connotations. In light of its etymology, I suggest that we might employ "landed" for אזרח, which avoids implications of a political system and is nearer to the socioeconomics, while using "landless" for גר allows the merism full expression. I give as an example Lev 18:26:

<div dir="rtl">

ושמרתם אתם את חקתי ואת משפטי ולא תעשו מכל התועבת האלה **האזרח** ו**הגר** הגר בתוככם
</div>

Keep my statues and my ordinances and do not do all these abominations – the **landed** and the **landless** [who lives] among you.[61]

Any sense of relocation or estrangement implied by the use of גר follows from this primary sense of landlessness/dependency, and given the restricted circles of intimacy, this strangeness need not imply national or ethnic difference anyway. Drawing the contrast along patrimonial lines avoids these implications.

Twice these terms appear together outside the Pentateuch. One is another merism in Josh 8:33 describing "all Israel" in more detail "as גר and as אזרח."

<div dir="rtl">

וכל ישראל וזקניו ושטרים ושפטיו עמדים מזה ומזה לארון נגד הכהנים הלוים נשאי ארון ברית יהוה **כגר כאזרח**
</div>

All Israel, its elders, officers, and its judges stand this side and that of the ark, opposite the priests, Levites who carry the ark of the covenant of Yhwh – both **landless** and **landed.**

Again, the common English translation for כגר כאזרח , "alien as well as citizen," seems to overstate the politics, carrying unwanted connotations of the nation state, although it does express the sort of purchase in society afforded by inheritance. The "landless and landed" reflects the socioeconomics better and accommodates the small circles of intimacy that characterize Israel's society.

The other occurrence found outside the Pentateuch of גר and אזרח together is in Ezek 47:22. Here the terms are not a merism, but rather highlight the patrimonial difference between these groups through the vision of return from exile.

60　BDB, II, 280.

61　The definite substantive participle הגר [who lives] towards the end of Lev 18:26 is also worthy of discussion, for which there is no space here. But the participle might be summarily glossed "who serves [*as a dependent*]" (see discussion of the psalter's poetic rhetoric below).

והיה תפלו אותה בנחלה לכם ול**הגרים** הגרים בתוככם אשר הולדו בנים בתוככם והיו לכם כ**אזרח** בבני ישראל אתכם
יפלו בנחלה בתוך שבטי ישראל

> It will happen – you will allot it as a patrimony for you and for the **landless** [who live] among you who have born sons among you, and they will be for you like **landed** among the sons of Israel – with you they will allot a patrimony among the tribes of Israel.[62]

Like in Mic 4, in Ezek 47 we have a vision of restoration. The dream that those without land (גרים) will now receive patrimony and become landed (אזרח) much more clearly expresses the eschatological aspiration of exiled Israel than a distinction between "alien" and "citizen."

Hendiadys: גר and תושב

These terms appear together nine times in the Hebrew Bible, five of them in Lev 25, a set of laws dealing with protection of the vulnerable in times of poverty.[63] While both terms seem to be as nebulous as each other, they are taken to cover the same semantic field.[64] In Ps 39:13 גר and תושב occur in semantic parallel, suggesting some overlap in meaning, although in Num 35:15 they seem to refer to different groups. Jacob Milgrom considers the combination of גר and תושב in Leviticus to be a *hendiadys*, "resident alien."[65] A hendiadys is a rhetorical device in which a modifier is nominalized creating an expression using two nouns, which are nevertheless grammatically independent. If תושב is thus the modifier of גר as in the translation "resident alien," then we might expect that the sense of dwelling or settlement brought by תושב is not ordinarily to the fore in the term גר when used on its own, needing such qualification to bring this aspect out, otherwise the rhetoric would be more like a tautology than a hendiadys. On this view, the regular emphasis of גר would remain rather that of dependency or landlessness as observed above: a "resident dependent" or "landless resident" perhaps might give the sense. This rhetoric is on display in Gen 23:4. By means of the hendiadys, Abraham attempts to persuade the Hittites to give him land by presenting his situation as an ironic paradox.

גר ותושב אנכי עמכם תנו לי אחזת קבר עמכם ואקברה מתי מלפני

> A **landless resident** I am with you. Give me landed property of a grave with you and let me bury my dead from before my face.

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62   Again, a definite substantive participle הגרים [who live] appears, which could be glossed "who serve [*as dependents*]" (see discussion below).

63   In Lev 25:6, תושב is in parallel with שכיר "wage labourer" collectively referred to as גרים. There is no space here to discuss the etymology of שכיר, nor the merits of the translation "wage labourer," nor how this sector compares with גרים. Briefly, though, I note that the idea of labour (שכיר) and that of settlement (תושב) both resonate with the status that being a גר seems to afford in Israel's society.

64   Cf. *HALOT* I, 1713; *DCH* VIII, 616.

65   J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 3B; New York: Doubleday 2001) 2187–2188; also B. Wells, "The Quasi-Alien in Leviticus 25," *The Foreigner and the Law. Perspective from the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East* (eds. R Achenbach – R. Albertz – J. Wöhrle) (BZAR 16; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz 2011); Rendtorff, "The *gēr*," 79–81.

The irony seems to be that Abraham has no land, specifically, no *patrimony*, in which to bury his dead, despite his apparent wealth (Gen 13:2).[66] Prosperity seems not to bring the "landed property" (אחזה) that Abraham seeks (23:4).[67] On this reading, what is surely rhetoric on Abraham's part becomes clearer as he compares his settled position with that of a landless dependent.[68] The hendiadys has rhetorical force by juxtaposing dependent status (גר) with residential status (תושב) through the combined use of both terms.

Poetic rhetoric – service in God's house

Landlessness is not the only connotation conveyed by גר but also the way the landless make their way in patrimonial society, namely service in a household. It is possible that the verbal form גור can be considered to refer to this servitude.[69] Granting the nuance, this particular type of household affiliation appears to be used as a metaphor in the psalms for the desire of the righteous to be part of Yhwh's household. In Ps 15:1, devotion is expressed through rhetorical questions.

יהוה מי **יגור** באהלך מי ישכן בהר קדשך

Yhwh, who shall **serve** [*as a dependent*] in your tent? Who shall reside on your holy mountain?

And in Ps 61:5 the psalmist's prayer is to be forever affiliated to God's household.

אגורה באהלך עולמים אחסה בסתר כנפיך

Let me **serve** [*as a dependent*] in your tent forever; let me take refuge in the shelter of your wings.

Recognizing the semantic parallel in this bicolon, the sense of protection afforded by client status (אגורה) is clearly brought out through its counterpart, the *refuge* of God's wings.[70] By recognising the social nuances, the verb גור nicely expresses the devotional desire for affiliation—having some stake—in God's household, even if it is as a serving dependent. Finally, it is worth noting that in these examples from the psalter, the sense of strangeness or foreignness seems inappropriate for the context, supporting the idea that estrangement is a secondary connotation.

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66 Lack of patrimony also resonates with the narrative theme of relocation, promised land and descendants that dominates Abraham's story (cf. Gen 12:1–3, 7; 13:14–17; 15:2–4).

67 Cf. *HALOT* II, 32; *DCH* I, 187–188.

68 The Hittites' response stresses the irony of Abraham's landlessness: "a mighty prince you are among us" (נשׂיא אלהים אתה בתוכנו) (Gen 23:6).

69 I alluded to this nuance above when the verb's participle occurs alongside the noun in Lev 18:26 and Ezek 47:22.

70 See the etymological discussion above; cf. Smith, *Religion of the Semites*, 75–76; Moore, *Judges*, 385; Stager, "Archaeology, Ecology," 229–230.

Conclusions

Beginning with the relativity of the stranger, it was noted how the narrow circles of intimacy in the ancient Near East's social structures could make even those from neighbouring cities strangers. Such a proximate horizon brought the challenge of grasping the biblical terminology into focus. Suggestions such as "foreigner," "immigrant" or "refugee" to render the term גר were rethought to avoid anachronistic connotations and to account for the range of uses found in the Hebrew Bible. For example, the subtext of immigration seemed inappropriate for occurrences such as found in the Psalms. The same socioeconomics that produced small circles of familiarity formed a system in which affiliation to a household was desirable for operating in society. Returning to the notion of גר as "client" opened a space in this social landscape that allowed for the nuance of landlessness or dependency to come to the fore, detaching the primary semantic emphasis of this word from questions of origin, a connotation perhaps more present in other vocabulary, such as זר or נכרי. This is not to say that a sense of relocation is entirely absent from the term גר. But in cases where foreignness is implied, the emphasis expressed by the term is not placed on origin or motivation for movement but rather in the life found having moved. This I suggest is the primary sense of גר. It is not where you've come from but how you've arrived. How are you to fit in Israel's patrimonial landscape? And this is why in many uses of גר/גור the question of origin does not arise.

Since many studies of the biblical stranger, particularly in the bible's legal material, have as a stated goal the development of a perspective or theology for the treatment of migrants today, it is perhaps appropriate to draw from my analysis the briefest concluding remark on this as a contemporary issue. At the beginning of the paper, I described strangeness as a conceptual horizon that can be dissolved in friendship. As we encounter people who have relocated in our societies today, we may need to focus less on their origin and more on how we address their arrival.

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