Strangers in the Land: Reimagining the Gēr Through Deuteronomic Law, Derridean Hospitality, and Evangelical Politics

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STRANGERS IN THE LAND: REIMAGINING THE GĒR THROUGH DEUTERONOMIC LAW, DERRIDEAN HOSPITALITY, AND EVANGELICAL POLITICS

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Table of Contents

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INTRODUCTION

Of all the Hebrew Bible texts that include the term *gēr*,[1] Deuteronomy stands out as a place of interest to study how the term functioned in ancient cultures and how it might function in discussions today around immigration. Deuteronomy's legal code, also known as the Deuteronomic Code, is distinct from the other texts of the Torah for two reasons, even though it does bear some similarity to legal material in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. First, it is a reinterpretation or reimagination of earlier Israelite law.[2] And second, it focuses on the concepts of justice, land, and communal living in contrast to matters like blood sacrifice in Leviticus 17:13 or adherence to statutes in Numbers 15:15-16, 29. It is this interest of Deuteronomy's laws in ensuring the survival of the *gēr* within the community of the Israelites that guides this dissertation project. To investigate further how the *gērim* were treated in the Afro-Asiatic world in addition to the treatment of the *gērim* today in the context of immigrants seeking a new life here in the United States, my contribution to scholarship will be a unique literary investigation into the Deuteronomic Code (chs. 12-26), focusing specifically on chapters 14, 16, 23, and 24, using both the existing body of scholarship on the *gēr* and the French philosopher Jacques Derrida who has written on the concept of hospitality, a prominent theme found in texts featuring the *gēr.* My dissertation also aims to reevaluate the understanding of the *gēr* ("stranger") in the text of Deuteronomy using Jacques Derrida's concept of hostipitality[3] - a point of entry into the

[1] Following the SBL Handbook of Style (2nd ed.), I use macrons to indicate long vowels in transliterated Hebrew: gēr (גֵּר) refers to a resident alien or sojourner, gūr (גוּר) refers to the verbal root "to sojourn," and gērim (גֵּרִים) is the plural form.
[2] Michael D. Coogan, *A Brief Introduction to the Old Testament: The Hebrew Bible in Its Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 149.
[3] Jacques Derrida, "Hostipitality," *Angelaki* 5, no. 3 (2000), 3-18. A portmanteau of the words "hospitality" and "hostility" coined by Derrida.

violence of traditions of hospitality – as a means to critique how prominent evangelical Christian groups have used their ethico-political power, both in terms of their cultural influence and the policies they support and implement, regarding immigrants seeking to come to the United States. While many studies exist for studying the *gēr* in various texts of the Torah,[4] there is a significant gap in the scholarship that addresses the intersection of hospitality and immigration. Many scholars have rightly understood the presence of hospitality traditions within biblical texts like Genesis, Deuteronomy, and Leviticus, yet they have not considered the power dynamics of host and guest that existed during the time of the ancient Israelites as a model to better interpret the experiences of immigrants facing opposition and oppression in modern contexts like the United States. Like the *gērim* in Deuteronomy (and other texts in the Torah), immigrants who seek to enter the United States from Mexico, often traveling from farther south in Latin America, have been met with suspicion and violence.[5] This similarity resonates with my own sense of ethical obligations regarding justice and has compelled me to undertake a comparative study between the *gērim* in the Afro-Asiatic world and those who might be called *gērim* in the context of United States immigration, especially with regards to the current treatment of immigrants, either here legally or who are here without documentation.

[4] Some prominent examples are Matthew Soerens and Jenny Hwang. *Welcoming the Stranger: Justice, Compassion & Truth in the Immigration Debate*, InterVarsity, 2009; R. Carroll, M. Daniel. *Christians at the Border: Immigration, the Bible and the Church,* Baker Academic, 2008; Christina van Houten, *The Alien in Israelite Law* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991; Reinhard Achenbach, "Ger-Nokhri-Toshav-Zar: Legal and Sacral Distinctions Regarding Foreigners in the Pentateuch," in *The Foreigner and the Law: Perspectives from the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East*, Reinhard Achenbach, Rainer Albertz, & Jakob Wohrle (eds) (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2011; José E. Ramírez Kidd, *Alterity and Identity in Israel: The ger in the Old Testament* (*Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*) (Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2012).

[5] This is based on the understanding that the Deuteronomic Code (chs. 12-26), a reinterpretation of Israelite law, is itself casuistic in nature. Since the gērim are explicitly protected in several places by case law in the Torah (concentrated heavily in Deuteronomy and Leviticus), the reader can infer that prior to becoming a protected class, the gērim were met with harsh treatment, abuse, and perhaps even death.

The dominant epistemological framework[6] for understanding the stranger (*gēr*) among evangelical-based organizations and institutions finds its basis in a type of dyspoliticized model.[7] In other words, the theory of knowledge (and the origins of knowledge) among most evangelical groups is grounded in the objectification of the Other – someone who is assessed as wholly different. Such objectification occurs within the power relationship between the host (the citizen) and the guest (the immigrant).[8] Because of this, the resulting framework produces malicious ethical and political responses to the suffering and oppression of people either seeking access to the United States for asylum or who are already here without official documentation. While advocating for the rights and protections of the immigrant, evangelical organizations largely understand the immigrant/stranger/Other as an object to be converted and/or feared. This resultant understanding is largely due to the host mentality of evangelical Christians/organizations that understand that the guests (the immigrants) must abide by the rules of the "house."[9] Such a construction of the stranger, borne out of the conflict that immigrants are made in the image of God yet are not legal citizens of this country, manifests in the formation and distribution of destructive politics and ethics in many evangelical groups. These actions are destructive in that they manifest as ethics governed by a hospitality that welcomes the Other all

[6] Kristin Kobes Du Mez, "Understanding White Evangelical Views on Immigration," *Harvard Divinity Bulletin*, https://bulletin.hds.harvard.edu/understanding-white-evangelical-views-on-immigration/. My own research and theory is indebted to Du Mez on her work with militant masculinity studies within evangelicalism since immigration is one of the contexts such militancy engages with. Though this bulletin is a short piece and not as exhaustive as her other work, she clearly articulates how the fear of terroristic threats and how evangelicalism's ideology has constructed the border as a place of violence rather than one of hospitality, thus resulting in what I describe as an ideology grounded in objectification of the Other.

[7] The impulse is what I describe as 'dyspolitical' (similar to but distinct from depolitical/depoliticized) in that it is a politics of malice – an anti-politics of the people that understands *polis* as a body of citizens.

[8] Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 15, 27-37. Derrida often refers to the categories of "host" and "guest" when discussing the power dynamics of hospitality, particularly regarding the legal capacity of hospitality. As an example of how the guest is quintessentially a foreigner, see Derrida's discussion in *Of Hospitality* (p. 15ff) on how Socrates functions legally like a foreigner in *The Apology of Socrates*.

[9] Jacques Derrida refers to the "house" when writing about the code of conduct often followed by the host(s) with power. See Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, p. 15.

while sublimated into a set of politics which allow the State to retain its sovereign, brutal power that it exercises in its treatment of the stranger. To better understand this phenomenon, I use Derrida's work on hospitality as an investigative tool to pry apart the language of welcome so frequently used in evangelical immigration discourse in order to critique what are inherently violent contradictory impulses – the welcome of the stranger and the obedience to the State. As Derrida himself writes, hospitality is about justice, which at its core is about the concept of an "absolute hospitality" that eschews the "hospitality by right…law or justice as rights."[10] My dissertation seeks to address the injustice that exists at the border between the United States and Mexico, funded by certain ideologies and readings of the text of Deuteronomy. The premise of a Derridean hospitality will be put in conversation with the instruction to extend hospitality in the laws laid out in Deuteronomy, particularly Deut chs. 14, 16, 23, and 24 from the Deuteronomic Code, since they, too, were radical commands issued to Israel, demanding that kinfolk of that area extend neighbor-love and support to strangers. Israel was situated in the geopolitical world of the Afro-Asiatic world – a group of city-states that routinely refused to permit strangers to dwell within the borders of their nations. Using Derridean hospitality to read the laws of Deuteronomy concerning the stranger and informed by ancient Afro-Asiatic accounts of the *gērim*, my contribution will be to reveal the latent hostility within a violently conditional hospitality that occurs in contemporary evangelical responses to immigration.

[10] Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 25-26. By "rights," Derrida is calling into question the entire project of jurisprudence, that the concepts of law and justice are always already tools of the State and servile to a conditional, hostile hospitality (which is contrasted by his idea of an absolute hospitality – a full openness to the anonymous, unconditional other).

1. An Overview of the Chapters

The first chapter focuses on the history of scholarship regarding the *gēr*, specifically on how biblical scholarship has understood the term (and its attendant social class and lived experiences) through the lenses of historical criticism, redaction criticism, and canonical criticism among others. As briefly mentioned above, my research necessarily leans upon the work of José E. Ramírez Kidd and his seminal work *Alterity and Identity in Israel*. Additionally, since my project is interested in filling the gap of scholarship regarding how immigrants are perceived and treated by the wealthy, powerful movement of evangelical Christians, a thorough survey of Kidd's work is significantly important due to his emphasis on the *gēr* as a weak social underclass requiring protection, his analysis that love for the stranger is based on Joseph's forced migration and treatment in Egypt, and Otherness as a tool to analyze marginalized identities. In addition to Kidd's work, this chapter also covers the broader contributions of other volumes and scholars such as Reinhard Achenbach and Christina van Houten.

The second chapter is a review of the history of scholarship regarding how evangelicals have engaged, both politically and theologically, with the context of immigration, particularly with regard to the past three political administrations (Presidents Donald Trump, Barack Obama, and George W. Bush). The bulk of this chapter provides a detailed history and analysis of the evangelical movement's efforts to support or work against various policies, laws, and politicians. This analysis includes the statistics, detailed policy descriptions, and pollster data of elite and non-elite evangelical reactions and movements in the politics of immigration. My goal for this second chapter is a collation of the data done by Melkonian-Hoover and Kellstedt while also integrating Gallup and other pollsters' records to better understand the evangelical mindsets from a demographic perspective. The combination of the above provides a better and broader picture

of the surprisingly complicated evangelical political landscape over the past thirty years in addition to forming the foundation from which I assess and critique how present-day evangelicals (2021) utilize their hermeneutical approaches to reading biblical texts on the subject of immigrants and immigration in chapter four.

The third chapter provides a critical analysis and evaluation of Derrida's work on hospitality and its methodological significance to the project of assessing evangelical responses to immigration. That analysis centers Derrida's hospitality as disruptive to the common understanding of "welcome" as proffered by evangelical theology and their approach to biblical interpretation. What is often communicated as a tension that remains intact – namely that a sovereign nation may protect its own borders and that the (evangelical) Church should welcome the stranger – typically results in a dehumanizing rhetoric that manifests as a type of objectification. The immigrants from Latin America (and parts elsewhere) are viewed as objects to be controlled and "saved," a type of welcome that Derrida describes as conditional and full of latent hostility. The primary focus of this chapter is the assertion that Derrida rightly identified hospitality as a site for a struggle for power. To aid in my investigation, I conduct a reading of Deuteronomy chs. 14, 16, 23, and 24 within this chapter, building upon Kidd's reading in conjunction with Derrida's statements on hospitality and power. The site for the struggle of power involves how the guests (immigrants) are welcomed with hostility by the hosts (the evangelical Christians). Hospitality, as a concept, allows my project to consider how evangelicals exhibit a commitment to State power while also claiming to welcoming the stranger. I argue that such a tension is not sustainable based on how Derrida's hospitality reveals that hostility will always favor the protection of power for the host. In the case of evangelicals, this results in a hollow, unsustainable theological welcome that is sublimated under the Rule of Law.

The fourth chapter is the space where I examine the specific commitments of evangelicals based on their advocacy and political support as a movement under the lens of the methodological insights of Derrida's hospitality. The chapter contains two investigations. The first investigation (and the primary focus) centers on how the concern for keeping families together – a prominent theme among evangelical responses to immigration found in the Bush, Obama, and Trump eras – interacts with the idea of hospitality. This concern, however, is a failed policy point given the overwhelming support for the Rule of Law. Children have been locked in cages, families who legitimately seek asylum are split apart, and governmental organizations like ICE do not even attempt to track where some children are placed. The second investigation compares how the evangelical defense of certain politicians and policies relies on their hermeneutical assumptions of how Deuteronomic law functions (in addition to their appeal to New Testament passages such as Romans 13 on rule and authority) with the core argument of Derrida's hospitality that it is impossible to advocate for State power and a benevolent welcome for immigrants given how violent State power functions toward immigrants.

The fifth and final chapter concludes my project and accomplishes two tasks. The first task is a brief review of the significant contributions of my project, particularly the collation and analysis of evangelical engagement, interpretation of biblical texts, and political support for policies that ultimately do not and cannot welcome the immigrant in conjunction with how Derridean hospitality analyzes and critiques the unsustainable tension found within the contradictory values of the evangelical movement. The second task is a self-assessment of how well Derrida's hospitality as a concept functioned as a tool of critique in revealing the hostility within the investigated evangelical responses. The conclusion asks a simple yet fundamental question: does hospitality have the hermeneutical ability to charitably read the biblical texts as

well as the evangelical interpretations of those texts to clearly demonstrate the violence inherent in the evangelical movement of the past three decades? Through my own exegetical and hermeneutical work on the chapters of Deuteronomy, I situate my own findings in conversation with both Derrida and Kidd. My close exegetical reading of the texts (hopefully) demonstrates both the strengths and limitations of these two scholars. I argue that hospitality, as a concept, does possess the rigor necessary to charitably understand the *gēr* in both ancient and present contexts and should be considered as a hermeneutical approach for interdisciplinary biblical scholarship.

Chapter 1: History of Scholarship of the Gēr

The Hebrew word *gēr* – "stranger, sojourner, alien"[11] – occurs frequently in the Hebrew Bible (ninety-two times). Though Numbers contains the most instances of the term, every book of the Torah refer to the *gēr* (Genesis, however, mentions the term the same amount as other non-Torah texts like Isaiah or 2 Chronicles). Some of the most well-known verses about the *gēr* come from Deuteronomy such as Deuteronomy 10:18-19: "…who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing. Therefore, you all shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt"; Deuteronomy 23:7 (Hebrew 23:8) "You shall not abhor any of the Edomites, for they are your kin. You shall not abhor any of the Egyptians, because you were a stranger residing in their land"; and Deuteronomy 24:20-21 "When you beat your olive trees, do not strip what remains; it shall be for the stranger, the orphan, and the widow. When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, do not glean what remains; it shall be for the stranger, the orphan, and the widow."

Commensurate with its prevalence, many scholars have attempted to understand the word's usage, its social location, and what the usage suggests about the identity of one who might be a *gēr*. Christina van Houten maintains that the *gēr* is a "non-Israelite living in Israel."[12] Reinhard Achenbach proposed a definition of the *gēr* within the probable agrarian, lineage-based societal context of ancient Israel: "a person, who, in order to protect his life and family, looks for a new home. *Gērim* [strangers] may have their origin among related or non-related ethnic

[11] "*gēr*," *NIDOTTE*, vol 1, 822.
[12] Christina van Houten, *The Alien in Israelite Law* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 107.

groups."[13] These scholars and their work provide the basis for understanding the *gēr* in both the historical and sociological contexts, which will provide this project with the requisite foundation to further explore the themes of hospitality both within the text of Deuteronomy but also in the contexts of evangelical stances on immigration in the United States. Starting with Kidd's work, this next section will present the major contributions to the scholarship on the *gēr*.

While this study centers on the figure of the *gēr*, it is important to situate this term alongside other Hebrew designations for outsiders, particularly *nokrî* (נָכְרִי) and *zār* (זָר). All three terms are often broadly translated as "foreigner," "stranger," or "alien," yet they occupy distinct legal, social, and theological spaces within the Hebrew Bible. The *gēr* refers to the resident alien—someone who lives within Israelite society but lacks landholding status and full kinship ties. The *nokrî*, by contrast, typically denotes a foreign national or ethnic outsider, often with connotations of political, cultural, or religious difference (cf. Deut 15:3; 17:15). The *zār* frequently designates a non-Israelite in cultic contexts—those prohibited from approaching sacred spaces or participating in priestly functions (e.g., Num 1:51; 3:10). As Christoph Koch notes, while all these terms signal "otherness," only the *gēr* is consistently integrated into Israel's covenantal ethics, receiving explicit legal protections and inclusion within communal rituals.[14] The *nokrî* and *zār* are often marked by boundaries—economic, ethnic, or ritual—that emphasize separation rather than solidarity.[15]

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[13] Reinhard Achenbach, "Ger-Nokhri-Toshav-Zar: Legal and Sacral Distinctions Regarding Foreigners in the Pentateuch," in *The Foreigner and the Law: Perspectives from the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East*, Reinhard Achenbach, Rainer Albertz, & Jakob Wohrle (eds) (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2011), 29.
[14] Christoph Koch, "The *gēr* in the Priestly Laws," *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 8 (2008): 5-7.
[15] For example, *nokrî* is frequently used to delineate economic or legal boundaries, such as the allowance of interest-taking from the foreigner (Deut 23:20) or differential debt practices (Deut 15:3). The term also appears in royal and national contexts, prohibiting the appointment of a foreign king over Israel (Deut 17:15). In contrast, *zār* is predominantly cultic, referring to those barred from priestly or sacred functions (Num 3:10; 16:40), and even applied metaphorically to unauthorized persons or objects encroaching upon holiness (Lev 22:10-13). Unlike the *gēr*, neither term carries sustained legal protections or invokes Israel's ethical memory of Egypt.

This distinction justifies the focus of this dissertation. The *gēr* embodies a paradoxical identity: both vulnerable outsider and covenant participant. Unlike the *nokrî*, who difference remains static and external, the *gēr* is a lived presence within Israel's social fabric, invoking legal and ethical responsibility grounded in Israel's own narrative of displacement. The *zār*, meanwhile, represents a category of ritual exclusion, reinforcing holiness codes rather than social justice imperatives. By centering the *gēr*, this study engages the term that most fully encapsulates the tensions of hospitality, belonging, and ethical obligation—which creates the ideal locus for examining how Deuteronomic law constructs and challenges the boundaries of community.

1.1 José E. Ramírez Kidd's Counter Reading

In *Alterity and Identity in Israel: The Ger in the Old Testament*, Kidd contends that the *gēr* "refers…not to a '*person*' but to the '*legal status*' of a man within the community where he presently lives."[16] *Alterity* is divided into four parts with each focusing on a particular aspect of the *gēr* as it appears in the Torah. While most of Kidd's commentary focuses on Deuteronomy (since the term appears there far more than other places in the Torah), he does include a comparison of how *gēr/gērim* function in the Holiness Code (Leviticus) as compared to Deuteronomy. In Part One, Kidd considers how the *gēr* exists as "figura iuridica [juridica]".[17] In Part Two, the *gēr* is investigated as a legal status in contradistinction to the verbal root *gūr*. Part Three discusses how the *gēr* is "figura theologica." And Part Four is a discourse on the unique

[16] José E. Ramírez Kidd*, Alterity and Identity in Israel: The ger in the Old Testament* (*Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*) (Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2012), 16.
[17] This is in contrast to the narrative aspect of the verb gūr (גור) which appears in non-legal texts such as Lot in Sodom (Genesis 19:19), Sarah and Abraham in Egypt (Genesis 12:10), Isaac in Gerar (Genesis 26:3), as well as other larger narratives such as that of Moses' movements in Exodus (Exodus 3:22; 6:4), by the Chronicler (2 Chronicles 15:9; Ezra 1:4), and even in Jeremiah (Jeremiah 35:7; 42:15, 17, 22; 43:2, 5; 44:8, 12, 14, 28).

character of the *gēr* within the Torah in terms of its alterity with some further comments on how foreigners in the Afro-Asiatic world were treated and how Israel's legal system ran counter to most of what was considered normative in that area of the world during the time of the presumed Bronze Age. Though Kidd's work is foundational for my own understanding of the *gēr*, the second and third sections of *Alterity* provide the best overview of his argument (supplemented by information from the first and fourth parts). Expanding further on Kidd's point that the *gēr* ought to be primarily understood as a legal status, his central argument is that the noun *gēr* was actually a later development from the verb *gur*, thus rendering it as a "weak social underclass" that needed protection in their daily life.[18] Perhaps most notably, Kidd understands the collective call to "love the stranger because you were strangers in Egypt" not as a reference to the time of slavery described in Exodus but to Joseph's brothers selling Joseph into slavery and forcing him to migrate to Egypt. As Diane Lipton notes on Kidd's work, this has startling implications since the traditional understanding of that text is that Israelites should recall their bitter treatment as slaves and must treat strangers with kindness yet Kidd's interpretation suggests it is more appropriate that Israelites recall the kindness that the *Egyptians* showed to Joseph and the Israelites when they were strangers.[19] These two points – *gēr* as legal status and that status representing a weak social underclass – form the main thrust of his work on the *gēr*, and I will explore both in more detail beginning with his commentary on the *gēr* as a legal status.

The *gēr*, according to Kidd, is distinct from its associated verbal root of *gwr* for two main reasons: first, it usually refers to a person/legal status without any indication of said person/legal status moving (as would be expected from the verbal root), and second, there is a marked

[18] Kidd, *Alterity*, 68. Kidd's analysis is based upon the different uses of the term between the Deuteronomists and the Priestly authors.
[19] Diane Lipton, review of *Alterity and Identity in Israel: The Ger in the Old Testament*, by José E. Ramírez Kidd, *Vestus Testamentum* 52, no. 1 (2002): 141.

difference in the contexts in which both *gēr* and *gwr* appear. Regarding the first reason, a close reading of the texts involved reveals that the use of *gwr* almost always involves a named figure (Sarah, Abraham, Isaac, Moses, etc.), and often describes the reason for fleeing/sojourning/moving away from a location (e.g., in Gen 12:10ff, Abraham sojourns [*gwr*] from Canaan to Egypt due to hunger).[20] Additionally – which will figure into later sections of this project – it is important to note that *gwr* usually refers to Israelites leaving Israel's territories due to famine[21] or fear of violence[22], yet the verb and its attendant forms are never used to refer to non-Israelite people coming to Israel under related circumstances.[23] Regarding the second reason, Kidd notes that of the eighty-one times that *gur* appears in the Hebrew Bible, only in three instances does it appear in a legal setting.[24] Of the eighty-one times that *gēr* appears in the Hebrew Bible, sixty-one of those instances are in a legal context.[25] This is supplemented by the fact that, as with the first reason, *gur* is attached to a named figure whereas the *gēr* is nameless and vaguely general – for example, "…the *gēr* among you" in Leviticus 17:8. This is further reinforced by the location of the instances of *gēr* throughout the Torah. They span across five legislative corpora: the Covenant Code (Exodus) contains four instances of *gēr* (Exodus 22:20; 23:9-12). Deuteronomy contains twenty instances of the term (Deuteronomy 1:16; 5:14; 10:19; 14:21, 29; 16:11, 14; 23:8; 24: 14, 17, 19, 20, 21; 26:11, 12, 13; 27:19; 28:43; 29:10; 31:12), the

[20] Kidd, *Alterity*, 14.
[21] Genesis 12:10; 26:3; 47:4; Ruth 1:1; 2 Kings 8:1-2; Judges 5:17; Psalm 120:5.
[22] Examples include Cain in Genesis 4:16; Moses in Exodus 2:15; Absalom in 1 Kings 11:17; and the fugitive slaves in Deuteronomy 23:17.
[23] Kidd, *Alterity*, 14.
[24] Kidd, *Alterity*, 16.
[25] Ibid., 17. Kidd notes that there are six other cases where *gēr* appears in a somewhat legal setting, referring back to the triadic construction of the other underclasses (orphans and widows) throughout Deuteronomy: Jeremiah 7:6; 22:3; Ezekiel 22:7, 29; Zechariah 7:10; Malachi 3:5.

Holiness Code (Leviticus) has eighteen instances[26], the P source contains sixteen instances[27], and three other not-grouped legal texts (Exod 20:10; Josh 8:33, 35). From even this simple survey of the differences between *gwr* and *gēr*, it is rather clear that the *gēr*/ *gērim* refer to those who are not from Israel and are distinctly disadvantaged given the overwhelming presence of the term in casuistic settings preventing abuses in general life among the Israelites as well as protections given for their working conditions and rights.

There is also the issue of the *gēr* as the social underclass that deserves some attention with respect to why the *gēr* is unique within Israel's codified laws in contrast with what would have been normative in other Afro-Asiatic nations and cultures.[28] Within Deuteronomy specifically, the term *gēr* appears twenty-one times. The most notable instances are the eleven references within what's known as the Deuteronomic triad[29] – the stranger (*gēr*)-orphan-widow. Most notably, the triad references orbit the problem of food security since eight of the eleven instances deal with "eating-measures."[30] The triad references also make use of what Kidd terms the "Egypt-עבד" formula – "Remember that you were a *slave* in the land of Egypt" (Deuteronomy 24:22).[31] Interestingly, these triad references are not legal and/or cultic in nature, with Kidd dating them to the earlier Deuteronomic reform prior to exilic/post-exilic redactions.[32] The *gēr*, then, as an individual subject (in the other ten references in Deuteronomy) is located

[26] Leviticus 17:8, 10, 12, 13, 15; 18:26; 19:10, 33, 34; 20:2; 22:18; 23:22; 24:16, 22; 25:35, 47 [3x]
[27] Exodus 12:19, 48, 49; Leviticus 16:29; Numbers 9: 14 [2x]; 15: 14, 15 [2x], 16, 26, 29, 30; 19: 10; 35:15; Joshua 20:9
[28] Most instances of a foreigner or stranger appearing as a protected class in Afro-Asiatic literature is typically found in either Egyptian or Assyrian texts. The following discussion contains illustrative examples to demonstrate the existence of the impetus to provide security to an underprivileged and vulnerable class of people rather than re-present an exhaustive treatment of this phenomenon.
[29] This triad should arguably be described as a quartet when considering the inclusion of the Levite as a protected underclass group throughout the prophetic literature.
[30] Kidd, *Alterity*, 35.
[31] Kidd, *Alterity*, 35.
[32] Ibid., 35-36.

squarely within that legal and cultic material likely from exilic/post-exilic redactions, particularly different from the full triad in that a new formula is used – the Egypt-גר formula of "for you were a *gērym* in the land of Egypt" (Deut 10:19).[33] What is novel about the *gēr*'s distinction from the full triad is that it demonstrates how the Deuteronomic code is an expansion on other Afro-Asiatic ethics/customs and laws regarding the "widow-orphan" pair. As a general rule, Afro-Asiatic literature does not treat the stranger in a similar manner to that of the widow-orphan pair. Most Afro-Asiatic literature describes protections for "the poor, the humble, the hungry," in which the widow-orphan pair appears without any mention of a stranger/foreigner/immigrant. In Egyptian literature, two major categories of underprivileged people are typically presented: (1) the "hungry-thirsty-naked" and (2) the widow and the orphan."[34] He suggests that the reason for the absence of the stranger in these texts is that most Afro-Asiatic societies were pyramidal, hierarchical yet closed off to outsiders in structure, meaning that even though the underprivileged ("the poor, weak, deprived, hungry and others") had a place – those groups were protected due to their status as members of those societies.[35] Strangers, by default, are not members of a society since they are immigrating to the society, which is what makes the Deuteronomic code so novel. In essence, the legal material in the Hebrew Bible (specifically in the Deuteronomic Code) is an expansion upon the established Afro-Asiatic "oppressed-poor-need" class of people, transforming that triad into the "stranger (*gēr*)-orphan-widow" we see in Deuteronomy.[36]

The third (though certainly not last) contribution and strength of Kidd's work in *Alterity* and on the *gēr* is his reading-against-the-traditional-grain of the phrase "you shall love the

[33] Ibid., 36.
[34] For example, the Book of the Dead, some hymns such as Hymn to Amon #71 [VII 1-3, translation: Barucq/Daumas, HPEA p. 204-205], the Eloquent Peasant, some examples from Mesopotamian literature like the votive inscription from the cones of Urukagina of Lagash, legal codes, the Hymn to Shamash #57.
[35] Kidd, *Alterity*, 39.
[36] Ibid.

stranger for you were strangers in the land of Egypt"[37] as a reference to Joseph's time in Egypt – not the time period of the Israelite enslavement. Though Deuteronomy, in its pre-exilic and post-exilic traces, typically understands Egypt as the "house of slaves"[38] and "the iron furnace,"[39] the usage of *gēr* in its motive formula with Egypt recalls a different memory of the Israelites' time in Egypt compared to the motive formula mentioned earlier of Egypt-עבד.[40] His argument for this distinction rests on what he presumes to be a Deuteronomic addition of Genesis 15:13, supported by other scholars.[41] In Genesis 15:13a, the text pertaining to the *gēr* reads "גר יהיה זרעך" ("…your offspring will be immigrants"), whereas Genesis 15:13b reads "ועבדום וענו אתם" ("…and they will be enslaved and oppressed…"). Kidd's contention is that the text reveals two separate moments (memories) between these two halves of the verse, the *gēr* referring to an act of sojourning or immigration and the root *'bd* connoting slavery.[42] This construction of sojourn and slavery is paralleled in Deuteronomy 26:5 and 26:6a.[43] Through his reading against the grain, Kidd's distinction shrugs off the conflation often made between Egypt-גר and Egypt-אבד and pushes for an understanding that the editors of Deuteronomy were attempting to provide a framework for a positive collective memory of their ancestor Joseph's reception in Egypt through the use of *gēr* despite the subsequent oppression and enslavement of the Israelites in the hope that legal precedence in their own time would protect similar outsiders/strangers who found themselves in need of rights to secure their living conditions within Israelite communities.

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[37] Deuteronomy 10:19 (see also Deuteronomy 23:8)
[38] Deuteronomy 5:6; 6:12, 21; 7:8; 8:14; 13:5, 10 –"בית עבדם"
[39] Deuteronomy 4:20 – "כור הברזל"
[40] Kidd, *Alterity*, 90-93.
[41] Kidd, *Alterity*, 90-91.
[42] Ibid., 92.
[43] Deuteronomy 26:5 reads "ויגר שם...ויהי־שם לגוי גדול" ("And he sojourned there…and he became a great nation there") against Deuteronomy 26:6a "ויעו אתנו המצרים ויענונו" ("…And the Egyptians brought evil against us, oppressing us…"). Kidd writes that this dual memory of earlier sojourning/movement/immigration is followed by a later oppression in line with the formula in Genesis 15:13, which is his basis for understanding the Genesis passage as a Deuteronomistic addition (*Alterity*, 92).

1.2 Christina van Houten and Casuistic Law

Christina van Houten maintains that the general assumption of the *gēr* was that the term referred to a "non-Israelite living in Israel."[44] Though much of her project is concerned with how the laws of Deuteronomy are connected to issues of authorship, van Houten helpfully provides an exhaustive overview of the redaction levels in conversation with other scholars such as Driver, Frick, and Blenkinsopp. She also rightly understands that most of the Deuteronomic Code section has subcategorizations, such as laws pertaining to social justice as well as the socioeconomic conditions that must have existed within Israelite cutlture at that time. For example, van Houten, upon noting Deuteronomy's particular concern for "marginalized groups of people" suspects that the extensive list of laws that protect a non-Israelite living within Israel (such as the *gēr*) indicates that there was a rift between the upper and lower classes in the society.[45] From what scholarship has gleaned from written texts in antiquity, any written document was a product of wealth and power, and therefore was an object certainly not circulated nor possessed by those of the lower classes. She argues that Deuteronomy and its laws were circulated among the upper-class elites as a means to encourage justice and charity.[46] Within this point, van Houten is also contending that Israelites categorized and analyzed outsiders the same way they did for themselves: by past experiences and by ethnic identity.[47] The God of Israel was the one who brought the Israelites out of slavery; so, too, should Israelites recognize the precarious position of a non-Israelite working and living in the lands of Israel. Lacking financial stability has been (and continues to be) a short path to enslavement and the

[44] Christina van Houten, *The Alien in Israelite Law* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 107.
[45] Christina van Houten, *The Alien in Israelite Law*, 93.
[46] Ibid., 106-107.
[47] Ibid.

laws of Deuteronomy, particularly concerning the *gēr*, were a legal attempt to foreclose such a future for the marginalized in Israelite society.

Many people groups were semi-nomadic during the Bronze Age, often moving due to war or famine. While Deuteronomy itself is an Iron Age II text, these earlier legal traditions remain instructive as comparative models for understanding hospitality and social ethics in the ancient Near East.[48] On the surface, then, the existence of a term for a person unconnected to the ethnic groups of Israel residing within the boundaries of Israel does not appear strange. However, it should be noted here at the outset that most Afro-Asiatic nations were not overly welcoming of foreigners, offering them little in the way of special legal protections or provisions for their life among the dominant people group. Gary Beckman, a scholar of Ancient Near Eastern Civilization and Languages at the University of Michigan, notes that there were "no special provisions concerning foreigners in the Mesopotamian law codes."[49] Specifically writing about the Hittite historical records, many immigrants were present from other lands, ranging from political dissidents to skilled artisans and farmers, and were often welcomed and assimilated into Hittite life due to their value to their local communities. The added value, however, was not enough to provide them legal protection from abuse or neglect. The codified protections for the *gērim* in the Torah represent a fundamental divergence from typical Afro-Asiatic customs given that they were a protected class (at least according to Kidd's analysis) yet were not considered

[48] Although Deuteronomy is widely dated to the Iron Age II period (7th century BCE), my references to "Bronze Age" law codes (e.g., Hammurabi, Eshnunna, Middle Assyrian Laws) are comparative and thematic. These earlier texts form part of the cultural-legal legacy that influenced later Israelite thought and remain useful for contextualizing the ethics of hospitality in Deuteronomy.
[49] Gary Beckman, "Foreigners in the Ancient Near East," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 133 no. 2, 211.

part of the ethnic groups that were permitted to hold land or receive the same rights as native-born Israelites.

1.3 Reinhard Achenbach and his Redactive Approach

There is also the matter of how the *gēr* features in the tripartite law material in the Hebrew Bible — the Covenant Code in Exodus, Deuteronomy, and the Holiness Code in Leviticus. Reinhard Achenbach proposed a definition of the *gēr* within the probable agrarian, lineage-based societal context of ancient Israel: "a person, who, in order to protect his life and family, looks for a new home. *Gērim* [strangers] may have their origin among related or non-related ethnic groups."[50] Referring to the Covenant Code in Exodus, Achenbach considers how the *gērim* were included in the laws of protection for "the personae miserae" — which were the "aliens, widows, orphans, and the poor."[51] What makes this distinction significant is that the *gērim* are, for the first time in Israelite history,[52] grouped with the two other major marginalized and disenfranchised social classes of the society: widows and orphans.[53] Achenbach rightly notes how bizarre these protections are for a non-Israelite given that they include judicial protections under the law equal to that of the well-recognized personae miserae groups like widows and orphans.[54] These

[50] Reinhard Achenbach, "Ger-Nokhri-Toshav-Zar: Legal and Sacral Distinctions Regarding Foreigners in the Pentateuch," in *The Foreigner and the Law: Perspectives from the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East*, Reinhard Achenbach, Rainer Albertz, & Jakob Wohrle (eds) (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2011), 29.
[51] Ibid., 30.
[52] Achenbach, in agreement with other scholars, locates the dating of this legal material to the "redactional composition" of the Covenant Code, suggesting that the protections were part of an inclusio as evidenced by the lawsuit record in Exodus 23:6-9 (Achenbach, "Ger-Nokri-Toshav-Zar," 30). See also Otto, *Vandel*, 38-44; van Houten, *Alien*, 45, 55; Schwienhorst-Schonberger, *Bundesbuch*, 23, 29, 373; Houtman, *Bundesbuch*, 225.
[53] Achenbach, "*Ger-Nokri-Toshav-Zar*," 30.
[54] Ibid.

protections in Exodus 22, then, is expanded upon and developed further in the later two legal sections: Deuteronomy and the Holiness Code.

Deuteronomy, then, a retelling and reinterpretation of laws given in Exodus, demonstrates this commitment to the *gērim*, Achenbach labeling the group as "socially disadvantaged" due to being landless and needing legal protection.[55] This retelling and reinterpretation solidifies and expands upon the rights and protections afforded to the strangers within Israel. For example, Deuteronomy 24:14 records a protection against any abuse toward strangers working in the lands of Israel: "You shall not abuse a needy and destitute worker, whether a brother or a stranger in one of the communities of your land!" Achenbach notes the strong link in the text between the usage of "brother" — a familial term for an ethnic Israelite[56] — and that of "stranger" — the *gēr* — and the equivalence generated by that link. This equal status "means that the ethic of brotherhood provides the foundation for social solidarity beyond genealogical boundaries."[57] Perhaps most notable is the equal status given to the stranger when compared with the social class of the orphan. Deuteronomy 24:17 reads: "You shall not subvert the rights of the stranger or the orphan!" This places the stranger on the same legal grounds as the orphan, one of the established protected classes in Israelite society. Children were already considered a type of third-class citizen with orphans a step below due to the lack of male-lineage-inheritance. Strangers, people who also had no inheritance or claim to land, were viewed (at least by this reinterpretation of the Covenant Code) as having equal standing to orphans under

[55] Achenbach, "*Ger-Nokri-Toshav-Zar*," 30-33.
[56] Achenbach, "*Ger-Nokri-Toshav-Zar*," 31. I included his use of the masculine term to highlight his understanding of siblinghood even though more inclusive language can and should be used to convey the same connection.
[57] Ibid., 32.

the law – a unique and possibly risky position for an ancient Afro-Asiatic nation located at the crossroads of several world powers in that part of the world.

The preceding sections of Deuteronomic law, while progressive and hospitable, does not establish the full equality of the stranger in Israelite life. Despite being protected from abuse while working and from malpractice in the court system, the *gērim* were only partially integrated into the fuller life of the community. In Deuteronomy 16:11, the text reveals that the *gēr* is permitted to participate in Shavu'ot: "You shall rejoiced before YHWH your God with your son and your daughter, your male and female slave, the Levite in your communities and the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow in your midst, at the place where YWHW your God will choose to establish God's name…" and also again for the Festival of Booths in Deuteronomy 16:14. Yet curiously absent from this section is the permission for the *gēr* to participate in the Festival of Passover (Deut 16:1-8). Achenbach notes that this ritual/celebration remains "exclusive…for the Israelites…" possibly due to the performance of the festival carried out by the Israelite men in the community.[58]

1.4 Additional Scholarship Regarding the Gēr

To reiterate some of what is written above, there are several scholars who have provided foundational scholarship regarding the historical and sociological dimensions of the *gēr*. As the others scholars listed above, many define the *gēr* as a non-native Israelite living within the boundaries of Israel and having partial citizenship.[59] From a socio-historical perspective, others

[58] Achenbach, "*Ger-Nokri-Toshav-Zar*," 32.
[59] Alfred Bertholet, *Die Stellung der Israeliten und der Juden zu den Fremden* (Frieburg/Leipzig: J. C. B. Mohr, 1896); Gerhard von Rad, *Das Gottesvolk im Deuteronomium: Inaugural-Dissertation zur*

like James Meek contend that the *gēr* was part of an "indigenous population of Palestine conquered by the Hebrews," which allows him to render *gēr* as "resident alien" given their proposed ethnic origins.[60] Perhaps one of the most influential and compelling theories was offered by Diether Kellerman that the *gēr* most likely refers to refugees fleeing from the collapse of the Northern Kingdom after the fall of Samaria.[61] This lines up with Norbert Lohfink's work that the inclusion of the *gēr* into the established widow-orphan dyad was likely due to the massive migration of displaced Israelites in the north as they fled south after the Assyrian invasion.[62] A northern group of immigrants/refugees/strangers fleeing south to Judah is corroborated by archaeological evidence during Hezekiah's Passover festival in that the city saw noticeable expansion during the eight century BCE, probably due to an increase in population.[63] Yu Suee Yan notes the particular curiosity that all but one of the occurrences of *gēr* in Deuteronomy are singular (the exception being Deut 10:19 when *gērim* refers to the Israelites and their time in Egypt), which is in line with similar legal-textual structures through the rest of the Hebrew Bible in that classes of people often appear in the singular.[64] She rightly argues that the line between the *gēr* and the Israelites is thinner than it appears at first glance, not only

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Erlangung der Lizentiatenwürde (BWANT 47; Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 1929), 45; Pierre Buis and Jacques Leclercq, *Le Deutéronome* (La Sacra Bibbia; Paris: Librairie Lecoffre, 1963), 179.

[60] James Theophile Meek, "The Translation of Gêr in the Hexateuch and Its Bearing on the Documentary Hypothesis," *JBL* 49 (1930): 172-80.

[61] Diether Kellerman, "*gûr*," *TWAT* 5:979-91, pp. 985-86 (translated in 1975 in *TDOT* 2:439-49). See also Peter Schmidt, "De Vreemdeling in Israël," *Coll* 23 (1993). 227-40; Matty Cohen, "Le 'ger' biblique et son statut socio-religieux," *RHR* 207 (1990):

[62] Norbert Lohfink, "Poverty in the Laws of the Ancient Near East and of the Bible," *Theological Studies* 52 (1991): 41.

[63] Magen Broshi, "The Expansion of Jerusalem in the reigns of Hezekiah and Manasseh," *IEJ* 24 (1974): 21-26; ibid., "La Population de l'ancienne Jérusalem," *RB* 82 (1975): 5-14; Nahman Avigad, *Discovering Jerusalem* (Nashville: Nelson, 1983), 26-31; Andrew G. Vaughn, *Theology, History, and Archaeology in the Chronicler's Account of Hezekiah* (SBLABS 4; Atlanta: Scholars, 1999), 19-80; Israel Finkelstein, "The Two Kingdoms: Israel and Judah" and Amihai Mazar, "The Divided Monarchy: Comments on Some Archaeological Issues" in *The Quest for the Historical Israel: Debating Archaeology and the History of Early Israel* (ABS 17; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 148, 154, 155, 157, 163, 167.

[64] Yu Suee Yan, "The Alien in Deuteronomy," *The Bible Translator* vol. 60, no. 2, April 2009:112.

because of the shared experience of the Israelites and their time in Egypt as *gērim* themselves but also due to Deuteronomy 29:10-11, which indicates that the *gēr* is brought into what Yan describes as a "covenant relationship."[65] Due to the requirement that *gērim* living with the boundaries of Israel are required to follow the laws of the Torah (Deut 31:12) suggest that they are, on some level, authenticated members of the community since peoples from other nations were not permitted access to the cultic rituals. These observations are confirmed by texts outside the Torah where Israelite tribes are referred to using a form of *gēr*. For example, Judges 19:16 presents an Ephraimite who lived at Gibeah with the Benjaminites who is called a *gēr*. 2 Chronicles 15:9, during King Asa's reign, people from the tribes of Manasseh, Simeon, and Ephraim are described as *gērim*. 2 Chronicles 30:25 also records *gērim* from Israel participating in Hezekiah's Passover festival while living in Judah. All of this scholarship strongly suggests that the *gēr* has strong social ties to native Israelites (both specifically in the case of the Northern Kingdom and generally to all Israelites) despite the distance between native and non-native Israelite found in Deuteronomy's presentation of the term.

1.5 Some Levitical Insight

Leviticus is often analyzed and treated in terms of its *Sitz im Leben* or in terms of the Documentary Hypothesis yet this somewhat bewildering text offers a unique perspective into the central, defining aspect of what separates the *gēr* from the Israelite: land ownership. Of the scholarship surveyed, most agree that the main diagnostic factor in determining whether someone was an Israelite or an outsider was due to family and the ties of those families to

[65] Yan, "The Alien," 113.

particular land rights. This is where the passage of Leviticus 25 becomes especially fascinating to consider since it effectively renders any native Israelite claim to land null and void. Leviticus 25:23 reads "The land must not be permanently sold because the land is mine. You are only *immigrants* and foreign guests of mine." The word for "immigrants" is *gērim* – strangers, foreigners, the not-from-here people. The passage continues: "Throughout the whole land that you possess, you must allow for the land to be repurchased."[66] The land does not exist to any one family permanently. Previously in the chapter are laws that stipulate regulations regarding the Jubilee year, so it is not coincidence that such an immense law regarding justice for the land is found alongside a law that essentially casts the Israelites in the same legal framework as that of the *gēr* who technically does not belong within the land of Israel. It was imperative that Israelites understood this leveling between ethnic insider and outsider if the marginalized were to have any hope of fair treatment under the law. What is telling is the fact that this law in Leviticus 25 exists in the first place. As a general rule, casuistic laws only come into practice due to repeated, real-world events that necessitate such a protection or punishment. Reading into this, strangers in the land being barred from communal life ceremonies, treated unfairly or abusively at work, or other forms of oppression were repeated occurrences that brought about the laws in the Deuteronomic Code to protect their wellbeing. Leviticus 25:23-25 also stands as an indication that the wealthy upper class of Israelites needed a strong, legal precedent that they were on equal footing with the *gērim* in their communities since the land legally belongs to God and must be held loosely.

[66] Leviticus 25:24

1.6 Thematic Survey on the Gēr

Furthermore, to better illustrate the history of scholarship regarding the *gēr*, this project will also include a thematic survey of the *gēr* in the Hebrew Bible by focusing on three aspects that constitute a framework for an ethico-political perspective within the biblical corpus: exploitation in law, humane treatment, and love. This survey serves as a mechanism to review previous scholarship on the intersection of *gēr* and hospitality (or the lack thereof).

In Exodus 23:1-9, there is an escalation of prohibitions against injustice that climaxes with the treatment extended to the *gēr*. Exodus 23:9 states: "You shall not oppress a stranger; you know the heart of the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt." Fleur Houston notes that the preceding prohibitions against injustice were capable of executing innocent victims (based on false testimony [Exodus 23:7] or corruption that makes it "impossible for the innocent to get a fair hearing" [Exodus 23:8]).[67] The following section (Exodus 23:10-12) contains "humanitarian provisions" for the treatment of vulnerable people: the poor, the slave, and the *gēr*. Houston contends that the *gēr*'s membership among vulnerable groups of people (e.g., the poor, the slave) suggests that "the *gēr* was not being treated fairly either in the courts or in the community."[68] This aligns with both Kidd and van Houten in terms of the socio-politico-economic strata that the *gērim* would have found themselves in – a class of non-Israelites facing an uphill struggle against relatively wealthy, land-owning Israelites who had power over their work and their lives. It is also important to recall Kidd's distinct reading of the phrase "for you

[67] Fleur Houston, *You Shall Love the Stranger as Yourself: The Bible, Refugees and Asylum* (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2015), 72. It is worth noting that the prohibition against perverting justice through deceit (Ex 23:7) by "making an indictment on the basis of false testimony or insufficient evidence" could "condemn an innocent person to death." Houston rightly concludes that such actions constitute "judicial murder" and the judge would have been held responsible to YHWH.
[68] Houston, *You Shall Love*, 73.

were strangers in the land of Egypt" as a reference to Joseph's time in jail and subsequent rise to power as a foreigner. Justice is predicated on the singularity receiving what is equitable given the circumstances, which in this case means that justice for the *gēr* requires that Israelites embody their past as strangers in a different land. Here, too, is a canonical resonance with Leviticus 25:23-24, reminding the Israelites that they do not hold their ancestral lands permanently – God is the one who owns the land and perceives the Israelites as immigrants and foreigners. These Israelite laws both proscribe against any oppression of the stranger and prescribe humane treatment of the stranger with the same compassion afforded to the poor and the slave.

Exodus 23:1-9 also contains some indications of hospitality's power dynamics in terms of the host-guest relationship. With regard to the *gēriym*, we can read them as the guest, as the ones standing trial without the same legal standing as an Israelite would innately possess. This set of prescriptive laws works toward what Derrida conceived of as an absolute hospitality since the guest receives a degree of protection and the host's power is diminished in terms of relinquishing some power and rights in order for the *gērim* be treated with respect and compassion. Yet the chasm between the host and the guest remains intact. Casuistic laws are created when the conflict resolved by the law has occurred enough times to warrant the recorded protections and punishments. The host (the courts/Israelites) is being reminded through the prescriptions in Exodus 23:1-9 *so that* the strangers are given fair trial or to receive the various provisions necessary to sustain life. Without such protections, the *gērim* had been subject to neglect, abuse, and unfair hearings. Even in what appears to be a moral, upstanding legal code, hospitality reveals its absence in the spaces between the host and the guest, previously violent and now only tenuously civil.

Hebrew Bible legal texts, like many Mesopotamian legal codes, contain sections of law that are concerned with ethical treatment of oppressed and vulnerable people groups. In Deuteronomy, there is a triad of marginalized peoples: the *gēr*, the orphan, and the widow. Some scholars, such as Houston, suggest that this formulaic triad "may be taken to refer to the helpless, marginalized group of people who were emerging in the late monarchy…the widow and the fatherless child with no man to support them and the landless *gēr*…"[69] Deuteronomy 16:11-12 connects the "religious and social realities"[70] of Israelite life, calling on citizens to "Rejoice before the LORD your God – you and your sons and your daughters, your male and female slaves, the Levites resident in your towns, as well as *the strangers*, *the orphans*, and *the widows* who are among you…" The disenfranchised were included in the communal celebration.

The final, and perhaps most important, aspect of treatment extended to the *gēr* is love. Israel is frequently commanded to imitate the actions of YHWH. In Deuteronomy 10:17-19, this imitation is explicitly demanded: "For the HOLY ONE your God is God of gods and lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribe, who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the *strangers*, providing them with food and clothing. You shall also love the *stranger*, for you were *strangers* in the land of Egypt." Houston rightly understands that the ethic is grounded "in a motive clause" of the past experience of the Israelites: "for you were *gērim* in the land of Egypt."[71] It was imperative that Israelites understood the vulnerability of the stranger because "they know what it feels like; they can identify with the *gēr* because they have themselves been *gērim* [in Egypt, in the Babylonian exile]."[72] Immigration, according to these ancient Hebrew texts, orbits the principle of

[69] Houston, *You Shall Love,* 74.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Houston, *You Shall Love*, 75.
[72] Ibid.

reciprocity: "…you know what it is like to be oppressed, so see to it that you do not in your turn oppress the *gēr*; love him! (sic)"[73]

1.7 Conclusion

The *gēr* is what I would describe as an understood enigma in terms of how it functions textually and to whom the word might have applied to in Israelite communities. The social, legal term is understood since the scholarship of Kidd, van Houten, and Achenbach all make clear that the term did not apply to Israelites and only ever appears in connection with those outside the ethnic, kin-connected peoples of those living in Israelite territory. We also can say the term is understood on account of the economic and legal contexts in which it appears in the texts of the Torah. The *gērim* experienced a period (or periods) of harsh, abusive, and negligent treatment that apparently led to the creation of legal protections for their livelihoods in terms of their work, their participation in the religious festivals, and their induction into the established widow-orphan dyad of the *personae miserae*/underprivileged underclasses. Yet the *gēr* is also an enigma in that the texts never reveal a proper noun associated with the term nor any indication from which regions these outsiders may have originated. If not for the legal contexts, the term is abstract and almost elusive, especially given the overall lack of legal protections extant for foreigners/strangers in other Afro-Asiatic societies that were coterminous with (or slightly earlier than) Israelite society. To deepen both the understood and enigmatic aspects of the term *gēr*, let us now consider the next chapter to investigate how the term takes on contemporary form in the political positions of evangelicals on immigration.

[73] Houston, *You Shall Love*, 75.

1.8 Framing the Argument: From the Gēr to Hostipitality

This project began with a focused question: what does it mean to love the stranger, and how is that love betrayed when hospitality is reduced to control? At the center of Deuteronomy's ethical vision is the *gēr*—the stranger, sojourner, or immigrant—whose presence demands not just tolerance but justice. While many have explored the *gēr* from historical and theological perspectives, this dissertation engages the term through the lens of *hospitality*—a concept that reveals its deepest ethical tensions when placed under philosophical pressure.

To this end, I bring the ancient legal texts of Deuteronomy into dialogue with modern philosophical critiques, particularly Jacques Derrida's theory of *hostipitality*—the inescapable entanglement of welcome and exclusion, gift and power. Where biblical laws command love for the gēr, Derrida's framework asks whether such love is ever truly possible when conditioned by law, borders, and sovereignty.

However, hospitality is not only a matter of philosophy; it is a lived ethical posture. That is why this project also attends to the theological and political structures that shape evangelical Christian engagement with immigration in the contemporary United States. Evangelical responses to immigration often echo the conditionality Derrida critiques: offering humanitarian aid while upholding brutal legal systems. These contradictions raise the stakes for how biblical hospitality is interpreted, and for whom it is ultimately meant.

Each chapter that follows builds toward an integrative argument:

- **Chapter 2** surveys the theological and political terrain of evangelical immigration discourse, mapping the competing commitments to mission, state power, and biblical hospitality.
- **Chapter 3** introduces the conceptual tools of *phenomenological double reading*, combining Derrida's deconstruction with Husserl's insights into intentionality and consciousness. This methodological pairing opens space to encounter the biblical text on its own terms while attending to the ethical experience of the stranger.
- **Chapter 4** applies this method directly to selected texts from Deuteronomy. Through close reading, it examines how biblical hospitality operates as both a legal command and a site of ethical risk, revealing tensions between divine justice and human law.
- **Chapter 5** synthesizes these insights and considers what they reveal about evangelical theology, the politics of immigration, and the continuing relevance of the gēr as a moral and theological category.

This project ultimately contends that hospitality—especially as envisioned in Deuteronomy—demands more than legal compliance or spiritual abstraction. It requires a reckoning with power, vulnerability, and the Other. And it requires that we recognize the stranger not as a guest in our house, but as someone who may once have called it home.

Chapter 2: The Political and the Christian – Responses to Immigration

Following the legal and theological exploration of the *gēr* in Deuteronomy, this chapter shifts focus to the modern terrain in which the stranger is welcomed or rejected: the social, political, and theological context of immigration in the United States. Specifically, it examines how evangelical Christians—who often claim scriptural mandates to love the stranger—have responded to immigration in practice. Rather than assuming a unified voice, this chapter traces a range of evangelical attitudes, from humanitarian concern to outright exclusion, across three recent presidential administrations. The goal is to frame these modern responses within the broader ethical discourse of hospitality and to prepare for the next chapter's application of philosophical and phenomenological methods to this terrain. Where Deuteronomy sets a foundational ethical precedent, evangelical practice exposes the limits and contradictions of hospitality in action.

The intersection of immigration and broadly conservative trajectories of Christian groups is one fraught with overlapping layers of politics, theology, and history. In this chapter, I would like to accomplish three major tasks. The first task is to present an overview of the recent immigration policies (within the last two decades) as they intersect conservative Christian responses. These are typically represented by evangelical Christians in the United States, but I will address how variegated the term "evangelical" is in a later section. Conservative Christian responses can also be found in non-evangelical groups such as the United Stated Council of Catholic Bishops. Secondly, I will provide a view into the evangelical theological mindset more specifically in terms of their engagement with the concepts of immigration and hospitality. Though an exhaustive study of this deserves its own full study, my aim here is to provide enough

of a cross-section for the reader to better understand what might be described as typical evangelical attitudes toward immigration and the idea of hospitality since each will inform my own translations, analysis, and interpretations in chapter four. Finally, this chapter's third task is to present an informative summary of the history, particularly with regard to economic realities, of immigration between the United States and Mexico, focused on the legislative impact on how the North American Free Trade Agreement (later the United States Mexico Canada Agreement) has contributed our present immigration landscape. With all of these pieces, I hope to demonstrate that a critical understanding of how Christians engage immigration is necessary to address the violent, inhospitable outcomes, both lived and theoretical, for undocumented people living in the United States.

Far from being a monolith, the evangelical subset of Protestant engagement in United States immigration policies is varied and complex. Ruth Melkonian-Hoover and Lyman Kellstedt produced a staggeringly comprehensive look into the varied responses of evangelicals over the past one hundred years, going back as far as the 1920s and tracking the changing attitudes (and similar motifs) through the decades. Their book, *Evangelicals and Immigration: Fault Lines Among the Faithful*, provides this exploration with the most recent scholarship (it covers up until early 2019) on responses to immigration from the evangelical community. The strength of this body of knowledge is not only in its assessment and organization of how groups like the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE), Christian Coalition (CC), Evangelicals for Social Action (ESA), and many others have responded to the immigration crisis but how those in leadership of those organizations compare against non-evangelical groups like the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference (NHCLC). Their work extends into demographic polling as well, particularly regarding polling

data on rank-and-file responses to various aspects of immigration and U.S. policies/proposed laws. The principal conflict forms around the split between the competing interests of large, national leadership talking points (which are surprisingly in favor of critical immigration reform) and the staunchly opposed lay person opinions of whether to aid undocumented workers in its analysis of extended (or rejected) hospitality shown to the stranger.

While there is a history of evangelical engagement with the political aspects of immigration that can be traced earlier than the 2000s, it is the span of twenty years, from 2000 to 2020, that reveals the inherent tensions between evangelical groups in the United States. Broadly speaking, evangelical responses split along the common fault line of Critical Immigration Reform (CIR), which began during the Bush (George W.) administration. During the early years of the 2000s, most evangelical voices were pro-CIR. Those who opposed CIR largely did not express their opinions via mainstream media outlets.[74] Among those more progressive (who favored CIR) were the Evangelicals for Social Action (ESA), World Relief, and the Mennonite Church USA (which was in conjunction with Sojourners and the NHCLC). These groups worked to form a coalition called Christians for Comprehensive Immigration Reform (CCIR) – an organization with a platform that largely resembled the USCCB: "…the organization advocated for humane border enforcement, the reuniting of families, a path to citizenship, a guest worker program independent of employers, and efforts to address root causes of migration."[75] One critical feature of the Bush Era evangelical response to immigration policies was the criticism of a bill known as the Sensenbrenner bill (HR 4437) by the Assemblies of God, the largest Pentecostal denomination in the United States. Their ire at the bill was rooted in a perceived

[74] Ruth M. Melkonian-Hoover and Lyman A. Kellstedt, *Evangelicals and Immigration: Fault Lines Among the Faithful* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2019), 52.
[75] Melkonian-Hoover and Kellstedt, *Evangelicals and Immigration,* 52.

interference "in their ministry to migrants" since it could potentially jeopardize the legality of working with undocumented immigrants.[76] It is also important to note that, during these years, many major players in the evangelical movement provided vocal support to pro-CIR policies, such as the National Association of Evangelicals, the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, and a number of Black evangelical groups like the Church of God in Christ [COGIC]).[77]

The Obama Era resulted in an increase for pro-CIR statements, activism, and more coalition building. It was during this era that the Evangelical Immigration Table (EIT) was created (largely headed by the National Association of Evangelicals). But this period also fostered ecumenical coalition building as mainline Protestants, Catholics (largely headed by the USCCB), and Jews (largely the ADC) joined forces.[78] Most of the work for CIR revolved around calling for the end of mass deportations and voicing support for the Dreamers.[79] But during this era, the first soundings of white evangelical voices critical of CIR began to be heard despite remaining the minority camp. However, as a counterbalance, many previously silent Asian evangelicals began to join the movement lead by Hispanic evangelicals.[80] While somewhat surprising that a group of Christians that tends to swing conservative on almost every issue would champion the cause of immigration, it is less surprising when the underlying motivation

[76] Border Protection, Antiterrorism and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005, H.R. 4437, 109th Cong., (2005). This bill is often referred to as the Sensenbrenner Bill among scholars of immigration law because the legislation's primary sponsor was Rep. F. James Sensenbrenner, Jr (R-WI).
[77] Melkonian-Hoover and Kellstedt, *Evangelicals and Immigration*, 52-54.
[78] Melkonian-Hoover and Kellstedt, *Evangelicals and Immigration*, 55.
[79] "Dreamers" refers to children who were brought into the United States without any documentation but are allowed to attend school and work in the country without being deported due to the protections of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), an executive order passed by President Obama. The name "Dreamer" (more accurately – DREAMer) comes from the still-unpassed piece of legislation called the DREAM Act (Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors).
[80] Melkonian-Hoover and Kellstedt, *Evangelicals and Immigration*., 55.

for supporting CIR routinely manifests as a desire for evangelical mission.[81] Galen Carey, Government Affairs Director for the National Association of Evangelicals, said in an interview: "A fundamental concern of our members…is that the church's role is to share the good news, and evangelize; and they think God has brought these people here. We've been sending missionaries out for centuries…now God has brought people here, and we're supposed to reach them right here." But what vocal support existed in favor of critical immigration reform would be quickly drowned out by the vehement anti-immigration rhetoric by some evangelicals during the Trump Era.

The Trump Era saw the full spectrum of evangelical engagement on immigration between those continuing to advocate and work toward CIR and those with more fundamentalist leanings publicly calling for a bigger wall and limits on Muslim immigrants and refugees – both of which were positions that President Trump enacted during his administration. Two of the prominent figures that rose in their political power were Franklin Graham and Jerry Falwell, Jr: "…both showed support for Trump's travel ban, limits of Muslim migration, limits on migration in general, and the border wall…"[82] Melkonian-Hoover and Kellstedt found that these evangelical elites and their bases were largely empowered and emboldened to finally critique and mobilize against CIR due to Trump's rhetoric on the issue.[83] The staggering revelation of this shift from

[81] Melkonian-Hoover and Kellstedt's interview with Galen Carey, Government Affairs Director for the NAE, March 26, 2010, via telephone (*Evangelicals and Immigration*, 57).
[82] For more detailed read on these positions, see Eugene Scott, "Billy Graham's Son: We Should Halt All Immigration," *CNN*, December 15, 2015. https://www.cnn.com/2015/12/15/politics/franklin-graham-halt-all-immigration/index.html; Billy Hallowell, "'Wake Up': Franklin Graham Has a Tough Message for Critics of Trump's Border Wall and Immigration Policies," *Faithwire*. https://www.faithwire.com/2017/03/31/wake-up-franklin-graham-has-a-tough-message-for-critics-of-trumps-border-wall-and-immigration-policies/; Lorie Johnson, "Franklin Graham: Trump's Refugee Order Is Right, but This Still Needs to Happen," *Christian Broadcasting Network*, February 1, 2017. http://www1.cbn.com/cbnnews/world/2017/february/franklin-graham-trump-refugee-order-is-right-but-this-still-needs-to-happen/; Sarah Rodriguez, "Falwell Speaks: Interview Addresses Trump Endorsement," *Liberty Champion*, March 18, 2016. https://www.liberty.edu/champion/2016/03/falwell-speaks/.
[83] Melkonian-Hoover and Kellstedt, *Evangelicals and Immigration*, 61.

near silence to full-blown vitriolic mobilization against more open immigration policies is that the vast lay population of white evangelicals completely support xenophobic and racist policies that would make CIR impossible.[84] This is not to suggest that there were not evangelical elites who did not push back against Trump's anti-immigration rhetoric since several Evangelical Immigration Table members did write articles against the moves made by the administration.[85] One notable example of this was Russell Moore of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, who was targeted by pro-Trump conservatives within the Southern Baptist Convention, and only managed to maintain his position after a "denominational vote, apologizing for his role in contributing to the 'Trump divide'."[86]

The border wall, however, demonstrates a key issue with the pro-CIR group of evangelicals, namely that they were willing to relent on the construction of a bigger wall in hopes of a "bargain that would enable other immigration reforms to be achieved."[87] Some of these leaders, like Rev. Samuel Rodriguez, who was on Trump's evangelical advisory board, believed it was "God-given accessibility" to be part of what he described as a "both/and, not either/or" process of seeking justice for Dreamers while conceding to the construction of the larger border wall.[88] But perhaps most surprising of all the changes to evangelical responses (both elite and laity) during the Trump era was the willingness of large sections of white

[84] Melkonian-Hoover and Kellstedt, *Evangelicals and Immigration,* 61. This is largely covered in chs. 4-6 in *Evangelicals and Immigration*. As an example, however, Evangelical Protestants, between the years 2006 and 2016, as surveyed by Pew Research and PRRI, showed an increase of 7% (54% in 2006 via PRRI survey) in believing that "immigrants are a burden on our country" (up to 61% in 2016 via PRRI survey). This is sharp contrast to other groups like Black Protestants and Latino Protestants who saw a significant decrease in this opinion of 27% and 13%, respectively (56%-29%; 27%-14%), based on Pew surveys from 2006 and 2016 (table 4.4, *Evangelicals and Immigration*, 95).
[85] Melkonian-Hoover and Kellstedt, *Evangelicals and Immigration,* 62.
[86] Tim Moody, "The Survival of a Southern Baptist Who Dared to Oppose Trump," *CNN*, July 2017. https://www.cnn.com/interactive/2017/politics/state/russell-moore-donald-trump-southern-baptists/.
[87] Melkonian-Hoover and Kellstedt, *Evangelicals and Immigration*, 64.
[88] Ibid. Interview conducted by Melkonian-Hoover and Kellstedt in May 2018.

evangelicals to ground their arguments solely on cultural and national terms without any citation of biblical or theological evidence when clamoring for "security-focused migration policies and emphasizing the rule of law."[89] It is upon these shifts in (predominately white) evangelical responses during the Trump administration that Derrida's work on hostility-within-hospitality reveals itself within most evangelical camps ability to provide hospitality to the stranger through their vocal support of harsh policies, unfair court proceedings, and extralegal organizations like Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

The second Trump administration has swiftly implemented a series of executive orders and policy shifts that mark a return to—and intensification of—the restrictionist approach to immigration policy that characterized his first term. Among the most significant measures are the cessation of birthright citizenship for children born to non-citizen parents,[90] the authorization of military personnel for direct border enforcement,[91] and the indefinite suspension of refugee admissions.[92] These actions, while consistent with Trump's established rhetoric on national sovereignty and border security, signal an evolution in executive power that further blurs the distinction between the role of the state as sovereign enforcer and the role of evangelical and political actors as intermediaries in the discourse of immigration.

Drawing upon the groundwork of this chapter, this section will examine how the policies of Trump's second term exhibit both continuity and disjunction with the broader historical trajectory of U.S. immigration policy, particularly as it relates to evangelical responses.

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[89] Melkonian-Hoover and Kellstedt, *Evangelicals and Immigration*, 74.
[90] Vox. "What Trump's Executive Orders Tell Us About the Future of Immigration." *Vox*, January 2025. https://www.vox.com/politics/396083/trump-executive-order-immigration-border-birthright-citizenship.
[91] The New Yorker. "The Unchecked Authority of Trump's Immigration Orders." *The New Yorker*, January 2025. https://www.newyorker.com/news/the-lede/the-unchecked-authority-of-trumps-immigration-orders.
[92] Time. "Trump's Day One Executive Orders: What They Mean for Immigration, Energy, and Civil Rights." *Time*, January 2025. https://time.com/7208691/trump-day-one-presidential-actions-executive-orders-memorandum-proclamation-explainer.

Specifically, this analysis will explore the persistence of nativist and nationalist logics in immigration restrictionism, the evolving evangelical engagement with state authority, and the ways in which these executive actions reinforce the Derridean framework of hostipitality—the intersection of hospitality and hostility within state mechanisms of immigration enforcement.

The policies enacted so far during Trump's second term are best understood as part of a longstanding pattern of restrictionist policies that, while historically bipartisan, have been increasingly consolidated under the ideological framework of conservative nationalism. As I stated earlier in this chapter, the evangelical movement's engagement with immigration reform has historically oscillated between a humanitarian impulse—motivated by the evangelical mission to proselytize —and an entrenched commitment to state sovereignty. These dual commitments have long been in tension, particularly among white evangelical groups, who have both supported comprehensive immigration reform (as seen in the Bush and early Obama eras) and championed restrictionist policies (which occurred during the latter Obama and first Trump eras).

The second Trump administration's move to revoke birthright citizenship represents a radicalization of existing nativist logics, shifting from a rhetoric of border security to one of demographic exclusion. While the termination of birthright citizenship is widely regarded as unconstitutional,[93] its symbolic power within the evangelical political imagination cannot be

[93] The Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution explicitly grants birthright citizenship, stating: "All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the state wherein they reside." Legal scholars and constitutional experts widely agree that any executive order attempting to alter this principle would directly contradict Supreme Court precedent, particularly *United States v. Wong Kim Ark*, 169 U.S. 649 (1898), which affirmed that children born in the U.S. to non-citizen parents are citizens by birth. Any attempt to revoke birthright citizenship via executive order would likely face immediate legal challenges and require either a constitutional amendment or a Supreme Court ruling overturning *Wong Kim Ark*. See Garrett Epps, *Democracy Reborn: The Fourteenth Amendment and the Fight for Equal Rights* (New York: Henry Holt, 2006), 215–218; and Erwin Chemerinsky, *The Case Against the Supreme Court* (New York: Viking, 2014), 178.

overstated. This measure extends beyond the realm of enforcement and into the domain of ontological belonging—asserting that legal status, and with it national identity, is not a birthright but a conditional privilege. In the evangelical discourse analyzed above, the paradox of welcome— the tension between the biblical mandate to love the stranger and the commitment to the Rule of Law—finds new expression in the rhetoric of deservingness.[94] This idea of deservingness is particularly useful in that the concepts of hospitality, belonging, and citizenship are increasingly framed as privileges rather than rights. By reframing citizenship as an earned status rather than an innate right, Trump's policy aligns with the broader evangelical impulse to define hospitality in terms of moral worthiness rather than unconditional welcome.

Similarly, the authorization of active-duty military personnel for border enforcement marks a significant escalation in the securitization of immigration. While previous administrations, including both Bush and Obama, deployed National Guard troops to assist with surveillance and logistics, Trump's directive explicitly frames unauthorized migration as an "invasion."[95] This rhetorical shift is significant not only in its legal implications but also in its resonance with white evangelical nationalism. Evangelical support for immigration enforcement has often been couched in theological narratives of divine ordination and national purity. The militarization of the border reinforces the hostipitality paradox: the nation-state, positioned as

[94] I use this term in conjunction with how the perception of a conditional hospitality might be understood among those from an insider perspective of citizenship and residency might perceive immigrants/outsiders. However, this term does have a history of its own in adjacent studies that I found helpful in my research yet were not specific enough to be included in the dissertation. See Hiroshi Motomura, *Americans in Waiting: The Lost Story of Immigration and Citizenship in the United States* (Oxford University Press, 2006) and Lindsay Pérez Huber, "Deservingness and the Limits of Solidarity," *Latino Studies* 14, no. 3 (2016): 271-292 for a broader understanding of the idea of deservingness.

[95] The New Yorker, "The Unchecked Authority of Trump's Immigration Orders," *The New Yorker*, January 2025, https://www.newyorker.com/news/the-lede/the-unchecked-authority-of-trumps-immigration-orders.

both the gracious host and the sovereign enforcer, extends conditional hospitality to those who conform while enacting violence upon those who do not.

While Trump's restrictionist policies follow historical patterns, his second term also marks a fundamental departure from previous immigration frameworks in terms of the expansion of executive power. One of the most striking shifts is the indefinite suspension of refugee admissions, a policy that not only subverts international norms but also disrupts the longstanding evangelical engagement with refugee resettlement. Evangelical organizations such as World Relief and the National Association of Evangelicals have historically played a pivotal role in advocating for refugee protections, often positioning themselves as intermediaries between the state and vulnerable populations. However, the second Trump administration's policies reflect a growing realignment between white evangelicalism and the state's exclusionary mechanisms.

This shift is exemplified by the elimination of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) programs within federal agencies. While seemingly distinct from immigration policy, the dismantling of DEI structures signals a broader ideological movement toward homogenization—a rejection of multiculturalism that aligns with the ethno-nationalist undercurrents of Trump's base.[96] The implications of these policy shifts extend beyond the immediate legal consequences to the broader ethical and philosophical frameworks that govern evangelical attitudes toward the stranger. As Derrida's concept of hostipitality makes clear, the act of welcome is always already entangled with exclusionary power structures. In the case of contemporary evangelicalism, this exclusionary logic is not merely political but deeply theological: the stranger is welcomed insofar as they can be assimilated into the host's moral and national identity. The second Trump

[96] Time, "Trump's Day One Executive Orders: What They Mean for Immigration, Energy, and Civil Rights," *Time*, January 2025, https://time.com/7208691/trump-day-one-presidential-actions-executive-orders-memorandum-proclamation-explainer.

administration's policies thus do not simply reinforce existing evangelical attitudes toward immigration but further embed them within a framework of state violence and exclusion.

The second Trump administration's immigration policies mark both a continuation of and a rupture with previous trends. On one hand, they reinforce the historical evangelical commitment to state sovereignty and legal order, aligning with the long-standing tension between humanitarianism and restrictionism. On the other hand, they reflect a radicalization of executive power that has further eroded the traditional evangelical role as a mediating force in immigration discourse.

In the context of Derrida's hostipitality, these policies exemplify the inescapable violence embedded within the very structures of welcome. The revocation of birthright citizenship, the militarization of the border, and the suspension of refugee admissions all function as mechanisms of conditional hospitality—gestures that define belonging not through inherent human dignity but through legal and ideological compliance. Evangelical support for these measures, whether explicit or tacit, suggests an ongoing transformation in the movement's engagement with immigration: what was once framed as a tension between mission and state power is increasingly becoming a wholesale embrace of the latter.

2.1 The Spectrum of Christian Responses to Immigration

As a point of contrast, I want to consider how the United States Council of Catholic Bishops has responded to immigration and their own policies as a means of understanding the evangelical positions. The USCCB advocates for Critical Immigration Reform in step with evangelicals. This moderate group of Catholics has a platform based on six elements: earned legalization,

future worker program, family-based immigration reform, restoration of due process rights, addressing root causes, and enforcement.[97] From this list, three items should be analyzed here to provide some contrast to evangelical positions: earned legalization and enforcement. The first term, earned legalization, could be considered their amnesty portion of the policy since it advocates for the opportunity "that would allow foreign nationals of good moral character who are living in the United States to apply to adjust their status to obtain lawful permanent residence."[98] The second platform worth exploring here is the advocacy for family-based immigration reform. Parallel to evangelical groups, the USCCB orients its political thinking in terms of allowing families to remain together. This drive to protect the family appears to be a shared trait among all Christian organizations involved in the immigration landscape. The third term – enforcement – is problematic for a group that appears to express positive intentions for aiding immigrants already in this country: "The U.S. Catholic Bishops accept the legitimate role of the U.S. government in intercepting unauthorized migrants who attempt to travel to the United States."[99] This statement of deference to the authority of law in the U.S. also appears in The Catholic Catechism: "…good government has two duties…the first duty is to welcome the foreigner out of charity and respect for the human person…the second duty is to secure one's border and enforce the law for the sake of the common good. Sovereign nations have the right to enforce their laws…"[100] Again, similar to the platform of keeping families together, the USCCB finds itself in a difficult position between wanting to welcome and support the stranger while also professing allegiance to the State and its borders with all the resultant violence and power

[97] "Catholic Church's Position on Immigration Reform," http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/immigration/churchteachingonimmigrationreform.cfm, accessed December 5, 2015. This site also provides insight into the intersection of the group's political stance and their religious beliefs.

[98] Ibid.

[99] "Catholic Church's Position…," http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/immigration/churchteachingonimmigrationreform.cfm, accessed December 5, 2015.

[100] Ibid., taken from the Catholic Catechism, 2241.

acquired by the agencies that enforce the laws of the country (and the extralegal capabilities of those agencies).

Other than the platform for earned legalization, the USCCB is nearly identical to most evangelical organizations working on immigration policies. Both prioritize families as a central piece of the immigration landscape and both believe that the State ultimately has the right and sovereignty to mete out so-called justice and order at the border regardless of what biblical texts prescribe (or proscribe) about the class of people known as immigrants/strangers/foreigners.

The positionality of the USCCB is humane, but limitedly so. The policy is mired in nationality, and a hos(ti)pitable, cannibalistic theology. It is humane in that earned legalization (in addition to the other elements in the USCCB policy: future worker program, family-based immigration reform, restoration of due process rights, addressing root causes) desires to treat the immigrant as a human being (e.g., recognizing that families should not be split apart and that underlying causes should be addressed). However, these theologically admirable articulations cannot overcome the power of a nationalism. Reading the "enforcement" element carefully, the USCCB legitimates the sovereign power of the State (the United States) to intercept "unauthorized" migrants. The policy endorses a nationalistic power over the human ("good government") and ultimately defers to the State ("Sovereign nations have the *right* to enforce their laws…").

Drawing upon the catechistic statement, it is relatively easy to locate both signs of a conditional hospitality and a cannibalistic theology. Good government's first duty is to "welcome the stranger out of charity and respect for the human person…" If the State's power supersedes the value of a human being, how can a welcome be anything but hostile? If the foreigner is always already translated into the language of the State, how can the stranger hear

our welcome? Does the stranger hear our words? Or can this stranger only see our borders, guns, and detention centers with strange letters scrawled on the walls? To welcome a stranger in this way is to be hostipitable.

Regarding the notion of cannibalism, In her book, *Postcolonial Hospitality: The Immigrant as Guest*, Mireille Rosello notes that Jean Baudrillard's articulation of Japanese hospitality is a hospitality that, rather than being "grounded in a universalistic discourse about the same and other" vis-à-vis the "myth of French 'integration'," absorbs the other/immigrant/foreigner into the "body" of the host.[101] She is skeptical about what she describes as the monolithicity of Baudrillard's anthropological claims that this type of hospitality only occurs in Japanese and "Afro-Brazilian" host-cultures.[102] She asks: "After all, isn't it commonly accepted that France 'absorbed' and 'devoured' its colonial others to a degree unparalleled by other imperial powers?"[103] Most useful from Baudrillard's somewhat problematic analysis, she notes, is that "he goes so far as to suggest that hospitality can be bad, cruel, selfish and egotistical."[104] Rosello's most engaging and critical contribution to my own study is the emphasis on the idea that a cannibalistic hospitality is a "welcome understanding" of the "element of power involved in guest-host relationship…as a critique of 'our' own colonial and postcolonial assimilationist policies, which have transformed a supposedly welcoming gesture into a demand for dissolution. If the host strips the guest of his or her identity, then it can be said that cannibalism has occurred…"[105] This provocative conceptualization – hospitality as

[101] Mireille Rosello, *Postcolonial Hospitality: The Immigrant as Guest* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 30.

[102] Ibid.

[103] Rosello, *Postcolonial Hospitality: The Immigrant as Guest*, 31.

[104] Ibid.

[105] Ibid. Rosello notes that this form of cannibalism (identity-stripping) is the "form of cannibalism that Aimé Césaire denounced in his *Discours sur le colonialisme* (1950; trans. as *Discourse on Colonialism* [1972])."

cannibalism – has deep implications for the Christian positions to the Mexico-U.S. immigration discourse.

This manner of welcome is also somewhat cannibalistic. If an immigrant were to arrive and somehow achieve earned legalization, this person may have been "welcomed" but to what end? The immigrant must struggle constantly against our culture to not be completely absorbed ("This is America – we speak English here"). If I reverse the hypothetical situation, the immigrant is still "absorbed" even if only temporarily: the person is devoured by the U.S. legal system (83% of deportees were not allowed a hearing by an immigration judge),[106] forced to sit in the "belly" of our justice system (detention center), and then "vomited" back out into Mexico through deportation. Even though there are some humane elements to the USCCB's policy on immigration, its nationalism is hostile in its hospitality and its theology cannibalizes the immigrant's experience regardless of whether the arrival is "successful" (earned legalization) or a "failure" (devoured, partially digested, and then vomited out).

Representing a more moderate evangelical position, Russell Moore, former President of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, emphasizes the centrality of the "gospel" within the conversation on immigration. He connects the idea of immigrant (and "illegal immigrant") to the figure of Jesus Christ. This biblical immigranthood extends beyond Jesus into the past, to "the ancestors of the faith, who were also immigrants and sojourners in Egypt."[107] He sidesteps the political discourse in his attempt to link the import of immigration to the idea of salvation: "Jesus tells us that our response to the most vulnerable

[106] "Immigrations Officers Ordering Illegal Deportations Without Hearings, Finds ACLU," https://www.aclu.org/news/immigration-officers-ordering-illegal-deportations-without-hearings-finds-aclu, accessed December 6, 2015.

[107] "Immigration and the Gospel," Russell Moore, https://www.russellmoore.com/2011/06/17/immigration-and-the-gospel/, accessed December 1, 2015.

among us is a response to Jesus himself…God will judge those who exploit workers and mistreat the poor."[108] While he complicates Christian observance of national law, he has no immediate solution for the conflict of interest between biblical directives and the (il)legality of immigration. Moore concedes that Romans 13 – "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God"[109] – is a problematic passage. His argument concludes with an overly-spiritualized perspective: "We might be natural-born Americans, but we're all immigrants to the kingdom of God."[110]

"Evangelical" itself is such a loaded, almost unhelpful term in the current milieu and deserves some space in order to complicate and articulate the multifaceted groups represented by this singular word. While most utterances refer to what most would describe as a non-Hispanic/Latinx group of Christians in terms of demographic markers, the fastest growing group of evangelicals in the United Sates since the early 2000s has been the Asian American and Latinx organizations.[111] Mentioned above, the NHCLC and the National Latino Evangelical Coalition represent nearly 15,000 congregations in the United States.[112] As of 2014, Pew Research asserts that such rapidly growing number of Asian American and Latinx evangelicals

[108] Ibid.

[109] Romans 13:1, NRSV. The following verses are even more problematic: "Therefore whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgement. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you wish to have no fear of the authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive its approval; for it is God's servant for your good. But if you do what is wrong, you should be afraid, for the authority does not bear the sword in vain! It is the servant of God to execute wrath on the wrongdoer" (Rom 13:2-4).

[110] "Immigration and Gospel," Moore, https://www.russellmoore.com/2011/06/17/immigration-and-the-gospel/, accessed December 1, 2015.

[111] Janelle S. Wong, "Race, Evangelicals, and Immigration," *The Forum* 2019: 17(3), 405.

[112] Ibid. To give some idea of the scale, Wong cites the attendance of 8,000 Spanish speaking attendees at Lakewood Church in Houston every Sunday. For similar figures in California, see also Kurt Streeter, "Spreading the Pentecostal Spirit – LA Times," *The Los Angeles Times*, February 2. http://www.latimes.com/local/la-me-latino-pentecostal-20140202-story.html.

represent 15 percent of all evangelicals in the United States.[113] This obviously complicates the conversation about how evangelicals in their diversity approach the myriad of issues surrounding immigration. Across a deep study of multiple sets of data – the 2008 Collaborative Multiracial Post Election Survey, the 2016 National Asian American Survey, and the 2016 Collaborative Multiracial Post-Election Survey – what is most instructive about how evangelicals respond to political and economic issues is not only tied to religious identity but more critically dependent on racial identity.[114] Consistently, whether they were evangelical or those without any religious affiliation (agnostic, atheist, "nothing in particular"), White Americans consistently vote for against issues like abortion, same-sex marriage, climate change, more open immigration policies, and taxes on the wealthy in much higher numbers than Black, Asian American, and Latinx evangelicals by staggeringly large margins.[115] Wong succinctly captures the importance of the study of evangelicals and immigration – that racial identity is as important, if not more important, to consider when evaluating how a group perceives what is considered a threat to their combined theo-socio-political worldview.

2.2 An Exploration of the Hostility within Evangelical Hospitality

Of all the aspects of the evangelical impact on immigration that could be analyzed, the tension between their perceived mission to the non-Christian undocumented immigrants and their commitment to concepts like the rule of law and the sovereignty of the State deserves some specific attention. Derrida's central argument – that hospitality, when conditional, contains a

[113] Pew Research Center, "2012 National Survey of Latinos. Pew Forum on Hispanic Trend," http://www.pewhispanic.org/2014/04/18/2012-national-survey-of-latinos/.
[114] Wong, "Race, Evangelicals, and Immigration," 407-409.
[115] Ibid., 408.

degree of hostility – is clearly at play in the contradiction between mission and allegiance to the State. On the one hand, evangelicals want to provide humanitarian aid like food and shelter to people whom the State declares as illegal. Yet on the other hand, they defer to and support the right of that same State to do as it wishes regarding any persons in violation of the rule of law. Is it possible, then, for these two opposing behaviors to exist together? The answer is that it is not only possible but also probable that these two trajectories co-exist due to the amount of power and wealth wielded by evangelicals.

Rather than approaching the competing projects of mission and allegiance to the State as equals, using Derrida, I suggest that we understand their relationship in terms of hierarchy rather than two rivals vying for the top. When we consider the number of Congressional representatives and senators who identify as evangelical, the painting of the power structures comes into focus much more clearly. According to the Pew Forum, 88% (or 468 people) of the 117th Congress identify as Christian, with 55.4% (294) identifying as some form of Protestant. For reference, only 65% of the United States identifies as Christian – nearly 13% less than the composition of Congress.[116] The same is true for the proportion of Protestants and Catholics compared to the rest of the United States population. These numbers combined with what we know from evangelical lobbying groups, namely that the top three categories for religious advocacy groups are church-state issues, civil rights and liberties, and bioethics and life issues,[117] strongly suggest that Christians (including evangelicals) are consolidating political power around their theological beliefs. Returning to the proposed hierarchical relationship between State allegiance and mission, the amount of power (in terms of elected officials identifying as Christian) and money (in terms

[116] "Faith on the Hil," *Pew Research Center,* https://www.pewforum.org/2021/01/04/faith-on-the-hill-2021/
[117] "Lobbying for the Faithful: Religious Advocacy Groups in Washington, D.C.," *Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life* May 2012, https://www.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2011/11/ReligiousAdvocacy_web.pdf, pp. 47-51.

of the efficacy and extent of Christian advocacy groups) involved at the highest levels of the United States government underscore that evangelicals are content with the status quo of our current legal framework for immigration. If these leaders and lobbyists were unhappy with how the legal system treats those seeking asylum or how arduous the pathway to citizenship is for undocumented workers, they have the power to legislate change. Yet these evangelical legislators do not, supported by a significant number of evangelical clergy and laity who appear to align with the views of their elected officials. In this way, evangelicalism resolves its own problem: the State is at the top and wields total power. The mission to the stranger must occupy a subservient position, sublimated into the civil religion of maintaining the sovereignty of the State and its borders.

Derrida's portmanteau of hospitality and hostility – aptly called "hostipitality" – accurately describes a performed hospitality that really is not hospitality at all. Using the concepts of host and guest, evangelicals (both political and non-political elites with their followers) fit the role of the host and the undocumented immigrants in the role of the guest. By allowing the State to remain totally sovereign, evangelicals are able to "play hospitality" in the way that children often "play house." There are motions of hospitality, like humanitarian aid or food drives in which community residents can come for a meal (and usually a sermon), but these seemingly charitable actions are rather hostile in nature. Thinking back to Derrida's suggestion of a hospitality that is unconditional (or at least in search of the unconditional), I would argue that any mission to the stranger must contest the power of the State regarding its brutal treatment of anyone who is undocumented or seeking asylum. To allow the State to legislate against the life of humans in search of a better life, often for their families, is the core of hostipitality. Hostility remains in control of the host's actions because the host understands they wield all the

power. For evangelicals to claim they love the stranger is violence if they remain so close to the center of legislative power in this country.

As a concluding thought, we must consider the view from below – from those undocumented immigrants and workers and asylum seekers who experience these hostile forms of hospitality. It is these voices which demonstrate the true nature of violence and exploitation. Derrida writes about how the foreigner is both unable to ask and unable to speak since the foreigner is always already translated into the language of the State. The foreigner can speak, but not in a language that the State recognizes as valid, which effectively removes the voice of these people who are expressing their fear, their pain, their dreams, and their needs.[118] This can be summed up in the often-heard phrase among some people in response to undocumented immigrants in their communities: "This is America – we speak English here." This dehumanizing, violent rhetoric has a significant and devastating material impact on the lives of people who find themselves in the position of the powerless guest against a politico-theological force of Christians who view their mission to welcome the stranger as subordinate to loyalty to the State. Hospitality will only be unconditional or approaching the unconditional when the host understands not only the power inherent in their position but divests that power into legislation that can provide a framework for community-based flourishing rather than rigid categories of legality, impossibly long wait times for visas, and brutalizing enforcement policies.

[118] Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality: Anne Dufourmantelle Invites Jacques Derrida to Respond*, trans. by Rachel Bowlby (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 15.

2.3 Is the Guest Truly A Guest? A Brief History of Migratory Patterns and the North American Free Trade Agreement

No conversation about immigrants from other countries coming to the United States could be complete without addressing how the immigrant-guests came to be seen as strangers and foreigners in a land they once called home. Borders are arbitrary, imaginary lines drawn by governments in a bid to claim as much land for their country. As such, they are sites of power, though their level of enforcement varies throughout the world with some countries devoting entire military forces to secure while others allow people from neighboring nations to pass freely across the street.[119] Enter the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA hereafter)[120] and the catastrophic consequences it had for migratory peoples who worked in both Mexico (and parts south) and the United States, primarily in agricultural work. The agreement entered into force on January 1, 1994 between Canada, the United States, and Mexico. While the particulars of such an enormous agreement are outside the scope of this study, one aspect illuminates the issue of hospitality and of migration: the competition between Mexican and United States farming goods and the subsequent crash of the farming economy in Mexico between 1994 and 2007. To begin, I will discuss the finer points of what happened with regard to the farming community crash in Mexico and the resultant effects on immigration (both before and after).

In their paper, "Did NAFTA Help Mexico?: An Assessment After 20 Years," Mark Weisbrot, Stephan Lefebvre, and Joseph Sammut published their findings in the Center for

[119] One such instance is the curious situation of Baarle-Hertog, Belgium and Baarle-Nassau, The Netherlands – two towns on top of each other with borders between each section of the town. https://www.npr.org/sections/krulwich/2014/08/05/337795842/how-to-cross-five-international-borders-in-one-minute-without-sweating

[120] It should be noted that during President Trump's administration NAFTA was re-termed the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) on July 1, 2020 as a "mutually beneficial win for North American workers, farmers, ranchers, and businesses" with a partiality to American workers given the administrations "America First" political platform. https://ustr.gov/trade-agreements/free-trade-agreements/united-states-mexico-canada-agreement

Economic and Policy Research regarding the varied and somewhat tumultuous impact that the agreement had on Mexico's economies since the agreement's inception in 1994. While several sectors did see a substantial increase in productivity and revenue (largely that of the automotive industry and its exports to the U.S.), the Mexican economy languished in comparison to its Central American neighbors. Mexico's per capita GDP growth of 18.6 percent for 1994-2014 was nearly *half* of what Latin America experienced during the same years.[121] Within this same vein, the United States started to subsidize corn and other farming products during these years, wiping out huge numbers of family farms in Mexico. They estimate that nearly 4.9 million Mexican farmers were put out of business ("displaced" due to the resulting forced migration that ensued) even with "seasonal labor in agro-export industries increased by about 3 million" – meaning that there was a loss of about 1.9 million farming jobs.[122] This, then, is reflected in what can be seen as a massive surge northward in farmers seeking employment. In 1990, there were approximately 4.5 million Mexican-born residents in the United States, which rose to 9.4 million in 2000, reaching as high as 12.6 million in 2009.[123] On top of all of these figures, the UN Economic Commission on Latin America (ECLAC) did a study on the poverty rates in both Latin American countries as well as Mexico, and the numbers reflect how NAFTA stunted Mexico's potential to reduce poverty in a similar manner as it did its GDP. While Latin American countries saw nearly a 20 percent reduction in poverty during the surveyed years, Mexico saw its poverty rate drop only 8 percent.[124] Clearly, this proposed beneficial agreement was only beneficial to some and largely destructive and violent to others.

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[121] Weisbrot et. al, "Did NAFTA Help Mexico?: An Assessment After 20 Years," *Center for Economic and Policy Research* Feb 2014, 1.
[122] Weisbrot et. al, "Did NAFTA Help Mexico?: An Assessment After 20 Years," *Center for Economic and Policy Research* Feb 2014, 1.
[123] Ibid., 2.
[124] Ibid. 1 with further discussion on pp. 3, 8-12.

The tense relationship between politics, economics, and immigration as all are inextricably bound together. When political and/or economic conditions deteriorate, people – particularly families – must seek new places of safety, refuge, and security in order to maintain a quality of life in order to survive. Given how many millions of jobs were affected by the farming crash in the 2000s in Mexico, it is little wonder why the United States saw such a massive surge in immigrants – both legal and undocumented – entering the U.S. looking for employment. Yet this influx of immigrants is quite plainly the fault of the United States since it was the country who shifted market conditions to the point where it was impossible to maintain a livable existence in Mexico for so many. Even at the time of this writing which is now nearly 10 years after Weibrot's research, both countries are still grappling with the effects of the NAFTA-now-USMCA on the presence of guests here in the United States with very little in the way of a path forward toward an equitable solution apart from immense amounts of detention and deportation for asylum seekers and undocumented people.[125] In the year 2022 alone, there were 50, 261 people deported by an immigration judge with 2,056,328 pending immigration court cases.[126] The absurdity of this system was in full view back in 2018 when Pro Publica published an article about a six year old defendant who was brought before an immigration court judge to defend himself.[127] And yet the problems continue apace with no end in sight as the Biden resumes the work of constructing more of the border wall along the U.S.-Mexico border, continuing the work of the previous Trump administration.[128]

[125] Currently as of January 2023, there are 24, 170 people detained at the U.S.-Mexico Border in Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) facilities. https://trac.syr.edu/immigration/quickfacts/ Of those detained, ICE claims that there are 14,732 with criminal records. Most are in Texas (9,841).
[126] https://trac.syr.edu/immigration/quickfacts/eoir.html
[127] https://www.propublica.org/article/6-year-old-in-immigration-court-by-himself-zero-tolerance-family-separation
[128] https://theintercept.com/2022/09/18/biden-trump-border-wall/

As this chapter has shown, evangelical engagement with immigration has rarely been monolithic. While official organizations and leaders have at times advocated for compassionate policies, their support has often been undermined by competing allegiances to state sovereignty, nationalism, and exclusionary ideologies. These contradictions reflect precisely the dynamic that Jacques Derrida calls *hostipitality*—the paradox of welcoming the stranger while simultaneously regulating, fearing, or expelling them. The theological desire to offer "Christian" hospitality, when filtered through the mechanisms of the nation-state, often results in a conditional welcome that mirrors the logic of power more than the ethic of grace. In the next chapter, I introduce the philosophical and methodological tools—particularly from Derrida and Husserl—that will allow a deeper reading of these tensions, both in the biblical texts and in their modern echoes.

Chapter 3: Reading Toward the Stranger — Phenomenology, Deconstruction, and the Ethics of Interpretation

Having mapped the contradictory theological and political responses of evangelicals to immigration in Chapter 2, this chapter now turns to the philosophical and methodological tools necessary to interrogate these contradictions more deeply. Specifically, I draw upon Jacques Derrida's theory of hostipitality, which names the paradox wherein every act of welcome also contains the potential for exclusion,[129] and Edmund Husserl's phenomenological concepts of intentionality and epoché, which reorient perception toward the structures of meaning and experience.[130] These thinkers, though temporally and thematically distinct, offer complementary insights into how power and ethics intersect in moments of encounter—between host and guest, citizen and stranger, text and reader. This chapter lays the foundation for what I call a phenomenological double reading, a method that seeks to hold both the surface and the structure of the biblical text in tension, attentive to both what is said and how it is encountered. The goal is to prepare the exegetical work of Chapter 4 with a critical method capable of revealing not only textual meaning but also the ethical demands that emerge in reading and being read by these ancient laws.

A Phenomenological Double Reading – a combination of Derrida's close "double reading" as it meets the philosophy of phenomenology, is an approach that seeks to read both the text's own experience with the phenomenon of being a stranger and of hospitality but also that of

[129] Derrida, *Of Hospitality,* 25–29
[130] Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, First Book: General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology*, trans. F. Kersten (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1983), §§27–32, 59–60.

how Derrida's own writing articulates and experiences hospitality. The goal, then, is to arrive at the ground level, a view from below, on the implications of what it means to be a strangers, the power of host over guest, and the experience of the Other, in the text and in our lives, in order to arrive at a better understanding and appreciation of what is at stake in the warring discourse of immigration. At its core, this chapter is concerned with a methodological approach to arrive at a better understanding of the lived experiences of the people within the letters of the text of Deuteronomy to let the textual record reveal what it meant to experience the dynamics of hospitality in a removed, ancient context and what it might mean for readers in our modern context. To do this, I will introduce another interlocutor – Edmund Husserl – to discuss briefly his ideas and contribution to the development of phenomenology. This is partly because Derrida himself was a student and his work an emerging move out of (and in some aspects away from) Husserlian phenomenology, but this is also because any discussion of what phenomenology is must contend with Husserl's articulation of consciousness and intention, regardless if Husserl himself is far removed both temporally and demographically. I am acutely aware that using French philosophers to investigate and interrogate an ancient text from the Hebrew Bible in conversation with evangelical presuppositions about immigrants and the idea of hospitality potentially obscures its own attempts to dialogue with what is real and what constitutes the violence happening at the southern border of the United States, I do believe a detailed summary of Husserl's *Ideas I* is appropriate here.

3.1 Introduction to Husserl's Phenomenology

Edmund Husserl, the founder of phenomenology, sought to establish a rigorous scientific philosophy grounded in the first-person perspective. His approach aimed to investigate the structures of consciousness and the essence of experiences as they are presented to us, free from presuppositions and theoretical biases. Husserl's phenomenology offers a methodological and philosophical framework that emphasizes the direct exploration of phenomena as they are experienced, with the ultimate goal of reaching the deeper, unbiased truths about the nature of consciousness and its correlation with the world. The idea that consciousness on its own as a method is certainly rooted in previous philosophical traditions, spanning all the way back in history to Descartes, but offers the potential to recognize and push aside internal biases and presuppositions about not only the experiences and perceptions of the observer but also that observer's interaction with the experiences and perceptions of the people in the world around them. Chiefly, in the opening lines of his seminal work on consciousness (*General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology*), he argues that cognition itself "begins with experience and remains within experience."[131] The argument that consciousness is locked within its own experience undergirds his later concepts of epoché (the idea of phenomenological reduction) as it is impossible to view and understand these experiences if the observer's biases and presuppositions are not bracketed and removed as much as possible.

[131] Edmund Husserl, trans,. F. Kersten, *Ideas pertaining to a pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy:First Book:General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology*, (Boston: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1983), 5.

3.1.1 The Concept of Epoché

At the heart of Husserl's phenomenological method is the concept of epoché, also known as the phenomenological reduction. This process involves a deliberate suspension of judgment regarding what Husserl describes as "the natural attitude," where the natural attitude is our everyday, non-critical engagement with the world, including all our beliefs, assumptions, and preconceptions about the existence of the external world and its objects. Husserl argued that by practicing epoché, one could bracket or set aside these presuppositions, which opens the possibility of creating what he described as a "pure,[132] unmediated examination of consciousness and its contents."[133]

The purpose of epoché is not to doubt or deny the existence of the external world but rather to temporarily suspend our belief in its existence to focus solely on the phenomena of consciousness. This suspension allows the scientists to examine the structures and processes by which consciousness is representative of and constitutive of its objects, thereby revealing the essential features of experiences and the intentional act of consciousness itself—how consciousness is always consciousness *of* something.[134]

Along with epoché, the concept of intentionality is central in Husserl's phenomenology, referring to the directedness or aboutness of consciousness—that is, the quality of consciousness

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[132] I depart slightly from Husserl in that I disagree that anything – in any context – can be truly pure, and that the foundations of the idea of purity are too closely associated with colonial and imperial interests to be of use, but that is a discussion for another project. With regard to his articulation, I note my objection here despite rendering his words here.

[133] These insights are a summary from across Husserl's work on the term, primarily from *Ideas Pertaining to a pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, pp. 59-63.

[134] A fuller range of this concept can be traced throughout a few of Husserl's main works such as *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. Dorion Cairns (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960), pp. 20-30; *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy,* trans. David Carr (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), pp. 103-141 discusses how the phenomenological reduction functions in within Husserl's oeuvre; *Phenomenological Psychology: Lectures, Summer Semester, 1925*, trans. John Scanlon (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1977), specifically Lectures II and III, pp. 50-98 in which epoché is discussed in the context of phenomenological psychology.

by which it is always directed toward an object, whether that object is a physical thing, an abstract concept, or a non-existent entity. Husserl's analysis of intentionality involves a detailed examination of the intentional acts (e.g., perceiving, imagining, remembering) and the intentional contents (the perceived, imagined, remembered) that constitute our conscious life.[135]

Through the method of eidetic reduction, which is part of the broader framework of epoché, Husserl aimed to identify the invariant structures of these intentional experiences. In more accessible language, eidetic reduction could be otherwise described as free imaginative variation, which Husserl offers to demonstrate how this methodological step functions.[136] One subjects an object to eidetic reduction (or free imaginative variation) to discover if aspects can be varied without the "essential nature" of the object itself being altered.[137] This involved imaginative variation, a process by which the observer/scientist considers a range of possible experiences to determine the essential characteristics that define a particular type of experience. For Husserl, understanding the essence of these experiences was crucial for building a foundation for all sciences, as it provided a clear account of how knowledge and meaning are grounded in the structures of consciousness.[138]

3.1.2 *Lebenswelt*: The Lifeworld

Another significant contribution of Husserl to phenomenology is the concept of the *Lebenswelt*, or lifeworld. Though this term appears elsewhere in several other contexts outside of Husserl's

[135] Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology*, 203. A fuller discussion can be found from pp. 203-235.
[136] Ibid., 159-168 (though Husserl does discuss eidetic reduction's role in phenomenology earlier on in pp. 10-15).
[137] Ibid., 160.
[138] These insights are pulled from various works of Husserl, including *Logical Investigations*, trans. J.N. Findlay, volume 2 "On Intentional Experiences and their 'Contents'" (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), 530-601; *Experience and Judgment: Investigations in a Genealogy of Logic*, trans. James S. Churchill and Karl Ameriks (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), pp. 70-115; *Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness*, trans. James S. Churchill (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1964), pp. 23-123, particularly in the section of "Lectures on the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time."

work, this iteration of the term refers to what he describes as the "pre-reflective, taken-for-granted world" of everyday life.[139] It is the world we live in and experience before any scientific or theoretical abstractions are applied to it. For Husserl, the lifeworld is the foundational layer of human existence and knowledge, grounding both the natural and human sciences.

The investigation of the lifeworld involves exploring the intersubjective and cultural dimensions of experience.[140] It focuses on how human experiences are shaped by historical, social, and cultural contexts, and how these experiences contribute to the understanding and composition of the world as a meaningful horizon for our actions and interactions. Husserl's emphasis on the lifeworld was a response to what he saw as the crisis of European sciences—a loss of meaning and relevance for life due to the hegemony of objectivism and scientism. By returning to the lifeworld, Husserl wished to re-establish the connection between scientific inquiry and the concrete, lived experiences that give those inquiries a significance lost by remote, unfeeling methods of observation and evaluation.[141]

Husserl's phenomenology, with its emphasis on epoché, intentionality, and the lifeworld, represents a radical shift in philosophical methodology and perspective. By focusing on the structures of consciousness and the pre-reflective lifeworld, Husserl laid the groundwork for a philosophy that seeks to reveal what he believed to be the fundamental basis of human experience and knowledge. His work not only paved the way for further developments in phenomenology but also influenced a wide range of philosophical discussions on consciousness, subjectivity, and the nature of reality. In the next section, I will explore how Jacques Derrida,

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[139] Husserl, *Experience and Judgment*, 138.
[140] Ibid., 140.
[141] Edmund Husserl, trans. David Carr, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 103-110. A fuller discussion can be found in the remainder of that reference's section on "The Clarification of the Origin of the Modern Opposition between Physicalistic Objectivism and Transcendental Subjectivism," pp. 110-193.

influenced by Husserl's ideas, embarked on a project that both engaged with and critically departed from phenomenological themes, leading to novel insights into language, meaning, and the concept of hospitality.

3.2 Derrida's Hospitality

At its most basic components, Derrida's work on hospitality is summed up as a group of discussions about "the foreigner" (*l'étranger*). His seminal work on the topic – *Of Hospitality* – opens with a question: "Isn't the question of the foreigner a foreigner's question? Coming from the foreigner, from abroad?"[142] He traces the Greek sophist tradition of the foreigner, through Socrates' writing, and contends that hospitality, as a tradition, has been inextricably bound to jurisprudence in terms of "rights" (citing the laws of hospitality for citizens and immigrants/strangers in Athens).[143] Such a connection suggests the existence of two forms of hospitality: absolute hospitality and hospitality "in the ordinary sense."[144] It is this ordinary sense hospitality that Derrida places under sharp relief and critique, arguing that any adherence to an ordinary sense - or what he later calls "conditional hospitality" - results in the loss of justice and in the erasure of the guest (the one receiving hospitality). This phenomenon is best exemplified by the codified statues of the State (e.g., the United States). The law of hospitality, then, is a paradox since it simultaneously appears to endorse both the idea of "hospitality as a right or duty" and hospitality as a gift.[145] This critical juncture – and simultaneous yet paradoxical endorsement – is what animates Derridean thinking regarding what to do with the welcome of

[142] Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 3.
[143] Ibid., 19.
[144] Ibid., 24.
[145] Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 25.

the stranger. On the one hand, States (like the France and the United States) have legal codes that dictate how asylum seekers and immigrants should be treated, what legal rights they have (or do not have), and how to treat them. On the other hand, the law of hospitality, according to Derrida, is also something that breaks with any idea of obligation or right or pact (specifically those codified statutes regarding the treatment of non-citizens) and must be both absolute (unconditional) and a gift (without obligation). As with all of Derrida's philosophical writing, the problem of hospitality is that it has internal contradictions within it, which is what makes it such a suitable lens for this dissertation.

Derrida claims that "'hospitality' means to invite and welcome the 'stranger' (*l'étranger*), on both the personal level…and on the level of state…"[146] His interest in the term "hospitality" led him to the work of Emil Benveniste's *Le vocabulaire des institutions indo-européennes*[147] "*L'hospitalité*" in which Benveniste traces out the etymology of the word.[148] In his investigation, Derrida began to understand the convoluted and complicated linguistic history of hospitality as a ter. Hospitality "derives from the Latin *hospes*, which is formed from *hostis,* which originally meant a 'stranger' and came to take on the meaning of the enemy or 'hostile' stranger (*hostilis*), + *pets* (*potis, potes, potentia*), to have power."[149] Hospitality, then, is the "welcome extended to the guest" that is simultaneously juxtaposed against the "power of the host to remain master of the premises."[150] This inner-conflict between the desire to extend a welcome while maintaining an inherently hostile power is represented by inner tension of the construction of the word

[146] Jacques Derrida and John D. Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997), 110.
[147] Émile Benveniste, *Le vocabulaire des institutions indo-européennes,* vol. 1 (Paris: Minuit, 1969), 87-101.
[148] *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, 110.
[149] Ibid.
[150] *Deconstruction in a Nutshell,* 110.

"hospitality" itself. John Caputo, a close reader of Derrida's work, summarizes the inherent tension of the idea of hostipitality as follows:

> The *hospes* is someone who has the power to host someone, so that neither the alterity (*hostis*) of the stranger nor the power (*potentia*) of the host is annulled by the hospitality. There is an essential "self-limitation" built right into the idea of hospitality, which preserves the distance between one's own and the stranger, between owning one's own property and inviting the other into one's home. So, there is always a little hostility in all hosting and hospitality, constituting a certain "hostil/pitality."

With this understanding of what constitutes hos(ti)pitality, I will utilize Derrida's idea of the host and guest as functional categories to better understand how power functions between the Israelites and the *gērim* as well as the between citizens in the United States and immigrants who seek new life in this country. Using his categories of conditional hospitality and absolute hospitality, this dissertation project will analyze how power can be and has been abused when vulnerable populations require aid from those with land, money, and power. These categories will enable me to better situate his work in conversation with José E. Ramírez Kidd's work on the *gēr* in *Alterity and Identity in Israel*.

One main contribution of Derrida's work on hospitality is how he describes the liminal nature of the concept as this helps identify how power dynamics function between the host and the guest. Hospitality is locked in an aporia (a contradiction) or as Derrida calls it – a "paralysis."[151] The act of welcome always already presents the possibility of the erasure of sovereignty, of ownership. For Derrida, "the possibility of hospitality is sustained by its impossibility; hospitality really starts to get under way only when we 'experience' (which means travel or go through) this paralysis (the inability to move)."[152] This impossibility, however, is not equivalent to what many would think is a logical contradiction. Hospitality's initial moment

[151] Ibid., 111.
[152] *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, 111.

begins when the very idea of hospitality itself and any attendant assumed obligations are questioned. When we push against "this limit, this threshold, this paralysis, inviting hospitality to cross its own threshold and limit, its own self-limitation, to become a gift *beyond hospitality*."[153] Hospitality must go beyond itself – beyond hospitality – in order to happen: "Hospitality, 'if there is such a thing': that means it never 'exists,' is not 'present,' is always *to come*."[154] Put in different terms, hospitality is both a concept and something that must be resisted itself due to its liminal nature, especially given how hostility is always within an expression or embodiment of conditional hospitality. Derrida's writing suggests that hospitality does not exist as some fixed ideal or action. Hospitality is in constant war and flux – with itself, with those who appropriate it for their own use (such as the State) – and must be constantly evaluated to be *more* than hospitality, or what he calls "beyond hospitality."

While at home in the context of existential French poststructuralist philosophy, how does Derrida's reading and writing on hospitality offer this project a methodology to read a biblical text written thousands of years ago, particularly if hospitality is always arriving and never quite here? Most Derridean scholars largely agree that Derrida's concepts, notably the idea of deconstruction but also the concepts of hospitality and autoimmunity, are simply just that – an event one encounters. I use the language of method here because I am using Derrida's insight to formulate a type of reading strategy that can more readily access and (re)discover the areas of contradiction, conflict, and power within the text. This reading strategy will not be systematic, nor will it be exhaustive. My intention in using hospitality (and the unavoidable reality of hostipitality) as a reading-strategy-method is to push those areas of contradiction and conflict to the surface to better analyze and consider their impact on the meaning(s) of the texts in this

[153] Ibid.
[154] Ibid., 111-112.

project. The topic of the *gēr* is a somewhat well-traveled road in biblical scholarship, but few have pushed the conversation to consider the literary aspects of the laws of the Torah. The literary theory behind Derrida's concern for hospitality animates what scholars like Achenbach, Kidd, and van Houten have uncovered in terms of the socio-historical strata. We as readers and scholars have a reasonably established comprehension of the circumstances and philological dimensions of what *gēr* did and could signify, but Derrida offers a view into the relationship of the law to the people, of the text to its time and to our own time, and how assumptions of the text always need to be revisited and investigated.

Derrida wrote that "Hospitality, 'if there is such a thing': that means it never 'exists,' is not 'present,' is always *to come*."[155] But what is the language of hospitality? Can hospitality be requested? Does the aporia of the possibility-impossibility prevent any hospitality discourse? To answer these questions, Derrida offers some help: "The foreigner is first of all foreign to the legal language in which the duty of hospitality is formulated, the right to asylum, its limits, norms, policing, etc. He [sic] has to ask for hospitality in a language which by definition is not his [sic] own..."[156] This is the beginning of epistemic violence, says Derrida, as the State (or authority or host or master or others) "imposes on him translation into their own language…"[157] Gayatri Spivak is a critical conversation partner at this juncture. Her question (and publication), "Can the Subaltern Speak?" directly applies to what Derrida means when he contends that the foreigner is both unable to ask and unable to speak since the foreigner is always already translated into the language of the State. The foreigner can speak, but not in a language that the

[155] *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, 111-112.
[156] Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality: Anne Dufourmantelle Invites Jacques Derrida to Respond*, trans. by Rachel Bowlby (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 15.
[157] Ibid.

State recognizes as valid. The foreigner is simultaneously heard and silent, because the language is unintelligible. Judith Butler is another necessary interlocutor in this discussion:

> To find that you are fundamentally *unintelligible* (indeed, that the laws of culture and of language find you to be an impossibility) is to find that you have not yet achieved access to the human, to find yourself speaking only and always *as if you were* human, but with the sense that you are not, to find that your language is hollow, that no recognition is forthcoming because the norms by which recognition takes place are not in your favor."[158]

Butler's articulation of gender as mostly-social construction based on a shared vulnerability (which indicates a shared humanity) also significantly figures into a discourse on hospitality and immigration.[159]

3.3 Hospitality as a Methodological Approach to the Exegesis and Hermeneutical Inquiry of Deuteronomy and the Stranger

Applying Derrida's concept of hospitality as a methodological approach to studying biblical passages involves a deconstructive reading that highlights the complexities, contradictions, and ethical demands present in the hospitality narratives found in Deuteronomy. In using this approach, my project does not seek definitive interpretations but rather creates a space to open up these verses to new meanings, emphasizing the ethical encounter with the Other and the impossibility of fully satisfying the demands of absolute hospitality. This approach also seeks to reveal the inherent power structures embedded, and often hidden, within any context in which

[158] Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 30.
[159] For a full treatment of this idea of mutual/shared vulnerability as a means of gender's social construction, see Butler, *Undoing Gender*, chap. 1, "Beside Oneself: On the Limits of Sexual Autonomy." In a future explorations of this idea, I hope to include more of her argument since her work illumines much of what Derrida writes about in his treatment of hos(ti)pitality.

hospitality presents itself. The relationship between the host and the guest is never neutral nor is it wholly without a degree of possible violence directed at the guest/the Other. In practical terms, my method uses a double reading to produce, in as vivid of a contrast as words can paint, the demands of ethics and compassion and absolute welcome to a group of people marginalized in nearly every category possible while also highlighting the socio-politico demands of the law and the cultural environment that dictated the interactions between host and guest, between the inherited and the foreigner, the known and the stranger. This approach, borrowing from Husserl's concepts of consciousness, epoché, intentionality, and *Lebenswelt*, will allow hospitality to challenge the reader to recognize and bracket their own presuppositions and biases when encountering sites of power both in the text, as is readily visible from the words of Deuteronomy, but also in the modern contexts of two countries, of borders, of neighborhoods and train tracks that demarcate segregated parts of a city. This method is understandably paradoxical as the absolute and radical welcome of the Other cannot exist peacefully and totally with the demands of the conditional hospitality of the law, the State, and cultural norms. But by foregrounding the ethical demands to love and care for the stranger in the pages of Deuteronomy, it is my aim to demonstrate that such contradictions and paradoxes are what push forward toward a justice imagined that may someday become a justice realized.

While Derrida's work sharpens the ethical paradox of hospitality—revealing how the law of welcome is always entangled with exclusion—it is Husserl's phenomenology that frames the hermeneutical posture with which I approach the biblical text. Husserl's concepts of intentionality, passive synthesis, and the epoché offer tools not for deconstructing law, but for attending to its appearance, its reception, and its ethical demand as experienced by a consciousness situated in history and memory. In the context of Deuteronomy's *gēr* laws, this

phenomenological method allows me to approach the text not merely as a legal document, but as a site of encounter—where law and memory form a structure of perception that both reflects and forms ethical action. Husserl's role in this project is thus not secondary to Derrida, but complementary: where Derrida challenges the very structure of welcome, Husserl helps us understand how that structure is perceived, lived, and potentially transformed through intentional engagement with the stranger.

Through this chapter, I have established the methodological foundation for the exegetical and ethical readings to come. Derrida's conception of hospitality as both gift and law—what John Caputo calls "the tremor at the heart of welcome"[160]—reveals the fragility and violence inherent in hospitality when it is conditioned by sovereignty, legality, or identity. At the same time, Husserl's focus on the structures of consciousness, particularly his insights into intentionality and lived experience (*Erlebnis*), offers a way to understand how ethical perception is formed and how memory, history, and identity shape the response to the Other.[161] Together, these frameworks enable a phenomenological double reading that is attuned to the biblical text's ethical force and to the interpretive structures we bring to it. In the following chapter, I apply this method to key passages in Deuteronomy concerning the *gēr*, showing how the tensions in hospitality—between law and love, inclusion and exclusion—are already at play in Israel's legal imagination and continue to shape contemporary discourse around the stranger

[160] Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, 111.
[161] Husserl, *Crisis*, 70–72 and §28.

Chapter 4: A Phenomenological Double Reading of Deuteronomy

With the conceptual groundwork now established, this chapter applies the phenomenological double reading methodology to selected passages in Deuteronomy concerning the *gēr*. These texts—Deuteronomy 10:18–19, 24:17–18, 24:19–22, and 26:12–13—were chosen not merely for their frequency of the term but for their diverse rhetorical, legal, and theological configurations of hospitality. This chapter does not treat them as isolated legal mandates, but as invitations to consider how Israel's ethical identity is constructed through memory, divine imitation, and vulnerability toward the stranger. The readings are structured thematically, attending to ritual, legal, and economic dimensions of hospitality while foregrounding the Derridean tensions between gift and law, and Husserlian insights into intentionality and historical consciousness. Building on the scholarly contributions of José Ramírez Kidd, Christina van Houten, Reinhard Achenbach, and others, this chapter expands the interpretive conversation by interrogating how hospitality operates not only as an ethic but as a form of social memory and political power. This exegetical work serves as the heart of this dissertation's argument: that hospitality, as revealed in the *gēr* passages, simultaneously expresses and strains the very conditions of welcome, justice, and identity formation.

Without being able to apply this method to the entirety of Deuteronomy, I have selected several passages within which I will apply my method. These passages selected from Deuteronomy serve as fertile ground for this exploration (though future studies ought to consider the many instances of *ger* outside of Deuteronomy, particularly in Leviticus). The first passage is Deuteronomy 10:18-19, with its divine mandate for empathy and justice towards the stranger, inviting us to consider the universality of Otherness and the ethical imperatives that transcend

temporal and cultural boundaries. For the second and third passages, the verses in Deuteronomy 24:17-18 and 19-22 reveal the societal structures that either facilitate or hinder the expression of hospitality, highlighting the inherent tension between legalistic prescriptions and the spontaneous ethics of care. Finally, Deuteronomy 26:12-13 encapsulates the communal aspect of hospitality, where the act of sharing becomes a sacred duty, imbued with the potential to redefine community boundaries.

Derridean hospitality, with its emphasis on the paradoxical nature of welcoming the stranger, provides a critical framework for interpreting these passages. It invites the reader to ponder the conditions under which hospitality is extended or withheld, the power dynamics at play, and the possibility of a hospitality that is unconditional yet conflicted with the risk of erasing the very alterity it seeks to embrace. My methodological approach does not suppose that definitive answers are possible but instead creates and opens a space for dialogue, for the text to speak within (and without) the context of our shared human condition marked by migration, displacement, and the perennial search for belonging.

In engaging with these Deuteronomic passages through the lens of Derridean hospitality, I have been confronted (and hope that the reader shares this confrontation) with the ethical demand to rethink our relationship with whom we define as “the stranger.” It challenges us to consider how ancient texts can illuminate contemporary issues in revolutionary new ways, making the ancient discourse on hospitality and Otherness resonate with our current global narratives of migration and displacement. This chapter, therefore, is not merely an academic exercise but a double call to a new criticality forged by exegesis as well as to ethical reflection and action in a world where the boundaries between self and Other, host and guest, are increasingly blurred and increasingly more violent.

4.1 Deuteronomy 10:17-19

A critical analysis of Deuteronomy 10:17-19 using Derridean hospitality as a method, especially through a Phenomenological Double Reading, involves a nuanced engagement with the text that transcends conventional exegetical approaches. This analysis considers the ethical and philosophical underpinnings of hospitality as presented in these verses, interpreted through the lens of Derrida's concepts of unconditional hospitality and the ethics of alterity.

This approach differs from traditional hermeneutics such as historical-critical, canonical, redaction, or literary interpretations by focusing less on the historical context, source composition, or literary structures, and more on the existential and phenomenological dimensions of the text. It explores the text's implications on understanding the Other (the *gēr*) not merely as an ancient legal or social category but as a real person with lived experience that invites a radical ethical response amidst the current landscape of (im)migration.

My method here also engages with the phenomenological aspect of the text, considering how the lived experience of both the ancient Israelites and modern readers informs the understanding of what hospitality is and might be. Using this as my focus, I aim to bring forth new insights by experiencing the text in a way that bridges what we can find in an ancient text with modern ethical dilemmas.

The text of Deuteronomy 10:17-19 reads: "Because the LORD your God is the god of all gods and master of all masters, the great, mighty, and the dreaded God – who does not play favorites[162] and who does not take a bribe. The one who executes justice for orphans and

[162] The Hebrew wordplay is clunky here - לֹא־יִשָּׂא פָנִים – but I follow the Common English Bible (CEB) translation here in the idea that the phrase suggests "playing favorites." *NIDOTTE* offers up the translation of "pay attention to" for the *qal* root of the word.

widows, and who loves the stranger, giving them bread and clothes. And so you all[163] must love the stranger because you were strangers in Egypt." By applying Derrida's framework to Deuteronomy 10:18-19, the text reveals rich layers of meaning regarding the power relationships inherent in the notion of hospitality. These verses encapsulate the divine imperative for hospitality towards the marginalized, emphasizing empathy and remembrance of one's own past vulnerabilities. Out of the text, three significant aspects of hospitality arise: the idea of unconditional hospitality from within what might be described as a divine imperative, hospitality as a recollection of one's own Otherness, and the embedded tension of power in the idea of hospitality.

In the first aspect, Derrida posits that true hospitality is unconditional, requiring the host to open their home and heart without any expectation of reciprocity or even acknowledgment. In Deuteronomy 10:18, God's actions toward the orphan, the widow, and the stranger illustrate an unconditional form of hospitality. This divine hospitality is not predicated on the recipients' ability to reciprocate but is an expression of justice. The verse not only highlights God's inherent benevolence but also sets a divine precedent for human behavior. By providing "food and clothing" to the stranger, God demonstrates an ideal of hospitality that transcends transactional relationships, aiming instead for an altruistic care for the Other.

This contrasts to what Gary Beckman presents in terms of how outsiders[164] were perceived by the in-group kinfolk of a region. In his impressive cuneiform study "Foreigners in the Ancient Near East," he interacts with similar material to my study of the *ger* in Deuteronomy in terms of

[163] I made it a point to translate the plural verbs quite literally to show the effect that these laws were for the entire community of Israel – not a vague, singular case law hypothetical person.
[164] Gary Beckman, "Foreigners in the Ancient Near East," *Journal of the American Oriental* Society 133, no. 2 (April-June 2013): 204. Beckman typically prefers the translation of "foreigner" instead of "stranger" or "immigrant" or "alien" when referring to an extra-regional person.

discovering the social attitudes toward a person (or group of people) not from that region. In Sumerian, Akkadian, and Hittite, the terms "lú.bar.ra" and "*aḫûm*," and "*araḫzena-*" respectively, reflect something akin to a notion of externality rather than hostility.[165] Beckman helpfully organizes ancient Afro-Asiatic[166] positions toward outsiders into a few categories: foreigners at home, invaders, infiltrators, merchants, diplomats, technical experts, mercenaries, refugees, and captives.[167] Even with the category of refugees, the outsiders were either variously tolerated with disapproval (particularly the foreigners at home) or outright rejected/attacked (invaders). In an inscription describing a treaty with Niqmepa of Ugarit, Muršili II reinforces the idea that refugees are nothing more than diplomatic properties being traded back and forth between the nations that possessed them, stating that "if a fugitive flees from Hatti and comes to the land of Ugarit, Niqmepa shall seize him and return him to Hatti…"[168]

These observations demonstrate how most – if not all – Mesopotamian cultures functioned in their treatment of the Other, of anyone described as a "foreigner" or a "stranger": assimilation and likely exploitation or rejection and deportation.[169] The preceding discussion contrasts sharply with the presented law in Deuteronomy 10 that offers an unconditional hospitality and welcome along with instructions for their provision (food and clothing). By virtue of association, the Israelites are to execute justice and provision for an outsider in a land foreign to them since God

[165] Beckman, 204. Beckman notes that the terms for hostility, then, would be *kur* and *nakrum* (Sumerian and Akkadian, respectively).
[166] I recognize that Beckman's work as a Mesopotamian linguist and specialist do not necessarily represent the broader attitudes and social milieu of the Levant but offer a necessary overview what might be described as Semitic positions on "outsiders" and hospitality.
[167] Beckman, 204-209.
[168] Beckman, 209. This inscription goes on to demonstrate that these treaties were enforced by oaths. If refugees were en route to either Hatti or Ugarit, the opposing king could not interfere, presumably since each would want to exploit the political/social/economic value they could provide the respective nation.
[169] Beckman, 204.

executed justice and provision for the Israelites when they were outsiders in Egypt. This ties directly into the second aspect of hospitality in these verses: shared recollection.

Deuteronomy 10:19 invokes the collective memory of the Israelites as "strangers in the land of Egypt," leveraging past experiences of vulnerability and marginalization to foster empathy towards the Other. Derrida's concept of hospitality involves a recognition and acceptance of one's own otherness as a basis for relating to the Other. This verse employs the Israelites' historical experience as an ethical grounding, reminding them of their own times of helplessness and dependence on the hospitality of others. This recollection serves as a moral imperative to extend hospitality, underscoring the idea that the power dynamics in hospitality are not fixed but fluid, with the host's own potential for otherness and vulnerability serving as a crucial point of reflection and connection.

The command to "love the stranger" (ואהבתם את־הגר) in Deuteronomy 10:19 is grounded not only in divine imitation but in a broader Deuteronomic ethical vision.[170] Patrick D. Miller notes that this passage is part of a larger pattern in Deuteronomy in which God's moral character—justice for the orphan, widow, and stranger—grounds Israel's covenantal obligations.[171] Similarly, Moshe Weinfeld has shown that the structure of Deuteronomy 10:12–22 moves from doxological affirmation to ethical imperative, embedding the call to love the *gēr* within Israel's covenant identity.[172] My translation of "ואהבתם" ("And so you all must love [the stranger]") here draws on Waltke and O'Connor's discussion of volitional force in *qal* verbs, particularly when

[170] Edmund Husserl's concept of passive synthesis—the unreflective layering of memory and perception—helps frame the theological movement in this passage. The ethical action commanded here emerges from Israel's memory of their own experience as strangers, which functions not just rhetorically, but phenomenologically: the past appears in the present as ethical demand. See Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences*, trans. David Carr (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 70–72.
[171] Patrick D. Miller, *Deuteronomy* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1990), 145–147.
[172] Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 268–273.

used in imperatival contexts,[173] reinforcing the sense that this is a divine command, not a suggestion. The act of loving the stranger is thus framed as an intentional response to the divine character—rooted in both God's impartial justice (v.17) and Israel's historical memory (v.19), producing a communal ethic shaped by both gratitude and obligation.

Mark Awabdy's related dissertation "He Loves the Immigrant: Deuteronomy's Theological and Social Vision for the גר" and his use of the concepts of volitional force and *imitatio dei* provides my own analysis here with an interlocutor of sorts with Husserl's concept of intentionality when considering Deuteronomy 10:19 (and the context of Deut 10:17-19 more broadly). Though Awabdy's work is far more focused on lexical studies across the entire Torah, I find that these concepts are (somewhat) compelling and worth considering in that such concepts provide the *why* for the spiritual, legal, and social mechanisms for Israel's compulsion to love the stranger. Awabdy is drawing on previous work from Bruce Waltke and Michael O'Connor who suggest that the *qal* form of ואהבתם - "and so you must love [the stranger]" - presents with what they call a volitional force.[174] This *imitatio dei* principle, according to Awabdy, also appears in two of my other selections in Deuteronomy: Deut 24:19-22 and Deut 26:10-13. Imitating God is the motivational force behind why Israel essentially *must* love the stranger. Here I depart from Awabdy in that I do not assent to what appears to be a one-dimensional understanding of this law in Deuteronomy 10:17-19. Rather, what I find compelling is how *imitatio dei* undergirds the ideas of Husserl's intentionality.

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[173] Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 572–573 (§34.3.2b).

[174] Mark Abraham Awabdy, "He Loves the Immigrant: Deuteronomy's Theological and Social Vision for the גר," PhD diss., (Asbury Theological Seminary, 2012), 60. The fuller discussion from Waltke and O'Connor, see Bruce K. Waltke and Michael O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake: Eisenbraums, 1990), 536. Awadby states that this volitional force is what compels what he calls "Israel's גר-love."

Husserl's intentionality offers a view into Israelite memory in terms of how reciprocality might have functioned in their reception of a divine law to love the strangers they now find living among them. Husserl explored how the very act of intentional remembering enables one to direct one's consciousness both toward the events and experiences of their past but also toward the experiences and pasts of others.[175] This same process can be applied to the Israelites with this law directing their memory, their consciousness, back to their experiences in Egypt and asking them to actively offer up support in an obligatory manner to the strangers now living in Israelite territory. Collective memory, Husserl reminds us, is not a passive repository of information but rather an active, intentional act of consciousness itself that has the capacity to shape a group's ethical stance toward others[176] – and in the case of Israel, their ethical stance toward those they have labeled as "strangers." The call to love the stranger "for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" is an appeal to this intentionality, to an intentional act of remembering. This consciousness might have roused their collective memory to the experiences of hardship and vulnerability experienced those long years in Egypt. The law, then, is aimed at reforming their ethical stance – by *imitatio dei* – to prevent a new iteration of marginalization for these *gērim* now under the care of the Israelites.

Regarding the third aspect of power relationships within acts of hospitality, the reader is struck by the injunction to "love the stranger" in verse 19. It introduces a complex power dynamic inherent in the act of hospitality, between host and guest. While on the surface, this command seems to advocate for an egalitarian form of care for the Other, it also implicitly reinforces the power imbalance between the host (the Israelites) and the guest (the stranger). Derrida's analysis of hospitality acknowledges this inherent tension, where the host's invitation

[175] Husserl, *Ideas*, 214-217.
[176] Husserl, *Ideas*, 214.

and welcome can simultaneously be an assertion of sovereignty and control over the space and terms of hospitality. The legal command to love and care for the stranger, while rooted in empathy and shared vulnerability, also delineates a power hierarchy where the host community dictates the terms of hospitality and, by extension, reinforces its own identity and boundaries in opposition to the Other. Such a legal framework also wards and warns against the darker side of power structures inherent in the interplay of host and guest, namely that of violence.

Since double reading requires that I read again, I present two readings that offer up a view into the conflict and violence that is often hidden in discussions of hospitality. Anne Katrine de Hemmer Gudme conducted a study of the Hebrew Bible's instances of murder and violence within the context of hospitality. Donald E. Gowan, while not analyzing the text of Deuteronomy, wrote a manuscript on the socioeconomic aspects of the poverty context of orphans, widows, and in his words "sojourners," a context that highlights the powerlessness of these groups and how easily they can be exploited (which is yet another form of violence). Both scholars emphasize how power is never far from violence, and how conflict between host and guest is always just beneath the surface of any encounter. I will present Gudme's findings here in this section whereas Gowen's contributions will be highlighted in the following section focusing on Deuteronomy 24:17-18.

Gudme, following the British social anthropologist Julian Pitt-Rivers, argues that hospitality in Mediterranean-type societies is a type of natural law triggered by social necessity.[177] This occurred because while a stranger could bring honor to the residents living in an area, these same strangers also brought the threat of violence.[178] As a result, the non-resident occupied a type of

[177] Anne Katrine de Hemmer Gudme, "Invitation to Murder: Hospitality and Violence in the Hebrew Bible," *Studia Theologica - Nordic Journal of Theology* 73, no. 1 (2019): 90-91.
[178] Gudme, 91.

liminal status between "hostile stranger and that of community member."[179] This ambivalence or suspension of conflict toward a stranger, Gudme writes of Pitt-Rivers, aligns well with what we find in Deuteronomy 10:17-19. A new person threatens violence on multiple levels in a community as they could bring harm to a resident or perhaps even be the target of violence initiated by community members. The legal injunction to care for the stranger stands as a social bulwark against any violence done *to* the stranger, obligating the community to protect them from any danger. Gudme notes that hospitality, especially in Mediterranean societies, is inextricably bound up with honor and reciprocity.[180] In this sense, both host and guest have their power redistributed paradoxically: the host must care for the guest, and the guest is obligated to honor and not shame the host. Again, this does not eliminate the threat of violence; the suspension of the stranger's status merely postpones what may become violent. Perhaps this is why a Derridean understanding of hospitality offers a unique view into such a relationship between the Israelites and the *ger* since Derrida's idea of the gift – an unconditional, non-transactional gesture – is unilateral in its extension of welcome. God legally mandates the unconditional care of a stranger who brings both the threat of violence and the possibly of honor.

[179] Julian Pitt-Rivers, "The Law of Hospitality," *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* vol. 2, no. 1 (2012): 504.
[180] Gudme, 91. This reciprocity sets up what Gudme later discusses as alternating inequalities that forever balance each other (pp. 92-93). Gudme's focus is on the stories of Genesis 18 and 19 with Abraham and Lot and is outside the purview of my own project but her emphasis on honor and reciprocity within hospitality is universally important.

4.2 Deuteronomy 24:17-18

Deuteronomy 24:17-18 instructs: "Do not obstruct the legal rights of a stranger or orphan. Do not seize a widow's coat as a debt.[181] Recall[182] how you were a slave in Egypt but how the LORD your God rescued you from there. That is why I am commanding you to do this act." This passage, when analyzed through the lens of Jacques Derrida's concepts of hospitality, along with Edmund Husserl's phenomenological insights, opens a rich field of interpretation regarding the nature of hospitality and its inherent power dynamics. Prior to discussing the insights provided by a phenomenological double reading, however, it would be better to take a moment to consider the lived experiences of the orphan, the widow, and the stranger (with particular focus on the widow given the textual context) to more appropriately understand the dimensions of hospitality in these verses.

Deuteronomy 24:17–18 continues the ethical triad of stranger, orphan, and widow by legislating against the perversion of justice in legal and economic contexts. The pairing of legal protection with the command not to "seize the widow's garment as a pledge" reflects a characteristic feature of Deuteronomic law: combining casuistic form with moral exhortation.[183] These laws often follow a structure of prohibition followed by motive clause—here culminating in the theological rationale "for you were slaves in Egypt, and YHWH your God redeemed

[181] I recognize most translations (NRSV, JPS, CEB being the prominent English translations I typically consult) keep to the standard rendering of "pledge" but I follow *NIDOTTE* here in that the pledge is ultimately referring to an incurred debt, which heightens the threatening nature of חָבַל's seizing. Attaching "loan" to the pledge is what the CEB offers for a translation here, but I do not believe "loan" is serious enough terminology to convey the precarity of the widow's situation for modern readers.

[182] Given Husserl's emphasis on collective memory, I opt to slightly bend the verb וְזָכַרְתָּ here to mean "you will recall" instead of "remember."

[183] Raymond Westbrook, *Law from the Tigris to the Tiber: The Writings of Raymond Westbrook, Volume 1: Civil and Comparative Law*, ed. Bruce Wells and F. Rachel Magdalene (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 433–435.

you."[184] Carolyn Pressler notes that such laws not only seek to guard the rights of the vulnerable but construct Israel's moral identity around empathy for the disadvantaged.[185] In this context, the ger is not merely a tolerated outsider but a test case for Israel's memory and obedience. The repetition of this motive clause across multiple legal units demonstrates how Deuteronomy embeds historical memory into the juridical structure, aligning justice with theological anthropology.

Donald E. Gowan's work often focuses on the socioeconomic aspects of the Hebrew Bible and his attention to the triad of orphan-widow-stranger, specifically about the degree of powerlessness each of these classes of people experienced is worth integrating into my project on the *ger*. Similar to Gudme's work, Gowen notes that in the class system in antiquity (and arguably similar in modern societies), the orphan/widow/stranger were among the most powerless and exploited groups.[186] This is not a surprise to anyone familiar with ancient Afro-Asiatic legal codes since the categories of *orphan* and *widow* feature prominently in protective laws as far away as Egypt, throughout Mesopotamia, to Ugarit and even in the Levant.[187] What is curious and surprising, Gowan adds, is that there is no mention of the stranger (or "sojourner" in his translations) in any of these cultures/societies – the intensive legal protections found in the Tanakh are unique solely to Israel.[188] The powerlessness had consequences for the triad, though,

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[184] Husserl's notion of historical intentionality suggests that consciousness is always shaped by lived time, including inherited or communal memory. This idea supports the Deuteronomic logic that ethical treatment of the *gēr* arises from embodied historical perception, not just from legal command. See Husserl, *Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness*, trans. James S. Churchill (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1964), 97–99.
[185] Carolyn Pressler, *The View from the Top: Women and Deuteronomic Law* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 64–70.
[186] Donald E. Gowan, "Wealth and Poverty in the Old Testament: The Case of the Widow, the Orphan, and the Sojourner," *Interpretation* vol. 41, no. 4 (1987): 341.
[187] Gowan, 343.
[188] Ibid. I need to add here that Gowan slightly overstates his claim that no other ancient societies/legal codes made provision for the stranger/sojourner/foreigner since Beckman's cuneiform studies clearly show that there was not only an awareness but some scant protections for refugees/asylum seekers (who could be considered strangers/foreigners) given their social/political/economic benefits. However, Gowan is correct that no other legal code gives as much attention and unilateral protection as we find in the Hebrew Bible.

far beyond a simple lack of resources in the society. Without a working/able-bodied male to secure income, status, and property, the orphan-widow-stranger groups incurred losses due to that absence of income, of status, of respect (which consequently lead to a degree a shame, another debt of social currency), making them vulnerable to "the powerful and unscrupulous" elite.[189] Echoing a sentiment that was as true in antiquity as it is today, Gowan mournfully reminds us that without the ability to generate status and respect in society, "those who are not poor are likely to become poor and those who are poor are going to get poorer."[190] This disparity for those without versus those with plenty highlights the ongoing power dynamics embedded in Deuteronomy's binding laws to welcome the stranger, to provide for the Other. The community ought to provide for the least of these because what they incur without the necessary aspects of life in a society (food, shelter, clothing, respect, status) results in more debt. Deut 24:17 plainly displays this concern when the text demands that the community does not place the widow in further debt by seizing her coat as a loan. Though these groups cannot offer anything of material or social value to the framework of a typical Afro-Asiatic society, the God of Israel still demands that hospitality be performed and the protective welcome extended.

Derrida, in "Of Hospitality," articulates the paradox of hospitality: to welcome the Other without condition is an ideal that confronts the reality of societal laws and norms that invariably impose conditions on such welcome. He posits that true hospitality involves a radical openness to the Other, a form of welcome that precedes and exceeds any conditional, juridical framework.[191] However, this ideal of absolute hospitality is persistently checked by the "laws of

[189] Gowan, 344.
[190] Ibid. Gowan comments on this section that we ought to consider other groups along with the triad, such as those who are not able-bodied, but they do not feature prominently in any of the legal codes except for a couple mentions in Leviticus 19:14 and Deuteronomy 27:18.
[191] Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 75-79.

hospitality," the societal regulations that dictate the terms and limits of hospitality.[192] Deuteronomy 24:17-18, by commanding justice for the *ger* encapsulates this tension. The biblical injunction reflects an unconditional ethical demand: to treat the stranger with the same justice and care as one's kin. Yet, by virtue of being codified in law, this demand is simultaneously situated within a conditional framework. The *ger* in Deuteronomy, thus, becomes a figure at the intersection of unconditional ethical imperatives and the conditional hospitality prescribed by societal laws. In this light, these verses can be seen as an enactment of "hostipitality" where the command to ensure justice for the *ger* reflects both an unconditional ethical imperative and the conditional hospitality that is mediated by societal norms and laws. The verses embody the perpetual negotiation between the ideal of a radical, unconditional welcome and the practical realities of conditional hospitality within a community.

Husserl's phenomenological concepts of intentionality and epoché provide a framework for understanding the ethical imperative in this passage. Intentionality, the directedness of consciousness towards an object, is crucial in the ethical treatment of the Other. The commandment to remember the Israelites' own enslavement in Egypt serves to direct their consciousness towards their past suffering, thereby cultivating empathy towards the orphan, the widow, and the stranger. This act of remembering is an instance of Husserl's epoché, a suspension of judgment, a parenthesizing of the natural world,[193] allowing the Israelites to bracket their present circumstances and biases to connect with their past experiences of vulnerability. This directed consciousness, shaped by the memory of their own marginalization, informs the ethical imperative to act justly towards the vulnerable, transforming the power relationship from one of potential dominance to one of empathetic solidarity.

[192] Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 77-82.
[193] Husserl, *Ideas,* §32.

Memory and identity appear in Deut 24:17-18 as well, explicitly tied the commandment to act justly towards the vulnerable to the Israelites' collective memory of slavery in Egypt: " Recall how you were a slave in Egypt but how the LORD your God rescued you from there. That is why I am commanding you to do this act." This linkage of ethical behavior to collective memory introduces a complex interplay between memory, identity, and hospitality. Derrida posits that true hospitality involves a radical openness to the Other, which can be facilitated by the recognition of one's own vulnerability and otherness.[194] The Israelites' recollection of their own enslavement serves not just as a moral rationale for their actions but also as a means of identifying with the Other, thereby mitigating the power imbalances typically associated with acts of hospitality. This shared experience of vulnerability fosters a sense of communal identity that transcends the usual distinctions between host and guest, creating a space for a more egalitarian form of hospitality that challenges traditional power dynamics.

4.3 Deuteronomy 24: 19-22

For this passage, I have translated Deuteronomy 24:19-22 as follows: “Whenever you are reaping the harvest of your field and you forget a sheaf[195] in the field, do not return to retrieve it. Let that portion[196] be for the stranger and the orphans and the widows so that the LORD your God blesses all the work of your hands. In the same way, when you beat out the olives from the branches, do not go over the branches again. Let that portion be for the stranger, the orphans, and

[194] Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 75 (with a broader discussion ranging from pp. 75-82). Derrida highlights the inherent tension between the idea of a “radical openness” and the practical limitations imposed by societal norms and laws.
[195] I opted to leave this literal instead of what would be a better translation (most likely “grain” for עֹמֶר) because it emphasizes the very scant quantity of what remains in the field. The Israelites are commanded to not be so frugal that they are concerned with the smallest scraps of food that could be a lifeline for those in need.
[196] I add “portion” here despite no clear term in the Hebrew due to the implication that there would be a remnant or additional amount of produce available given the previous phrases injunction to “not go over it again.” The term “portion” helps demarcate that what is left is not the main harvest yet substantial enough for the triad groups to eat for survival.

the widows. Yet again, when you gather from the vineyard, do not strip[197] the vines a second time. Let that portion be for the stranger, the orphans, and the widows. Recall how you were a slave in Egypt. That is why I am commanding you to do this act." Derrida's conceptualization of hospitality involves a radical openness to the Other, an invitation that ideally comes without preconditions or expectations of reciprocity. This unconditional hospitality, however, is fraught with complexities, particularly when intersecting with societal norms and structures. In Deuteronomy 24:19-22, the command to leave behind a portion of the harvest for the stranger, the orphans, and the widows introduces a form of hospitality that is institutionalized within the community's economic practices. This act of leaving behind what is forgotten or a leftover portion subverts traditional power dynamics; the landowner, typically in the position of power, relinquishes a portion of their wealth, inadvertently (yet intentionally) empowering the marginalized who are invited to claim these remnants. This redistribution mechanism, divinely codified, functions as a form of hospitality that not only addresses immediate needs but also reconfigures societal power relations, reflecting Derrida's ideal of a hospitality that upends the traditional host-guest hierarchy.

Deuteronomy 24:19–22 presents a ritualized form of hospitality through the command to leave behind portions of the harvest for the stranger, the orphan, and the widow. The threefold pattern—grain (v.19), olive (v.20), and vine (v.21)—establishes a cadence of ethical restraint, mandating that Israelite landowners do not return for what remains. As Bruce Wells notes, this type of gleaning provision has no clear parallel in Mesopotamian legal texts, where protections

[197] Though not critical to my analysis, I wanted to point out the unique aspect of תְּעוֹלֵל given that it could be translated "do not deal/strip severely" from *HALOT*, 834. It is interesting that the law is written with the understanding that workers would so carefully (and violently) remove the grapes to ensure every single piece of produce was gathered. Perhaps the redactors were aware of the practice and rendered the text in a way that the community would hear and be mindful to not be as thorough as possible in their stripping.

for foreigners are notably absent.[198] The logic of this law is not charity but structural justice: access to food is a *right* embedded in covenantal land ethics. Brueggemann emphasizes that these laws reflect a vision of economy grounded in memory, mutuality, and trust in divine provision.[199] The motive clause, "remember that you were a slave in Egypt," frames this economic ethic in terms of narrative solidarity—the Israelite must remember what it was to be landless, dependent, and hungry. Hospitality here is not interpersonal benevolence but an agricultural discipline, shaping a just society from the roots of the land itself.

Husserl's notions of intentionality and epoché offer insightful lenses to examine the ethical imperatives found in these verses. Intentionality, the act of consciousness being directed towards something, is central to the ethical directive of not going back to gather what was left behind. This intentional refraining from action requires a conscious effort to recognize and consider the needs of the stranger who has no access to gainful income without consent from the community at large. Furthermore, the command to remember the Israelites' enslavement in Egypt employs Husserl's concept of epoché, the suspension of natural assumptions, to evoke a collective ethical consciousness. This is case law, meaning that this scenario has, in all likelihood, occurred previously, so the law was created from previous instances of this situation so that the community has a framework for how to navigate strangers present among the Israelites. By recalling their own history of marginalization and vulnerability, the Israelites are called to suspend their present biases and economic interests, fostering a deep empathy and solidarity with the marginalized in their community. This collective remembrance and the intentional act of leaving behind a portion of the harvest embody an ethical hospitality that

[198] Bruce Wells, *The Law of Testimony in the Pentateuchal Codes*, BZAW 355 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004), 183–185.
[199] Walter Brueggemann, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 39–42, 51–55.

transcends mere charity, embedding within it a recognition of shared humanity and interdependence.

Returning to the idea of social obligation, hospitality in the Israelite subset of Afro-Asiatic antiquity was not a personal virtue but an ingrained, moral practice.[200] But more than collective, communal obligation, T.R. Hobbs argues for a transformative quality present in hospitality that could be akin to a naturalization process in a modern country. Given the inherent risk and threat that all strangers pose to a community, he suggests that the framework of hospitality (meta)physically transforms the stranger from threat into an ally – a protected member of the community despite not having any kin ties or claims to property.[201] The idea of naturalization into a modern country is useful in another sense given that the principal reason one would become a stranger in a foreign land is due to conflict and danger where they were living.[202] A person flees war or other threats of harm in order to find a new life where they (and possibly their family) can re-settle and begin again. Though Hobbs warns against "making a virtue out of a sociological necessity,"[203] I believe he misses the bigger conversation of hospitality in that there is a blurred line, a liminal space, between a virtue and an obligation. He is primarily concerned that the text's context remains grounded in antiquity so that nothing in modernity – whether tourism or immigration – should affect the interpretation of what hospitality meant for Israelites.[204] Yet the concept of hospitality stretches beyond any finite context – the readers of the text bring out the context into their lives, their experiences, their struggles, their futures. I agree with Hobbs that the issues of modernity regarding hospitality do not necessarily

[200] T.R. Hobbs, "Hospitality in the First Testament and the 'Teleological Fallacy'," *JSOT* vol. 95 (2001): 3-4. I have a severe disdain for the term "First Testament" but that is an argument for another project.
[201] Hobbs, 4. Hobbs here is following previous scholars like Roland de Vaux (*Ancient Israel*, 1961, p. 10 in which de Vaux writes about how hospitality even among nomads was an esteemed virtue).
[202] Waldemar Janzen, *Old Testament Ethics: A Paradigmatic Approach* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1994), 43.
[203] Hobbs, 5.
[204] Hobbs, 4-5.

reflect that of Israel's laws concerning what hospitality meant in their location and time; however, this is not to say that hospitality then and there has no impact on hospitality now and here if the text of Deuteronomy is instructive for those who hold it be sacred.

In terms of viewing the text through memory**,** the repeated injunction to remember the period of enslavement in Egypt serves as a foundational element for the community's identity and ethical behavior. This collective memory not only serves as a historical reminder but also as a moral compass guiding the community's treatment of the marginalized. Derrida posits that true hospitality necessitates an openness to the Other that can challenge and transform one's identity.[205] In this biblical context, the Israelites' identity is intrinsically linked to their historical experience of vulnerability and marginalization, which, in turn, informs their ethos of hospitality. By anchoring the command to provide for the stranger, orphan, and widow in the collective memory of enslavement, the text suggests that hospitality is not an isolated act of kindness but a fundamental aspect of the community's identity and ethical orientation. This interweaving of memory and identity fosters a hospitality that is both a personal and communal imperative, challenging the community to live out an ethic that reflects their almost-but-not-yet transformed identity.

4.4 Deuteronomy 26:12-13

The text for this section is as follows: "When you have completed paying the whole tithe of your produce on the third year – which is the tithe year[206] – you will give it to the Levites, the

[205] Though I have noted this elsewhere, it is important to remember that Derrida incessantly states that hospitality, in its true, unconditional form, is impossible. It is the goal of humanity to strive toward this impossible goal as it is also required of us to participate in that *imitatio dei* regardless of how impossible it may be to emulate a perfect being.
[206] Even the redactors needed to remind the community what year they were required to tithe.

stranger, the orphans, and the widows so that they can eat in your towns until satisfied. Then declare before the LORD your God: 'I have purged the holy portion from my house, and also I have given it to the Levites, the stranger, the orphans, and the widows – just as your whole commandment has commanded me[207] – I have not transgressed your commandments. And I have not forgotten even one!" Derrida's exploration of hospitality pivots on the tension between its conditional and unconditional forms. The cycle of tithing described in Deuteronomy 26:12-13 illustrates a form of conditional hospitality, where the giving of tithes is bound by specific commandments and structured within a cultic and social framework. This structured giving, directed towards the Levites, strangers, orphans, and widows, institutionalizes hospitality as a duty and an act of compliance. While this appears to limit the radical openness that Derrida associates with true hospitality, it also serves to formally recognize and integrate the marginalized within the community's social and economic life. The act of tithing creates a power relationship where the host adheres to a prescribed role of provider, yet this role is sanctioned by the divine, thereby diminishing the personal power the giver might otherwise exert in the act of giving.

Deuteronomy 26:12–13 elevates the ethic of hospitality from private practice to public ritual. On the third year—the "year of the tithe"—the Israelite is commanded to not only redistribute goods to the gēr, the orphan, and the widow, but also to *declare* that this has been done "according to all the commandment" and that "none of it was consumed in mourning or uncleanness." Jeffrey Tigay highlights that this declaration mirrors the creedal statements of

[207] I could not find a good way to translate this phrase - כְּכָל־מִצְוָתְךָ אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתָנִי – and it seems like most major translations required auxiliary words to smooth out the meaning. I attempted to keep it simple while preserving readability.

Deuteronomy 6 and 26:5–10, embedding justice within Israel's liturgical memory.[208] Weinfeld similarly emphasizes that this speech-act is not peripheral—it is central to the theology of Deuteronomy, where obedience to God is expressed through care for the vulnerable.[209] In this sense, hospitality becomes more than ethical practice—it is covenantal witness. Derrida's insight into the performative dimension of hospitality—how the word of welcome may conceal structures of control—is instructive here.[210] The Israelite must *not only give*, but speak truthfully before God and community about having given. The ritual thus functions as both economic redistribution and a form of ethical self-accounting, where hospitality becomes a testimony of identity, justice, and integrity.

The intentional act of giving, as outlined in these verses, can be further illuminated by Husserl's concept of intentionality — the directedness of consciousness towards an object or an act. The tither's declaration before God, "I have purged the holy portion from of my house," signifies a conscious, intentional adherence to the commandment, reflecting a deliberate ethical action rather than a spontaneous act of generosity. This intentionality is underscored by the cultic remembrance of the commandments and the explicit acknowledgment of having followed them, akin to Husserl's epoché, where one suspends natural inclinations to focus on the object or act in question. The ethical action here is not merely the act of giving but the intentional adherence to a divine command that structures the relationship between the giver and the recipient within a sacred and communal context. This structured intentionality ensures that the act of giving transcends personal power dynamics and is instead embedded within a collective ethical memory and action.

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[208] Jeffrey H. Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996), 244–246.
[209] Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy*, 270.
[210] Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 27–29.

The inclusion of Levites, strangers, orphans, and widows in the commandment to tithe speaks to the biblical conception of community, where the marginalized are explicitly recognized and provided for within the community structure. This act of provision can be seen through Derrida's lens as an encounter with the Other that is structured yet imbued with ethical significance, as it mandates the recognition and inclusion of those who are often on the peripheries of society. The act of tithing, therefore, becomes an act of hospitality that not only addresses the material needs of the marginalized but also symbolically integrates them into the community's identity. This integration challenges and reshapes the community's identity, making it one that is inherently ethical and inclusive, reflecting Derrida's ideal of a hospitality that acknowledges and embraces the Other. The ritual declaration that "I have not transgressed your commandments. And I have not forgotten even one!" further reinforces this ethos, linking the community's identity to a collective memory of ethical mandates and actions that define its very essence.

4.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I embarked on a phenomenological double reading of hospitality in the selected passages of Deuteronomy. This analysis has illuminated the complex interplay between unconditional ethical imperatives and the conditional frameworks of hospitality embedded within the societal and legal structures of ancient Israel. In my exploration of Deuteronomy 10:17-19, I delved into the profound ethical implications of these verses through the lens of Derridean hospitality and Husserlian phenomenology. This passage, with its divinely codified mandate for empathy and justice toward the stranger, was analyzed not just as a biblical injunction but as a call to a radical form of hospitality that transcends the conditional confines of societal norms. I highlighted how the divine example of unconditional care for the marginalized—widows,

orphans, and strangers—sets a precedent for human action, challenging us to extend hospitality beyond transactional relationships towards an altruistic care for the Other. This analysis brought to light the tension between the ideal of unconditional hospitality and the practical realities of its enactment within the community, underscoring the fluid dynamics of power inherent in acts of hospitality.

In the section on Deuteronomy 24:17-18, my analysis focused on the instructions to uphold justice for the stranger and the vulnerable within the community, framing these commands within the broader context of conditional and unconditional hospitality. I drew upon Husserl's concept of intentionality to examine the ethical directive of remembering one's own enslavement in Egypt, which serves to cultivate empathy and solidarity with the marginalized. This act of directed consciousness, informed by collective memory, was presented as transforming the power relationship between host and guest, promoting an empathetic solidarity that challenges traditional power dynamics. My discussion also touched on the complexities of hospitality as both an ethical imperative and a regulated societal norm, reflecting the negotiation between the ideal of radical openness and the conditional frameworks that govern hospitality practices.

Deuteronomy 24:19-22 and 26:12-13, with their specific instructions on leaving behind sheafs for the marginalized and the tithing practices, respectively, serve as poignant illustrations of this dynamic. These passages not only command acts of care and provision but also situate these acts within a broader ethical and communal context, reflecting a deep-seated concern for the vulnerable that is both issued by divine decree and regulated by societal norms. Through Derrida's concept of "hostipitality," I have attempted to demonstrate how hospitality inherently entails a tension between welcoming the Other and the potential for exclusion or even hostility

embedded within this welcome. This tension is palpable in Deuteronomy's legal code, where the command to extend hospitality to the *ger* is framed within a conditional legal structure, highlighting the ever-present negotiation between the ideal of radical openness and the practical realities of societal living. Husserl's phenomenology, particularly his notions of intentionality and epoché, further enriches our understanding of these biblical texts. The intentional act of remembering one's own marginalization and extending hospitality based on this recollection underscores the transformative power of empathy and ethical reflection. This directed consciousness not only informs the Israelites' actions towards the *ger* but also invites modern readers to consider how our own perceptions and treatments of the Other are shaped by our experiences and biases.

This chapter, through a phenomenological double reading of Deuteronomy's hospitality laws, invites a reimagining of hospitality not as a mere social convention but as a profound ethical orientation towards the Other. It calls for a hospitality that is deeply rooted in the divine example, one that transcends mere tolerance to embrace genuine welcome, and in doing so, reconfigures the social order towards a more inclusive and just community. This exploration not only sheds light on the ancient texts but also resonates with contemporary issues of migration, displacement, and the ethics of care, urging us to reconsider the boundaries between self and Other in our increasingly interconnected world, especially as we continually recognize the Other always already present in ourselves.

These close readings reveal both the ethical force and internal tensions of Deuteronomy's treatment of the *gēr*. Each passage examined calls Israel to a posture of radical empathy—one grounded in divine action ("for YHWH loves the stranger…") and communal memory ("for you were strangers in Egypt"). Yet this call is mediated through ritual laws, property norms, and

juridical structures that condition the welcome and delimit the stranger's place. Through Derrida's lens, these tensions become sites of *hostipitality*, where the welcome of the stranger remains entangled with systems of power. Husserl's phenomenology further illuminates how Israel's memory of enslavement functions as an intentional act, shaping ethical perception and behavior. These texts, then, are not merely legal codes—they are ethical invitations and hermeneutical events. They ask not only how hospitality was practiced in ancient Israel but how it continues to be practiced or denied in our own socio-political and theological frameworks. The final chapter will synthesize these insights, reflecting on what is at stake theologically, politically, and ethically when evangelicals—and interpreters of scripture more broadly—fail to see the stranger not as a threat, but as the mirror through which justice itself is revealed.

Chapter 5: A Review

With the exegetical analysis now complete, this concluding chapter steps back to consider the broader theological, ethical, and political implications of the project. Here, I revisit the key insights from each chapter—not simply to summarize, but to ask: what has this study of Deuteronomic hospitality revealed about how we read scripture, construct theology, and encounter the Other? By drawing together the ancient legal imagination of Deuteronomy, Derrida's deconstructive critique of conditional welcome, and the lived contradictions of evangelical responses to immigration, this final chapter reflects on what hospitality demands from communities of faith today. It also offers a critical self-assessment of the methodology employed—particularly the usefulness and limits of Derridean and Husserlian frameworks in biblical interpretation. Above all, this chapter affirms that hospitality is not a metaphor or abstraction, but a test: of justice, of power, and of the willingness to see the stranger as beloved rather than as burden.

5.1 Chapter 1: Insights and Contributions

The first chapter of this dissertation introduces and considers the term *gēr* ("stranger" or "sojourner") within the context of Deuteronomy. The *gēr* occupies a unique position in the legal and social framework of ancient Israel. Unlike other marginalized groups in ancient Afro-Asiatic societies, the *gēr* was given special protections alongside widows and orphans. The Deuteronomic Code emphasizes justice, communal solidarity, and the ethical treatment of the

vulnerable, with specific injunctions concerning the *gēr*. This focus on the *gēr* reflects an innovative legal and moral ethos, setting ancient Israel apart from neighboring people groups.

5.1.1 Legal and Social Status of the *Gēr*

José E. Ramírez Kidd's foundational work underscores that the term *gēr* primarily denotes a legal status rather than merely describing a foreigner. Kidd argues that the *gēr* represented a weak social underclass, requiring protection and inclusion within Israelite society. His interpretation suggests that Deuteronomic laws sought to establish a framework for justice and compassion, ensuring that the *gēr* would not be subjected to exploitation or marginalization.

One of Kidd's most provocative arguments involves a reinterpretation of the phrase, "You shall love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt." Contrary to the traditional understanding that this command recalls Israel's enslavement in Egypt, Kidd posits that it refers to Joseph's positive reception in Egypt. This reframing emphasizes gratitude and reciprocity, encouraging Israel to treat the *gēr* with dignity and empathy.

5.1.2 Comparative Analysis with Other Ancient Societies

Unlike the legal codes of other ancient Afro-Asiatic cultures, which often excluded or ignored foreigners, the Deuteronomic Code integrates the *gēr* into the broader community. Christina van Houten highlights that while ancient Mesopotamian societies recognized the presence of foreigners, they rarely afforded them legal protections. In contrast, Deuteronomy repeatedly demands that Israel upholds the rights of the *gēr*, linking their welfare to the nation's collective identity and memory of displacement.

Van Houten also explores the socioeconomic dimensions of these laws. She suggests that they were directed primarily at the Israelite elite. By codifying protections for the *gēr*, the law sought to bridge the gap between the privileged and the disenfranchised, fostering a more equitable society. This emphasis on social justice reflects a radical departure from the exclusionary practices of Israel's neighbors.

5.1.3 Ethical Imperatives and Memory

Memory plays a pivotal role in Deuteronomy's ethical framework. The repeated invocation of Israel's experience in Egypt serves as a moral anchor, reminding the community of their past vulnerability. Reinhard Achenbach notes that this motif reinforces the obligation to protect the *gēr*, which positions hospitality as both a legal duty and a moral imperative.

Deuteronomy 10:18-19 exemplifies this ethic: "For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing. And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt." This passage encapsulates the theological rationale for extending hospitality to the *gēr*, framing it as an act of imitatio Dei—imitating God's justice and compassion.

5.1.4 Integration and Exclusion

While the Deuteronomic Code advocates for the inclusion of the *gēr*, it simultaneously delineates boundaries. The *gēr* is permitted to participate in certain communal activities, such as the Feast

of Weeks (Deuteronomy 16:11) and the Feast of Booths (Deuteronomy 16:14), but is excluded from others, notably the Passover celebration (Deuteronomy 16:1-8). This selective inclusion reflects a tension between the ideals of universal hospitality and the realities of maintaining a distinct national identity.

Reinhard Achenbach's redaction-critical approach highlights how the laws concerning the *gēr* evolved over time, with later additions emphasizing greater inclusivity. He argues that this legal evolution mirrors Israel's shifting socio-political landscape, particularly during and after the Babylonian exile. During the time that Israel grappled with questions of identity and belonging, the *gēr* became both a symbol of inclusion and a marker of communal boundaries.

The Deuteronomic injunctions concerning the *gēr* serve not only to protect the vulnerable but also to shape Israel's moral identity. By extending hospitality to the *gēr*, Israel embodies a countercultural ethic that prioritizes justice and compassion over exclusion and fear. This ethical vision challenges both ancient and modern audiences to reconsider how they engage with the Other.

Fleur Houston's analysis of Exodus 23:1-9, which parallels Deuteronomy's laws, underscores the transformative potential of hospitality. She argues that these legal texts invite a reimagining of societal structures, calling for a radical openness to the stranger. This openness, however, is not without its challenges. The power dynamics inherent in hospitality necessitate vigilance against exploitation and abuse.

5.1.5 Chapter 1: Final Thoughts

Chapter 1 establishes a critical foundation for this dissertation by exploring the multifaceted concept of the *gēr* in Deuteronomy. The legal and ethical provisions concerning the *gēr* reflect a

commitment to justice that is centered on Israel's collective memory and theological convictions. By situating these laws within their ancient Afro-Asiatic context and engaging with contemporary scholarship, this chapter highlights the radical nature of Deuteronomy's vision of hospitality. This vision, while imperfect and mired by tensions, offers valuable insights for contemporary discussions on immigration and the ethical treatment of the Other.

5.2 Chapter 2: Summary Findings

Chapter 2 of this dissertation provides a comprehensive exploration of the interplay between conservative Christian thought, particularly within evangelical communities, and immigration policies in the United States. It seeks to present the complex historical, theological, and political engagements of evangelical groups with the issue of immigration over the past two decades. Through this analysis, the chapter highlights how these interactions have shaped not only public discourse but also actual policies that directly affect immigrant populations, particularly people who are undocumented migrants. The primary objective of Chapter 2 is to illuminate the ideological tensions within evangelical responses to immigration, the theological constructs underpinning those responses, and the socio-economic impacts of U.S. immigration policy, especially as influenced by free trade agreements like NAFTA.

5.2.1 Political and Theological Engagements with Immigration

The chapter opens by distinguishing the heterogeneity of evangelical perspectives on immigration, emphasizing that this group is far from monolithic. Ruth Melkonian-Hoover and Lyman Kellstedt's research is cited to underscore the historical shifts in evangelical attitudes,

beginning with early 20th-century isolationist tendencies and evolving into the more polarized stances seen in recent decades. Their study, *Evangelicals and Immigration: Fault Lines Among the Faithful*, provides a pivotal framework for understanding the diverse evangelical responses, noting a dichotomy between national leadership bodies advocating for more compassionate immigration policies and the laity, who often hold more conservative and often exclusionary views.

During the Bush administration (2000-2008), evangelical coalitions such as Christians for Comprehensive Immigration Reform (CCIR) emerged, advocating for humane border enforcement, family reunification, and pathways to citizenship. The support for critical immigration reform (CIR) by major evangelical organizations, including the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) and the Southern Baptist Convention, was notable for its emphasis on humanitarian and theological imperatives. This period also saw the rise of criticism against anti-immigration legislation, such as the Sensenbrenner bill (HR 4437), by groups concerned about its potential to criminalize aid to undocumented immigrants.

Under the Obama administration (2008-2016), evangelical advocacy for CIR intensified with increased ecumenical cooperation across religious lines. The establishment of the Evangelical Immigration Table (EIT) signaled a strategic alliance aimed at promoting justice for immigrants. Yet, the chapter notes an emerging intra-evangelical tension during this period, as segments of white evangelicals began to express opposition to CIR, a trend that would become more pronounced during the Trump era.

The first Trump administration (2016-2020) marked a significant shift, with starkly anti-immigrant rhetoric and policies, such as the travel ban and heightened border security measures, winning widespread support from white evangelical communities. Prominent evangelical leaders

like Franklin Graham and Jerry Falwell Jr. publicly endorsed these measures, framing them as necessary for national security. This era exposed a deepening rift within evangelical circles, as more progressive factions, including Hispanic and Asian evangelicals, continued to advocate for CIR in the face of growing opposition from their white counterparts. The concept of "hostipitality," derived from Jacques Derrida's critique of conditional hospitality, is employed in the chapter to analyze the contradictory evangelical stance of providing aid while supporting exclusionary policies.

The second Trump administration marked a decisive intensification of restrictionist immigration policies, further embedding the paradox of hostipitality within the mechanisms of the state. This period so far has been characterized by a radicalization of executive power, expanding upon the foundational nationalist and nativist logics that had defined his first term. Among the most significant policy shifts were the termination of birthright citizenship for children born to non-citizen parents, the increased militarization of border enforcement through direct deployment of active-duty military personnel, and the indefinite suspension of refugee admissions. These measures, ostensibly enacted in the interest of national security and sovereignty, functioned instead as mechanisms of demographic exclusion and state-enforced hostility under the guise of legal order.

The revocation of birthright citizenship stands as a particularly radical departure from prior frameworks, reflecting a deeper shift in the evangelical-political imagination. By reframing national belonging as contingent upon ideological and legal compliance rather than as an inherent right, the policy articulated a vision of the state as the ultimate arbiter of inclusion. Within the evangelical discourse surrounding immigration, this shift mirrored an evolving theology of deservingness—where hospitality is extended only to those who conform to the

host's moral and nationalistic expectations. In this view, the immigrant is welcome not as a reflection of a biblical imperative to love the stranger but as a subject of conditional grace, whose presence is always precarious and subject to the sovereign host's approval.

Equally significant was the Trump administration's decision to authorize military personnel for direct border enforcement, escalating the securitization of immigration to unprecedented levels. While previous administrations, including Bush and Obama, had relied on the National Guard for logistical support, Trump's directive reframed migration as an "invasion" requiring active military response. This rhetorical shift has not been merely legal or procedural but profoundly theological, resonating with a white evangelical nationalism that increasingly fused biblical notions of divine election with the defense of national borders. In this framework, the hostipitality paradox has deepened: the nation-state, positioned as both gracious benefactor and sovereign enforcer, justified the exclusion of the Other as a necessary act of self-preservation.

Perhaps the most telling shift in evangelical engagement with immigration during this period has been the administration's indefinite suspension of refugee admissions. Historically, evangelical organizations such as World Relief and the National Association of Evangelicals had positioned themselves as intermediaries between the state and displaced populations, advocating for refugee protections under the framework of humanitarian aid. The second Trump administration's policies, however, signaled a realignment of white evangelicalism with state power in which the theological imperative to care for the stranger was subordinated to an increasingly racialized vision of national identity. This move reflected not only a political acquiescence but a deeper ideological transformation—one in which the evangelical mission of welcome became increasingly indistinguishable from the exclusionary logic of the state.

These policies, while consistent with Trump's first-term rhetoric, represented an escalation in both scope and impact, demonstrating a shift from policy-driven restrictionism to an explicit ideological campaign of demographic gatekeeping. The dismantling of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) programs within federal agencies—though seemingly distinct from immigration policy—underscored this broader movement toward homogenization, rejecting multiculturalism as a threat to national cohesion. Evangelical support for such measures further entrenched the movement's complicity in the exclusionary mechanisms of the state. In this regard, the policies of Trump's second term did not merely continue prior trends but has actively redefined the evangelical engagement with immigration, aligning it more fully with the authoritarian structures of sovereignty rather than the theological principles of hospitality and justice.

In the context of Derrida's hostipitality, Trump's second-term policies have exposed the inherent violence embedded within the very structures of welcome. The revocation of birthright citizenship, the militarization of the border, and the suspension of refugee admissions all operate as instruments of conditional hospitality, reinforcing the reality that belonging—whether national or theological—is dictated by the host's power to exclude. The evangelical embrace of these measures suggests that the longstanding tension between mission and state authority has given way to a wholesale endorsement of the latter, where the rhetoric of welcome masks an ever-expanding apparatus of exclusion. Because of this, the trajectory of Trump's second term reveals not merely an evolution in policy but a fundamental transformation in the theological and political frameworks through which evangelicals engage with the Other, rendering hospitality itself an act of hostility.

5.2.2 The Spectrum of Christian Responses

To provide a comparative perspective, Chapter 2 also examines the stance of the United States Council of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) on immigration. The USCCB's six-point platform advocating earned legalization, family-based immigration reform, and humane border enforcement mirrors many of the evangelical calls for justice but diverges in its consistent emphasis on human dignity over national sovereignty. The chapter juxtaposes this moderate Catholic position with the more fragmented evangelical landscape, highlighting the shared yet distinct theological motivations underpinning their advocacy. Notably, the chapter critiques the nationalist undertones in both evangelical and Catholic frameworks. This critique suggests that while these religious groups outwardly promote compassion, their ultimate deference to state sovereignty undermines the ethos of unconditional welcome they claim to uphold.

5.2.3 The Historical Context of U.S.-Mexico Migration

A significant portion of the chapter is devoted to contextualizing the current immigration crisis within the broader history of U.S.-Mexico relations. The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), later replaced by the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), is scrutinized for its role in exacerbating economic instability in Mexico, leading to increased migration northward. The chapter cites data from the Center for Economic and Policy Research, which details how NAFTA displaced nearly 5 million Mexican farmers, contributing to a surge in undocumented migration to the United States.

This economic lens is critical to understanding the evangelical response to immigration, as many proponents of CIR cite mission opportunities and humanitarian obligations as reasons to

support reform. However, the chapter underscores the inherent tension in evangelical advocacy, where theological imperatives for compassion clash with socio-political allegiances to conservative, nationalist ideologies.

5.2.4 Theological Constructs: Mission and State Sovereignty

A recurring theme in Chapter 2 is the evangelical commitment to mission as a primary motivation for engaging with immigration issues. Leaders like Galen Carey of the NAE articulate a theology that views immigrants as divinely-sent mission fields. This perspective, while ostensibly compassionate, is critiqued for its underlying utilitarianism, which reduces immigrants to objects of evangelism rather than recognizing their intrinsic dignity.

The chapter further explores how this missionary zeal often coexists uneasily with a staunch commitment to state sovereignty. Evangelicals frequently invoke Romans 13 to justify obedience to immigration laws, even when those laws perpetuate injustice. Derrida's concept of "hostipitality" is again invoked to illustrate how this dual allegiance results in a performative hospitality that masks an underlying hostility.

5.2.5 Chapter 2: Final Thoughts

Chapter 2 concludes by emphasizing the need for a more critical engagement with the theological and ideological foundations of evangelical responses to immigration. It calls for a reevaluation of the interplay between mission, hospitality, and state power, urging evangelicals to move beyond conditional forms of welcome toward a truly radical hospitality that prioritizes human dignity over national boundaries.

Through its thorough analysis of historical, theological, and socio-political dimensions, Chapter 2 significantly contributes to the dissertation's overarching argument: that contemporary evangelical engagement with immigration, while often couched in the language of compassion, remains constrained by a conditional hospitality that ultimately serves the interests of state power rather than those of the marginalized stranger. This insight lays the groundwork for subsequent chapters, which will further explore the ethical implications of biblical hospitality and its relevance to contemporary immigration discourse.

5.3 Chapter 3: Insights and Contributions

Chapter 3 focuses on a methodological framework combining Derrida's deconstruction and Husserl's phenomenology to analyze hospitality in biblical texts. This focus is squarely on the book of Deuteronomy as a lens through which to evaluate modern immigration discourses, especially those shaped by evangelical interpretations. The chapter introduces the key concepts of epoché, intentionality, and *Lebenswelt* from Husserl's phenomenology to explore consciousness and the observer's interaction with experiences. These philosophical tools aim to uncover biases and presuppositions in the reading of biblical hospitality and its implications on present-day immigration debates.

5.3.1 Derrida's Hospitality and the Stranger

Central to Derrida's discourse on hospitality is the idea of hostipitality, where hospitality is inherently conflicted by the host's power over the guest. Derrida distinguishes between absolute hospitality—an unconditional welcome—and conditional hospitality, bound by rules and

sovereignty. His critical analysis reveals how biblical laws of hospitality, particularly those involving the *gēr* (stranger), offer a radical challenge to societal norms by mandating care for the outsider without expectation of reciprocity.

The chapter applies Derrida's framework to Deuteronomy, emphasizing the aporia (contradictions) in hospitality as depicted in the biblical text. Derrida's interpretation, along with insights from Husserl's phenomenology, provides a methodological approach for double reading—examining both the ancient context of the text and its modern implications. This approach seeks to expose hidden power dynamics and ethical contradictions in the treatment of immigrants, both historically and in contemporary evangelical discourse.

5.3.2 Husserl's Phenomenological Method

Husserl's epoché, or bracketing of biases, is employed to examine the text of Deuteronomy in an attempt to achieve a more authentic understanding of hospitality. His concept of intentionality, the directedness of consciousness, is crucial in interpreting the Israelites' collective memory of being strangers in Egypt, as presented in Deuteronomy 10:17-19. By recalling their own marginalization, the Israelites are ethically compelled to extend hospitality to the stranger.

The chapter explores the tension between divine commands for unconditional care and the practical, legal constraints imposed by society. Husserl's idea of the *Lebenswelt*, or lifeworld, compliments the analysis by situating the text within the lived experiences of its ancient audience, offering parallels to modern socio-political contexts.

5.3.3 Derridean Double Reading in Deuteronomy

Applying Derrida's double reading method, the chapter investigates specific Deuteronomic passages (10:17-19, 24:17-18, and 26:12-13), highlighting the ethical demands placed on the Israelites to care for marginalized groups such as strangers, orphans, and widows. These passages reveal the complexity of biblical hospitality, where divine imperatives intersect with societal norms, creating a dynamic tension between unconditional welcome and legalistic frameworks.

Derrida's notion of hospitality as always "to come"—never fully realized—frames the ethical challenge posed by these texts. The chapter critiques how evangelical interpretations often fall short of this ideal by subordinating hospitality to state sovereignty and legal frameworks, resulting in what Derrida would describe as hostipitality.

5.3.4 Chapter 3: Final Thoughts and Modern Implications

By situating Derrida's and Husserl's philosophies within the context of Deuteronomy's hospitality laws, the chapter draws parallels to contemporary evangelical attitudes toward immigration. It critiques the evangelical emphasis on obedience to state power, which undermines the biblical mandate to care for the stranger. The chapter argues that evangelical support for restrictive immigration policies reflects a failure to embrace the radical, unconditional hospitality demanded by Deuteronomy and echoed in Derrida's philosophy.

5.4 Chapter 4: Insights and Contributions

Chapter 4 of this dissertation embarks on a rigorous exegetical and hermeneutical investigation into the Deuteronomic texts concerning the *gēr* ("stranger" or "foreigner") using a phenomenological double reading approach informed by Jacques Derrida's concept of hospitality and Edmund Husserl's phenomenological method. The goal is not merely to interpret the selected passages of Deuteronomy but to create a dialogical engagement with the text that bridges ancient notions of hospitality with modern ethical concerns about migration, displacement, and belonging. This chapter builds on previous sections of the dissertation by applying theoretical insights to specific biblical texts, thus offering original research that both broadens our understanding of the *gēr* and critiques contemporary evangelical responses to immigration through a comparative lens.

5.4.1 Methodological Approach

Employing a phenomenological double reading—a synthesis of Derrida's deconstructive methodology and Husserl's phenomenology—this chapter analyzes selected passages from Deuteronomy: 10:18-19, 24:17-18, 24:19-22, and 26:12-13. Derrida's concept of hospitality, particularly the tension between unconditional hospitality and conditional hospitality, serves as a critical lens through which these passages are examined. Husserl's ideas on intentionality and epoché (suspension of presuppositions) enrich the analysis by providing a framework for understanding how memory, identity, and ethical intentionality shape the Israelites' approach to the stranger.

5.4.2 Deuteronomy 10:18-19: The Divine Imperative for Hospitality

The analysis begins with Deuteronomy 10:18-19, where God's actions toward the marginalized—orphans, widows, and strangers—are presented as a model for human behavior. By invoking the Israelites' own experience as strangers in Egypt, the text establishes a moral imperative rooted in empathy and shared vulnerability.

Through Derrida's lens, this passage exemplifies the paradox of hospitality: while the Israelites are commanded to love the stranger, this command is mediated through legal and social structures that define the terms of hospitality. Derrida's notion of hostipitality (the inherent hostility within hospitality) is evident in the power dynamics of the host-guest relationship, where the host retains control over the conditions of the welcome. This analysis reveals how the divine mandate in Deuteronomy seeks to mitigate this hostility by emphasizing a form of hospitality grounded in justice and empathy.

Husserl's concept of intentionality is applied to highlight how the act of remembering their past as strangers shapes the Israelites' ethical consciousness. The command to love the stranger becomes an intentional act directed by memory, transforming the power dynamic from one of domination to one of solidarity.

5.4.3 Deuteronomy 24:17-18: Justice and the Vulnerable

Deuteronomy 24:17-18 prohibits obstructing the legal rights of strangers, orphans, and widows, linking this command to the Israelites' memory of enslavement in Egypt. This passage underscores the ethical obligation to protect the vulnerable, framing hospitality not as an optional virtue but as a legal duty.

Derrida's critique of conditional hospitality is pertinent here, as the legal framework imposes conditions on the welcome extended to the stranger. However, the divine rationale—"remember that you were slaves in Egypt"—complicates this conditionality by invoking a shared history of vulnerability. This shared memory disrupts the power hierarchy, fostering an ethic of care that transcends mere compliance with the law.

Husserl's notion of epoché is employed to suggest that the Israelites are called to suspend their present assumptions about social hierarchy and power, allowing their past experiences to inform their ethical obligations. This phenomenological reduction reveals the unique aspects of hospitality as an act of justice rooted in empathy and solidarity.

5.4.4 Deuteronomy 24:19-22: Redistribution and the Ethics of Provision

This section of Deuteronomy commands landowners to leave behind portions of their harvest for the stranger, orphan, and widow. By institutionalizing acts of provision within agricultural practices, the text embeds hospitality into the socio-economic fabric of the community. Derrida's ideal of unconditional hospitality is contrasted with the structured, conditional hospitality prescribed by the law. While the act of leaving behind a portion of the harvest is legally mandated, it also reflects a critical ethical impulse to care for the marginalized. This duality highlights the tension between societal norms and the ideal of a radical, unconditioned welcome.

Through Husserl's framework of intentionality, the act of leaving behind a portion of the harvest is interpreted as an intentional, ethical action directed towards the Other. The repeated injunction to remember their own enslavement serves as a phenomenological cadence, guiding the Israelites' consciousness towards empathy and ethical responsibility.

5.4.5 Deuteronomy 26:12-13: Cultic Ritual and Communal Identity

In Deuteronomy 26:12-13, the Israelites are instructed to give a tithe of their produce every third year to the Levites, strangers, orphans, and widows. This act is accompanied by a ritual declaration before God, emphasizing the communal and sacred dimensions of hospitality. Derrida's concept of hostipitality is explored in the context of this ritual, where the act of giving is both a duty and an expression of ethical solidarity. The ritual declaration reinforces the communal identity of the Israelites as a people bound by shared ethical obligations towards the marginalized.

Husserl's ideas on intentionality and memory are applied to interpret the ritual as a deliberate, conscious act that reinforces the community's ethical identity. By recalling their history of enslavement, the Israelites are reminded of their own vulnerability, fostering a sense of solidarity with the marginalized.

5.4.6 Chapter 4: Main Contributions to Knowledge

This chapter makes several significant contributions to the study of Deuteronomy, hospitality, and contemporary ethical discourse on immigration:

1. **Interdisciplinary Methodology**: By combining Derrida's deconstructive approach with Husserl's phenomenological method, this chapter offers a novel interpretative framework that bridges ancient texts with modern ethical concerns.

2. **Reinterpretation of the *Gēr***: The analysis provides a rigorous understanding of the *gēr* as a legal and social category in ancient Israel, highlighting the ethical imperatives embedded in Deuteronomic law.
3. **Critical Engagement with Derrida**: By applying Derrida's concept of hospitality to biblical texts, the chapter critiques the conditional nature of hospitality in ancient Israel while acknowledging the text's attempt to move towards a more inclusive ethic.
4. **Application to Contemporary Issues**: The chapter draws parallels between the ancient context of the *gēr* and modern debates on immigration and hospitality, offering insights into how ancient ethical principles can inform contemporary discourse.

5.4.7 Chapter 4: Final Thoughts

Chapter 4 demonstrates how the Deuteronomic laws concerning the *gēr* embody a complex interplay between unconditional ethical imperatives and the conditional realities of societal life. Through a phenomenological double reading, the chapter reveals the depth of the ethical demand to love and care for the stranger, highlighting the transformative potential of hospitality when informed by memory, intentionality, and empathy. This research not only advances biblical scholarship but also contributes to contemporary ethical discussions on immigration and the treatment of the Other, urging a reimagining of hospitality as a radical, inclusive ethic.

5.5 Conclusion

Having traced the political, philosophical, and theological dimensions of hospitality as it relates to the biblical figure of the *gēr*, this dissertation affirms that hospitality is not merely a virtue to

be invoked, but a tension to be lived. The ethical call to welcome the stranger—so central to Deuteronomy's legal imagination—persists today not simply as a spiritual imperative but as a litmus test for justice. It exposes, with clarity and discomfort, the fractures between theology and politics, scripture and state, memory and exclusion.

This project has argued that Deuteronomy's laws concerning the *gēr* are best read not as static legal prescriptions, but as ethical performances grounded in divine character, historical memory, and social structure. By applying a phenomenological double reading—one that draws from Derrida's deconstructive lens and Husserl's attentiveness to the structures of experience—I have sought to uncover not only the content of these laws, but the interpretive posture they demand. This method allows us to hear both the voice of the text and the ethical silence surrounding it: the welcome that is always also a risk, the law that reveals its own limits, the memory that shapes the shape of justice itself.

Through this lens, evangelical Christian responses to immigration, particularly in the U.S. context, can be understood not simply as theological positions but as ethical events—acts of interpretation with real political consequences. The dissonance between the command to love the stranger and the rhetoric of border control, exclusion, and conditional welcome is not merely a moral failing; it is a hermeneutical one. What emerges is a portrait of hospitality distorted by sovereignty, loyalty, and fear—what Derrida would call hostipitality, the shadow of violence that accompanies every law of welcome.

Theologically, this work contributes to the reimagining of biblical hospitality not as passive openness, but as an active, justice-oriented disruption. To welcome the stranger is to confront the boundary of the self and the state alike. It is to remember one's own history not as

moral capital but as moral responsibility. It is to enact a reading of scripture that does not domesticate the radical edge of its ethics.

While this dissertation has focused primarily on Deuteronomy's legal texts concerning the *gēr*, it is important to acknowledge the broader literary and canonical contexts that remain beyond its scope. Narratives such as Ruth, legal corpora across the Pentateuch, and post-exilic texts like Ezra-Nehemiah engage deeply with themes of foreignness, belonging, and exclusion. Each presents distinct theological postures: Ruth celebrates integration through covenantal loyalty and kinship; Eza-Nehemiah emphasizes boundary reinforcement in response to imperial pressures. These texts, along with priestly and holiness codes, offer diverse constructions of the "other" that could significantly complicate and rich any study of biblical hospitality. Their absence here reflects an intentional narrowing of focus—allowing this project to sustain a phenomenological and deconstructive reading within a coherent legal framework. Yet they remain unexplored pathways, inviting future scholarship to trace how hospitality evolves across Israel's literary imagination and socio-political realities.

Beyond literary boundaries, this study also recognizes the interpretive lenses it has only begun to engage—particularly those attentive to race, gender, and disability. Each of these dimensions offers critical insights into how exclusion and welcome are constructed, both in ancient texts and modern receptions. Briefly, I will outline some initial thoughts on what might be explored in these contexts by myself or other scholars.

A deeper engagement with race would interrogate how notions of ethnic identity, purity, and otherness function within biblical hospitality. While the *gēr* is often framed as a protected outsider, figures like the *nokrî* or the Moabite in Ruth expose how ethnicity intersects with covenantal belonging. Modern racialized readings—especially within colonial and evangelical

contexts—further distort these categories, using Scripture to justify exclusionary practices. Future research could explore how racial ideologies have shaped interpretations of the *gēr*, and how a decolonial hermeneutic might reclaim hospitality as a site of resistance against ethnocentric and white supremacist frameworks.

In terms of gender, the intersection with hospitality is both pervasive and under-examined. Texts like Ruth foreground the vulnerability of women foreigners, while Deuteronomic law often lists "widow, orphan, and *gēr*" together as paradigms of society precarity. Yet this project did not fully explore how gender dynamics inform who is welcomed, who is protected, and under what conditions. A feminist or womanist reading would press further—interrogating not only patriarchal structures but also how biblical texts reflect and perpetuate systems of domination that expose women, particularly marginalized women, to sexual violence under the guise of hospitality or social order. Stories such as Genesis 19 or Judges 19—where the language of hospitality masks the imminent threat of sexual violation—underscore how "welcome" can operate as a space of danger for women and gendered others. A womanist hermeneutic, attentive to the lived experiences of Black women and other marginalized identities, would highlight how the figure of the *gēr* cannot be ethically disentangled from the realities of gendered violence, exploitation, and coerced belonging.[211] Future work might examine how hospitality, when framed without critical attention to power and patriarchy, risks reinscribing systems where protection is conditional and often complicit in harm.

[211] See Wil Gafney, *Womanist Midrash:A Reintroduction to the Women of the Torah and the Throne* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2017), 15-17. Gafney outlines the womanist commitment to centering Black women's experiences, which specific attention to confronting texts that normalize or silence sexual violence. She emphasizes reading with ethical suspicion toward androcentric and oppressive frameworks, a posture essential when interrogating how hospitality and protection are framed in patriarchal contexts.

Lastly, disability remains an often-silenced category in discussions of biblical hospitality. Priestly laws, for example, restrict access to sacred spaces based on physical "blemish" (Lev 21), reflecting ancient constructs of purity tied to bodily norms. While the *gēr* is protected within economic and legal spheres, there is little explicit acknowledgement of how differing abilities or impairments affected one's experience of welcome or exclusion. A disability studies lens could interrogate how biblical laws reinforce or subvert notions of physical and social "wholeness," and how hospitality might be reimagined as an ethic of accommodation rather than assimilation.

These pathways invite continued exploration—and if I had another decade to remain with this project, I would follow the questions that have only begun to surface at its edges. I would trace the figure of the *gēr* beyond Deuteronomy into the narratives of Ruth, the polemics of Eza-Nehemiah, and the prophetic visions where strangers and exiles reappear in new forms. I would linger longer with Derrida and Husserl, pressing their philosophies into dialogue with womanist, postcolonial, and disability hermeneutics to craft a more intersectional ethic of hospitality. I would explore how the language of welcome has been weaponized in modern ecclesial and political contexts—not only in immigration debates, but in conversations about race, gender identity, and bodily autonomy. Given more time, I would seek to transform this reading posture into a praxis, bridging the gap between textual interpretation and lived advocacy within faith communities. Yet perhaps the most honest answer is this: even with ten more years, the work of hospitality would remain unfinished. Because hospitality—that true, ethical, and absolute hospitality—is never a project we complete. It is a posture we inhabit, a question we carry, and a risk we choose to embrace, again and again.

Ultimately, to read Deuteronomy's *gēr* texts today is to hear a question echoing across time: *Who do we say the stranger is?* And, perhaps more urgently: *What does our answer say*

about us? The biblical command to love the stranger is not a marginal ethic. It is a theological mirror, held up to the face of every reader, every interpreter, every community that dares to claim the name of the covenant. This study, then, is not merely a work of interpretation but of invitation—an appeal to read scripture ethically, to approach the text with a posture shaped by memory, justice, and responsibility.

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