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The Concepts of Migration and Alienation in the Twelfth-Century Maghreb

Intramural Co-production

At the beginning of the twelfth century, a Berber dynasty known as the Muwaḥḥidūn (1121–1275) conquered large parts of the Maghreb. They adhered to a new 'fundamentalist' version of Islam and declared uncompromising war on all infidels, including Jews and Christians — who until then had been protected as adherents of monotheistic religions (*Ahl al-Dhimma*).[1] The Muwaḥḥidūn (known in Latin as Almohads) succeeded in establishing a vast kingdom in the Maghreb, and their time is considered one of economic and cultural prosperity, particularly in the fields of art, architecture, and philosophy,[2] but Christians and Jews were no longer part of it. As for the Jews, some were killed, many converted to Islam, and many others managed to flee the Maghreb to other countries.[3] A contemporary letter written by a Jewish Maghrebi trader to his father, documenting the invasion of the Muwaḥḥidūn of the Maghreb, relates: 'There has not remained a single one who bears the name "Jew" between Bijaya [Bougie] and the Gate of Gibraltar'.[4]

Ostensibly, the whole Maghreb became a purely Muslim territory, a single-religion space, which would not seem to offer opportunities for

* I would like to thank Sarah Stroumsa and the editors of this volume for their insightful comments and suggestions.

1 Friedmann, *Tolerance and Coercion in Islam*.

2 Kennedy, *Muslim Spain and Portugal*; Shatzmiller, 'al-Muwaḥḥidūn', pp. 801–07; Fromherz, *The Almohads*.

3 Fierro, 'Legal Policies of the Almohad Caliphs', pp. 226–48; Molénat, 'Sur le rôle des Almohades', pp. 389–413. Molénat, 'A Muslim Land without Jews or Christians', pp. 231–47.

4 Ms. Sasson 713, published by Hirschberg. Partial English translation by Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society*, pp. 60–61. See Frenkel, 'Genizah Documents as Literary Products', pp. 139–55. For the fate of Christians in the Muwahidi period, see Burman, *Religious Polemics*, p. 191; Talbi, 'Le christianisme maghrébin de la conquête musulmane à sa disparition', pp. 330–31.

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studying religious interaction. In what follows, I try to show how encounters between various currents of thought continued even in a mono-religious field, and how they occurred within and beyond confessional boundaries. These interactions happened by ways of influence, appropriation, reverberation, adaptation, or parallel development. I consider all these varied ways part of a long and complex process of co-production as suggested by Katharina Heyden and David Nirenberg.

By focusing on synchronous processes, at a given place and time, i.e. that of the Maghreb during the twelfth century,[5] I hope to bring into focus a higher resolution of this historical moment and to be able to distinguish between various religious currents within what is usually considered one monolithic confessional entity, and also to discover how these various currents were engaged in the processes of co-production. Instead of a schematic division between religions, I suggest considering twelfth-century Islam in the Maghreb as a vast mosaic composed of various currents of thought, which in relating to one another generated dynamic processes of co-production. Crypto-Jews were situated at the very margins of this mosaic, on the borderlands of identities, from where they could function as major agents of co-production across religious boundaries.

Instead of confining myself to the religious realm, I would rather speak about a commonly shared intellectual field in which ideas and concepts were continually in contact and constantly disseminated, transferred, and adapted.

I venture to make use of two key concepts: *hijra* (migration) and *ghurba* (estrangement, alienation). Each of these concepts can stand by itself, but they are also closely related. Franz Rosenthal has already considered the stranger a by-product of travel, quoting Eric J. Leeds: 'Travel … generates that peculiar species of social being of unknown identity — the stranger'.[6] Migration, also a sort of travel, is deeply connected to estrangement, and the two concepts are considered to be interdependent by contemporary writers as well.

These two concepts were already co-produced in many instances prior to the twelfth-century Maghreb, but I do not intend to carry out a vertical examination in order to trace a chain of transmission. My intention is to observe how these two concepts were used by the various currents of thought at this particular historical moment, and how each of these currents shaped and interpreted them to suit its ideologies and interests.

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5 The term Maghreb is used here to denote the western part of the Islamicate world and includes North Africa and al-Andalus, whose political, demographical, and cultural history was closely entangled.

6 Rosenthal, 'The Stranger in Medieval Islam', p. 35; Leeds, *The Mind of the Traveler*, pp. 62–64.

Hijra and *Ghurba*

Hijra is an accepted and praiseworthy Islamic principle. In the Quran, migration is understood as an important social practice, and many verses call on the Muslims to worship God anywhere:

> 'Oh, my servants who believe, surely My earth is wide; therefore, Me do you serve!' (Quran, Sura 29, The Spider, verse 56).

Hijra is deeply entrenched in the Islamic foundation narrative, which tells about the *muhājirūn*, the first Muslim believers who were persecuted in Mecca and forced to migrate to other places, first to Ethiopia, then to al-Madina. Following these events, migration became a central religious issue in Islam. Muhammad's followers who refused to join him in his journey to Mecca are forcefully condemned in the Quran:

> And those the angels take, while still they are wronging themselves — the angels will say, 'In what circumstances were you?' They will say, 'We were abased in the earth'. The angels will say, 'But was not God's earth wide, so that you might have emigrated in it?' Such men, their refuge shall be Gehenna — an evil home coming! (Sura IV, Women, verse 97)

Hijra continued to be a central ideal in early Islam, but in subsequent periods, when Islam became an established and powerful community, more ambivalent voices regarding the inevitability of *hijra* could be heard.[7] It was the Almohads who returned to this concept, making unprecedented and extensive use of it as they adapted it to their particular needs.

Closely related to the concept of *hijra* is the notion of *ghurba*, estrangement or alienation, the sense of being a stranger in one's society. *Ghurba* too is a basic notion in Islamic tradition. The isolation and alienation experienced by the first Muslim believers, as told in the Quran and the *Sīra*, engendered the notion of a small vanguard of true believers who stick to their creed among a multitude of infidels and turned it into a basic Islamic principle, which was put to significant use during the Almohad period.

The present essay examines these two closely related concepts in the writings of some of the more influential thinkers of the twelfth-century Maghreb in the context of co-production.

The Concept of Migration (*hijra*)

The twelfth-century Maghreb is marked by the strong influence of the Almohads, first as an opposition movement, and then as a ruling regime. The Almohads were a remarkable phenomenon in Islamic history that can be regarded from

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7 Verskin, *Islamic Law*, pp. 31–60. Verskin shows how the importance of *Hijra* diminished after the early Islamic period. The Almohads, however, renewed its centrality.

many perspectives. They were a revivalist movement that aspired to restore genuine Islam and to remove all traces of the former Almoravid rule, which they considered to be corrupt and deviant. They were a revolutionary movement that aimed at a total change in Muslim theology, law, legal system, and practices.[8] They were also a messianic movement, holding their leader, Ibn Tūmart, to be the expected Mahdi,[9] as well as a fundamentalist movement, calling for reliance only on the revealed tradition of Quran and *Sunna*,[10] rejecting the legitimacy of legal controversies (*ikhtilāf*), and admitting no plurality of legal schools. Above all, they were a utopian movement, aiming at the creation of a Muslim society free of all infidels and of inner contradictions and ruled by the ultimate leader, the Mahdi. In order to pursue their vision, they needed, like every other intentional utopia, an insulated space separated from the corrupt society around, wherein they could act collectively and from which they could reach out to impact the outside territories.[11] Such a territory could be attained through massive migration. Encouraging 'true believers' to abandon their inferior places and move to better ones through the praise of migration was but another means to achieve this goal, alongside the eradication of all non-Muslims from their territories.

Abu Abd Allah Amghar ibn Tūmart (d. 1130)

Migration was assigned a central place in Almohad ideology. The Almohad foundational narrative echoes the Prophet Muhammad's historical *hijra*. The biography of Ibn Tūmart, the founding father of the Almohad movement, has been fashioned in the pattern of the prophet's life story, in which the *hijra* occupies a central role. According to the official biographies, Ibn Tūmart migrated in 1123 from his cave in the Sous Valley and settled in Tinmallal in the Atlas Mountains, followed by a small group of believers (al-ʿAsharah al-Mubāsharah), who received the names of the historical Companions of the Prophet. In Tinmallal, he gathered more and more followers who joined his 'true path'. Ibn Tūmart's stronghold in Tinmallal thus became his al Madinah, the secure base whence he broke out with his followers to occupy the whole Maghreb, spreading the 'true belief' of 'genuine Islam'.[12] Ibn Tūmart's biography, in which the *hijra* occupies a central place, is essential to the Almohad worldview. Moreover, the concept of *hijra* developed in Almohad theology into an entire doctrine and was considered a central commandment of the utmost importance, as manifested in Ibn Tūmart's Book:

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8 Montgomery-Watt, 'Philosophy and Theology under the Almohads', pp. 101–07; Fierro, 'Legal Policies of the Almohad Chaliphs', pp. 227–28; Fierro, 'Proto Malikis', pp. 57–76; García-Arenal, *Messianism and Puritanical Reform*, p. 157.

9 García-Arenal, *Messianism and Puritanical Reform*, pp. 174–92.

10 Stroumsa, *Maimonides in His World*, pp. 53–59, especially p. 58, where she differentiates between the Almohads' fundamentalism and 'fundamentalism' as understood today.

11 Sargisson, 'Strange Places', pp. 393–424.

12 García-Arenal, *Messianism and Puritanical Reform*, pp. 172–73.

> Hijra from among the enemies of God to God and His prophet is obligatory for all servants of God. The duty of leaving homes and property for religion is never nullified for any reason. Rather upholding God's commandment is obligatory and it must be done immediately and without delay. Consideration for upholding God's commandment takes precedence over consideration of bloodshed and loss of life and property — for corruption must be entirely repelled.[13]

During the Almohad period, the concept of *hijra* was introduced into legal texts, especially Quran commentaries, commentaries on legal manuals, and legal responsa.[14]

The historical *hijra* of the Prophet was thus revived and refashioned to suit the Almohads' needs as a utopian movement. But the concept predated Almohad rule and was circulating already during the Almoravid period, used and developed by contemporary thinkers, who held different, even opposing worldviews compared to the Almohads themselves. One of them was the Malikite Qadi, Abu Bakr Ibn al-ʿArabi.[15]

Abu Bakr Ibn al-ʿArabi (d. 1148)

Ibn al-ʿArabi was born in Seville, but in 1091 when al-Andalus was taken over by the Almoravids, the 16-year-old Ibn al-ʿArabi and his father left for Egypt, and for eight years the two assumed an itinerant way of life, travelling from place to place all over the Muslim east. It was only in 1099 that Ibn al-ʿArabi returned to his homeland in al-Andalus, where he served as the local qadi in the service of the Almoravid regime. In his later years, with the ascent of the Almohads, he joined a delegation that travelled to Marrakesh to show loyalty to the Almohad Caliph ʿAbd al-Muʾmin — a mission that failed and resulted in the imprisonment of all the delegation's members. Ibn al-ʿArabi himself found his mysterious death on his way home, shortly after his release.[16]

Travelling occupied a central place in Ibn al-ʿArabi's biography. The long years he spent with his father in the east were commemorated in his famous travelogue, *Tartib al-Riḥla*, to which he refers many times in his other writings. There are several possible explanations for this long journey. It can be understood as a common form of travel in pursuit of knowledge (*fi ṭalab al'ilm*), recommended for acquiring learning and popular among elite young scholars of al-Andalus during the rule of the *taifa* kingdom as part of their religious schooling. Kenneth Garden has explained the journey as a strategy

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13 Ibn Tūmart, *Kitāb Muhammad ibn Tumart Mahdī al-muwaḥḥidin*, ed. by Goldziher, p. 252.

14 Verskin, *Islamic Law*, pp. 38–40, where he explains why the term *hijra* was not directly introduced into the legal manuals themselves. See a list of Quran commentaries that consider *hijra* to have eternal validity in Verskin, *Islamic Law*, p. 40 n. 35.

15 Lagardère, 'La haute judicature à l'époque almoravide en al-Andalus', pp. 135–228.

16 Robson, 'Ibn al-ʿArabī'; Lucini, 'Ibn al-ʿArabī, Abū Bakr'; Drory, *Ibn el-Arabi of Seville*, p. 12 n. 1, pp. 50–51.

employed by Ibn al-ʿArabi to regain his family's elite status and property, both lost when the Almoravids overthrew the *ṭāʾifa* of Seville that his father served as a vizier, and later to gain prestige as a scholar who had visited and studied in the pilgrimage sites and great centres of learning of the East.[17] Yann Dejugnat explained Abū Bakr's motives as a Sufi's pursuit of the spiritual path (*sulūk*) and found in it a strong influence and evocation of al-Ghazālī's *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn* and *Munqidh min al-ḍalāl*.[18] In addition to all these plausible explanations, it seems that Ibn al-ʿArabi also undertook his long travels in the east for a *hijra*, although he does not explicitly use the term, but prefers the more generic expression *Riḥla*. Nevertheless, in his autobiography he observes: 'The takeover of Seville by the Almoravids made it impossible for us to stay in our country'.[19] Leaving a bad place in search of a better one is indeed at the core of the idea of *hijra*. What is more, since he comprehended the departure from a corrupt place as a fulfilment of a religious commandment, he advised his mentor, al-Ṭurṭushi, to leave his dwelling place in Fatimid Alexandria and find a better place to live in:

> I told our teacher, the recluse Imam Abu Bakr al-Fahri (= al-Ṭurṭushī): Leave the land of Egypt and go back to your homeland. He answered: I don't want to stay in a country governed by ignorance and lack of reason. I told him: go then to Makkah and stay under the auspices of Allah and his messenger. You certainly know that leaving this country (= Fatimid Egypt) is obligatory due to all the unlawful innovations and prohibitions introduced there. He said: I brought her right guidance and directed people there to the right path. I brought her monotheism and abandonment of false ideas and prayer to God.[20]

Migration was not only a major part of Ibn al-ʿArabi's life story; it was also a central topic of his writings. In a commentary on the hadith compilation *Ṣaḥiḥ al-Tirmidhi*, he discussed in detail the obligation to perform *hijra* and stated that any Muslim is obliged to migrate to a place which is of a lesser degree of sin and even to prefer belief over justice. If he lives in a land of justice and disbelief, he should migrate to a place of belief and injustice.[21]

Ibn al-ʿArabi was a Maliki qadi known for his severity and ascetic way of life. He was very critical of Ibn Tūmart's ideas on the Mahdi's infallibility (*ʿiṣma*) and considered the Almohads' religious programme dangerous because it was based on allegorical exegesis of the Quran and on what he

17 Garden, 'The riḥla and Self-Reinvention of Abū Bakr Ibn al-ʿArabī', pp. 1–17.

18 Dejugnat, 'À l'ombre de la *fitna*, l'émergence d'un discours du voyage', pp. 85–101, especially pp. 88–89, 95, 97–99.

19 Abbas, 'Riḥlat Ibn al-ʿArabi Ila al Mashriq kama sawaraha Qanūn al-Taʾwil', pp. 56–73, especially pp. 67–69, p. 61. Mentioned by Drory, *Ibn el-Arabi of Seville*, p. 11.

20 Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn al-ʿArabi, *Aḥkam al-Quran*, ed. by ʿal-Bajāwī, I, p. 458. Mentioned in Drory, *Ibn el-Arabi of Seville*, p. 18.

21 Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Ariḍat al- Aḥwadhī li- sharḥ ṣaḥiḥ al-Tirmidhī*, VII, pp. 88–89.

regarded as extreme Sufism, which threatened the concept of the Imam and the leadership of the *umma*.[22]

Ibn Tūmart and Ibn al-ʿArabi adhered to different, even opposing currents of thought in the Maghrebi Islam of the twelfth century, yet they were both engaged in endorsing and promoting the notion of *hijra* as a compulsory, praiseworthy imperative.

Moses Maimonides (Mūsā ibn Maimūn. d. 1204)

Moses Maimonides was born in Cordoba in 1135. Following the Almohad occupation, he left Spain in 1148 while still a young boy and lived for seventeen years in various places in the Islamic west, including North Africa which was under Almohad occupation, where he was a Crypto-Jew, living outwardly as a Muslim.[23] It was only in 1165 that he left the Maghreb to settle in Egypt, where he returned to Judaism and became a prominent spiritual and political Jewish leader.[24] A short time after his arrival in Egypt, he came upon an epistle written by a certain rabbi, whose name is unknown, in which it was stated that the Jews who converted to Islam under the pressure of the Almohads were apostates who could no longer be considered Jews, while those who performed the Jewish commandments in secret were even greater sinners. Maimonides declared himself horrified by the potential consequences of this epistle, and resolved to respond to it in an epistle of his own, known as *the Epistle of Martyrdom*.

Maimonides, who was well aware of the power of the written word, was afraid that the rabbi's epistle would be accepted as a binding ruling and therefore decided not only to respond to it in extremely sharp and unambiguous terms, but also to offer those forcefully converted Jews clear instructions about maintaining their genuine religion in secret. Thus, for example, he permits them to say the *Shahadah* (the Islamic declaration of faith), and even to pray inside a mosque, but encourages them to continue performing secretly as many of the Jewish commandments as possible. Nevertheless, for Maimonides, a Crypto-Jewish life cannot be a permanent solution, and he advised forced converts to leave their countries and migrate to other places whenever possible:

> Anyone who cannot leave, because of his attachments or because of the dangers of a sea voyage, and stays where he is, must look upon himself as one who profanes God's name, not exactly willingly, but almost so. At the same time, he must bear in mind that if he fulfills a precept, God will reward him doubly, because he acted so for God only, and not to show off or be accepted as an observant individual … nevertheless, no one should

22 García-Arenal, *Messianism and Puritanical Reform*, pp. 110–17.
23 Friedman, *Maimonides*; Mazor, 'Maimonides' Conversion to Islam', pp. 5–8.
24 Kraemer, *Maimonides*; Davidson, *Moses Maimonides*; Halbertal, *Maimonides*, pp. 16–84.

> cease planning to leave the provinces that God is wroth with, and to exert every effort to achieve it.[25]

This advice is presented not as an ad-hoc strategy, but rather as a permanent commandment, not necessarily related to historical moments of tribulation and persecution.

> What I counsel myself, and what I should like to suggest to all my friends and everyone that consults me, is to leave these places and go to where he can practice religion and fulfill the Law without compulsion or fear. Let him leave his family and his home and all he has, because the divine Law that He bequeathed to us is more valuable than the ephemeral, worthless incidentals that the intellectuals scorn; they are transient, whereas the fear of God is eternal. Moreover, when two Jewish cities are at one's elbow, one superior to the other in its actions and behavior, more observant and more concerned with the precepts, the God-fearing individual is obliged to depart from the town where the actions are not at their best, and move to the better township… This is the proper thing to do when both cities are Jewish. But if the place is gentile, the Jew who resides there must by all means leave it and go to a more suitable location. He must make every effort to do so although he may expose himself to danger, so that he can get away from this bad spot where he cannot practice his religion properly and strive to reach a comfortable place… This is the effort he must make to separate himself from the heretics when they do not coerce him to do as they do; he should leave them. But if he is compelled to violate even one precept it is forbidden to stay there. He must leave everything he has, travel day and night until he finds a spot where he can practice his religion. *God's earth is wide*.[26]

The concept of compulsory migration and the hierarchy between dwelling places pronounced in Maimonides' epistle resonates very clearly with Ibn Tūmart and Ibn ʿArabi's postures. The words with which Maimonides has chosen to conclude this paragraph paraphrase the Quranic verse mentioned above: 'Oh, my servants who believe, *surely My earth is wide*; therefore, Me do you serve!' (Quran, Sura 29, The Spider, verse 56). What is more, Maimonides, just like Ibn Tūmart and Ibn al-ʿArabi, did not recommend migration as a solution only in times of distress, but presented it as a perennial commandment. A Jew is demanded always to abandon a not good enough place, to hit the road and wander until he finds the best place to live. Migration, according to Maimonides, is an organizing principle of life, not simply an unavoidable solution in times of despair.

A similar position is manifested in the Yemenite Epistle, written by Maimonides in 1172 when he was already head of the Jews of Egypt. This epistle

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25 *Crisis and Leadership*, p. 33.
26 *Crisis and Leadership*, p. 31.

was directed to the Jewish communities of Yemen, who had experienced a deep crisis following the forced conversion imposed on them by the Isma ʿily ruler, Ibn al-Mahdī, and the appearance of a false messiah, who succeeded in attracting a large following. In the Yemenite Epistle, Maimonides consoles the Jews of Yemen and explains why the false messiah was an impostor. Just as in the Epistle on Martyrdom, here as well he recommends that the Jews leave their homes in Yemen and migrate to better places:

> It therefore behooves the victims of this persecution to escape and flee to the desert and wilderness and not to consider separation from family or loss of wealth, for they are a slight sacrifice and a paltry offering due to God, King of Kings, possessor of all things, this honored and awesome Name, the Lord your God [Deuteronomy 28. 58]. God may be trusted to compensate you well in this world and in the world to come. Thus we have found that the godly and pious folk who are animated by desire to get acquainted with the Truth and those who are engaged in its pursuit, rush to the divine religion and wend their way from the most distant parts to the homes of scholars. They seek to gain increased insight into the Law, that they may gain reward from God. How much more is it one's duty to run for the entire Torah! We know that when a man finds it arduous to gain a livelihood in one country, he emigrates to another. It is all the more incumbent upon one who is restricted in the practice of the divine religion to depart for another place.[27]

Here, again, migration is praised, not only as an inevitable solution, but rather as a desideratum. Moreover, Maimonides uses his own biography as exemplum and presents himself as the epitome of a wandering immigrant.

Epistles such as the Epistle of Martyrdom and the Yemenite Epistle were written in response to ongoing events and served as ad-hoc guides for the Jewish public, intended to instruct and advise them how to act in the face of current events. Nevertheless, Maimonides' conception of migration is not only a riposte to current events, but part of an all-encompassing worldview that can also to be identified in his Hebrew legal codex, the *Mishneh Torah*:

> A person who lives in a place where the norms of behavior are evil and the inhabitants do not follow the straight path, should move to a place where the people are righteous and follow the ways of the good. If all places with which he is familiar and of which he hears reports follow improper paths, as in our times, or if he is unable to move to a place where the patterns of behavior are proper, because of [the presence of] bands of raiding troops,

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27 *Crisis and Leadership*, p. 106. The original Judeo-Arabic text of Maimonides' *Epistle of Martyrdom* is not extant, but one can quite confidentially assume that his words were a paraphrastic rendering of the Quran. Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that in *The Yemenite Epistle*, of which we do have the original Judeo-Arabic text, Maimonides does not explicitly use the word *hijra*, but prefers the more neutral term of *ḫurūj* (exit).

> or for health reasons, he should remain alone in seclusion as [Eichah 3. 28] states: 'Let him sit alone and be silent'. If they are wicked and sinful and do not allow him to reside there unless he mingle with them and follow their evil behavior, he should go out to caves, thickets, and deserts [rather than] follow the paths of sinners as [Jeremiah 9:1] states: 'who will give me a lodging place for wayfarers'.[28]

Maimonides' praise of migration is also exemplified in the way he portrays the patriarch Abraham. Abraham was admired by Maimonides as a major biblical hero. So much so that he decided to call his one and only son after him.[29] Maimonides' Abraham is the man responsible for the spread of monotheism to the world. This is how he depicts Abraham's spreading the belief in one God:

> Abraham was [saved through] a miracle and left for Charan. [There] he began to call in a loud voice to all people and inform them that there is one God in the entire world and it is proper to serve Him. He would go out and call to the people, gathering them in city after city and country after country, until he came to the land of Canaan — proclaiming [God's existence the entire time] — as stated: 'And He called there in the name of the Lord, the eternal God …' [Genesis 21. 33]. When the people would gather around him and ask him about his statements, he would explain to each one of them according to their understanding, until they turned to the path of truth. Ultimately, thousands and myriads gathered around him. These are the men of the house of Abraham.[30]

Maimonides' Abraham is thus a wandering hero, who travels from one place to another to spread the word of God. He is the ultimate migrant, the eternal traveller who never settles in one place.

Migration was, of course, not new to Judaism in Maimonides' day. Beside the biblical foundational narrative about the forty years' journey of the Children of Israel in the wilderness, some, such as Erich Neumann, have even talked about *secondary nomadism*, and explained that with the *galūt* (exile), Jews adopted a form of secondary nomadism, embodied in a persisting compulsion to continue wandering.[31] Still, the language Maimonides uses and the metaphors he employs, the paraphrased Quranic verses he uses, and the theory he develops about the hierarchy among bad and good places, are to be found also in contemporary Muslim writings and reverberate very clearly with Islamic thought in the Maghreb during his days.

The co-produced concept of *hijra* was deeply connected with possibilities of life. Interestingly, there is a clear constructional resemblance between the personal biographies of the three influential figures presented above, in which

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28 Moses Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Hilchot De'ot*, trans. by Abramson and Touger, pp. 117–18.
29 Kraemer, *Maimonides*, p. 216.
30 Moses Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Avodat Kochavim*, trans. by Touger, p. 27.
31 Neumann, *The Roots of Jewish Consciousness*, trans. by Kyburz and Lammers.

displacement, migration, and travel occupy a crucial part. We may assume that the Maghreb during the twelfth century, with its political upheavals on one side and its openness towards the rest of the Islamicate world on the other, enabled travel and migration, especially of the intellectual elites, and so stimulated the emergence of an ideal of migration among Muslims of various loyalties as well as among Jews and enabled the co-production of the concept of migration within and across religions. The newly co-produced concept of *hijra* could rest on a previous deep-rooted ethos in both creeds, Islam and Judaism. In Judaism it was found in the biblical foundational narrative of the Exodus, while in Islam it rested on the historical memory of its early phase. But, at this particular historical moment in the twelfth-century Maghreb, both convictions produced new theological significations for this concept, each of them using it for very different purposes, yet sharing similar patterns of thought articulated in almost identical vocabularies.

The Concept of Alienation (*ghurba*)

The concept of alienation (*ghurba*) was a basic notion in early Islam and is an indispensable part of Islam's foundational narrative. It goes back to the status of the early companions of Muhammad in Mecca, who felt like strangers among the surrounding society of idolaters. During the twelfth century, the concept accumulated special significance and acquired new meanings and values. The concept of *ghurba* in its new guise was co-produced by several currents of thought in the Maghreb.

The new appeal of this concept is demonstrated by the large popularity gained in the twelfth-century Maghreb by the ḥadith 'Islam began as a stranger and shall return to being a stranger just as it began' (bada'a al-Islām ghariban wa-saya'ūdu ghariban kama bada'a). This enigmatic *ḥadith*, which transmits a clear message in praise of *ghurba*,[32] was repeatedly quoted and referred to by different religious and political groups, each of which identified with it and held themselves to be the true 'strangers'.[33]

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32 In spite of its ambiguity, the text of this hadith contains an obvious messianic message embedded in its construction, which starts and ends with the same word ('bada'a' = began) and betrays a cyclic perception of time.

33 The ḥadith appears in most canonical ḥadith collections — Saḥiḥ Muslim, Jami'al-Tirmidhi, and Sunan ibn Majah — and is quoted in many others. On the hadith itself and its various interpretations, see Rosenthal, 'The Stranger in Medieval Islam', pp. 59–63, n. 98. In a seminal article, Maribel Fierro has shown how this hadith gained remarkable popularity during the twelfth century and was intensively used by different groups in al-Andalus: Fierro, 'Spiritual Alienation', pp. 230–60. This does not mean that the term and the ḥadith were not known in other times and in other parts of the Islamicate world. See, for example, Stroumsa, 'Philosopher King', pp. 433–60. On earlier discussions on *ghurba*, see Fierro, 'Spiritual Alienation', p. 233 n. 7.

The concept of *ghurba* in the twelfth-century Maghreb indicated a special mood, a feeling of being different, exceptional, and unique in alone holding to the truth among a multitude of wrong doers, all of whom had gone astray. It was not necessarily identical with solitude, although in many cases it did involve loneliness and seclusion.

Ibn Tūmart and the Almohads

For the Almohads themselves, who began as a minority that opposed the former dynasty of the Almoravids, *ghurba* offered a conceptual tool for defining their antagonistic position within the contemporary Islamic tradition. They presented themselves as the restorers of the original, true Islam, which had been distorted. As such, they used the concept of *ghurba* to express the notion of a small group of true believers, such as Ibn Tūmart's followers, among a majority of Muslims who deviated from the right path. Since they adhered to a utopic ideology, aspiring to the creation of a better world, the notion of alienation was essential for them to distinguish and delineate their adherents in contrast to all other, deviant, people.

Ibn Tūmart himself often quoted the above-mentioned ḥadith in the writings attributed to him. The strangers (*ghurābāʾ*) were for him the true believers who stuck to the pillars of Islam and therefore felt like strangers among a mass of innovators who aimed at changing and corrupting 'genuine Islam'.

But the concept of *ghurba*, in the sense of a small group that sticks to its correct ideology and feels alienated from the rest of society, preceded the Almohad period and had been used already during the Almoravid reign when the Almohads were still in the early stages of their formation.

Ibn Ḥazm al Andalūsi (d. 1064) and Ẓāhirism

The concept of *ghurba* was already used by followers of the Ẓāhirite school. Ẓāhirism preached a strict adherence to the outward, literal meaning of expressions in the Qur'an and ḥadith and rejected the *qiyās* (analogical deduction) and *ʿurf* (custom or common knowledge) largely used by most schools of Islamic jurisprudence. The Ẓāhirite insistence on strict adherence to the fundamental sources of Islam and their rejection of any additional, late speculation brought them nearer to the Almohad ideology.[34] Both schools shared a sense of being a small vanguard group. Ibn Ḥazm al Andalūsi, the most prominent representative of Ẓāhirism at this time, regarded the Ẓāhirites as a small minority of pious people living among a multitude of irreverent people who do not practice Islam strictly according to its basic scriptures

34 Nevertheless, some prominent Muwaḥḥidi scholars held an ambivalent attitude towards Ẓāhirism: Abu Bakr Ibn al ʿArabi, whose father was a Ẓahiri, rejected Ẓahiri, law categorically and Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, who used to be a Ẓāhiri, forsook the school and turned against it.

and who followed erroneous sources. Therefore, they experienced a sense of *ghurba* even while living in the abode of Islam.[35]

Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr al-Qurtubi (d. 1071) and the ʿUlamāʾ

The notion of *ghurba* could also be found among religious scholars with no affinity to the Almohad ideology, and who even opposed it. Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr al-Qurtubi, the Malikite Qāḍī of Lisbon, belonged to the traditionalist part of the Malikite school (*ʾAhl al-Āthār*) and was known for his determined rejection of *taqlīd* (blind-imitation). ʿAbd al-Barr strived to harmonize the Andalusi Malikism with the classical doctrine of the legal principles (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) as formulated by the Shafiʿites. The *ghurābāʾ* were for him those Malikite scholars who, like him, had tried to revive Andalusian Malikism on the true model and lived among the majority of Malikite scholars who were content with the existing Maliki system. He quoted the ḥadith in his work on religious knowledge frequently[36] and described the *ghurābāʾ* as those who will revive the *sunna* and teach it to mankind.[37] Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr sounded the collective voice of the *ʿulamāʾ* (religious scholars) class, who tended to identify themselves with the *ghurābāʾ*. In this way they could prove that they were inevitably necessary for the community and could thus justify their privileged status. This is manifested in Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr's words: 'religious scholars are strangers (and rare) because there are so many ignoramuses … believers are few among people, and scholars are few among believers'.[38]

Abu Bakr Muhammad al Ṭurṭūshī (d. 1126)

The concept of *ghurba* could be found already in the writings of Ibn Tūmart's teacher, Abu Bakr Muhammad al Ṭurṭūshī. Al Ṭurṭūshī, the famous Maliki jurist, was also a renowned authority in ascetism, mysticism, and the censorship of customs. The *gharīb* for him was the eternal antagonist: when God revealed Islam, he stated in his book on forbidden innovations, it was the first Muslims who became 'strangers' in their own tribe, because their fellow tribesmen rejected, humiliated, and despised them, so that they lived among them as strangers until they had to migrate. Later, when new deviant sects entered the Islamic community, the true Muslims lived among them as strangers. Even in his own days, says Ṭurṭūshī, 'true Muslims' continued to be strangers among the mass of believers gone astray.[39] Al Ṭurṭūshī apprehended the stranger as

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35 Ibn Ḥazm al-Andalūsī, *Al-Iḥkam fi usūl al-aḥkām*, IV, pp. 199–200, 229; and Turki, *Polémiques entre Ibn Hazm et Bagi sur les principes de la loi musulmane*, pp. 153, 170, 329.

36 Fierro, 'Proto-Malikis'. On *Taqlīd*, see Abdul Rahman, *Ibn al Qayyim's Critique of Authority in Islamic Law*, pp. 64–65.

37 Fierro, 'Spiritual Alienation', pp. 238–39.

38 See Rosenthal, 'The Stranger in Medieval Islam', pp. 61–62.

39 *Kitāb al-ḥawādith wa-l-bida'*, ed. by Turki, no. 16; al-Turtusi, *Kitab al-hawadit wa-I-bida'*, trans. by Fierro, p. 195.

a historical phenomenon that repeats itself. Strangers are the 'true believers' who appear among the ordinary deviant Muslims in each generation.

Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn Bājja (d. 1138) and the Philosophers

The concept of *ghurba* was further elaborated in the writings of the Andalusian polymath Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn Bājja, who combined the concept of *ghurba* with that of solitude, inherited from the Hellenistic philosophers. Ibn Bājja lived most of his life under Almoravid rule, serving as vizier and intimate friend of Ibn Tīfilwīt, the Almoravid ruler of Saragossa, and of Yūsuf ibn Tāshufīn, brother of the Almoravid sultan ʿAli ibn Tāshufīn.[40] But, although he served the Almoravid rulers and profited from their support and patronage, his position as court philosopher was precarious. Under Ibn Tāshufīn he was twice jailed after being accused of heresy.[41]

Estrangement and solitude occupy a central place in Ibn Bājja's thought. In one of his most important books, *The Regimen of the Solitary* (*Tadbīr al-mutawāḥḥid*), Ibn Bājja offered the concept of *nawābit* (weeds), referring to people who secretly profess a doctrine different than the one prevalent in their city.[42] The *nawābit*, according to Ibn Bājja, live in imperfect cities, where false ideas and corruption reign. In such places, it happens that some men may arrive at an understanding of true doctrines, or realize the falseness of the doctrines held by most of the city's residents. These men are like weeds that spring up in planted fields. He explained that, although those *nawābit* live in their homelands, they are strangers since they hold dissident, nonconforming beliefs. The only way for the *nawābit* themselves to attain happiness is by conducting a solitary way of life, mentally and physically, through withdrawal from society. In spite of the *nawābit*'s alienation from the corrupt society around, it is their existence in the non-perfect city that may turn it after all into a perfect city.

Ibn Bājja generally equates the *nawābit* with the *ghurābāʾ*.[43] His favourable attitude towards concepts of dissidence and nonconformity such as *ghurba* and *nawābit* is hard to explain in terms of political advantage, taking into

40 Lagardère, *Les Almoravides*, pp. 80, 174–78.

41 Stroumsa, *Andalus and Sefarad*, pp. 84–85; Puig Montada, 'Ibn Bājja [Avempace]'; Puig Montada, 'Philosophy in Andalus', pp. 155–79; Dunlop, 'Remarks on the Life and Works of Ibn Bajjah', pp. 188–96.

42 The concept as well as the term *Nawābit* had been used already by earlier Muslim thinkers and can be traced back to Plato's *Republic*. See Leaman, 'Ibn Bajia on Society and Philosophy', pp. 109–11; al-Qāḍī, 'The Earliest nābita and the Paradigmatic nawābit', pp. 27–61; Alon, 'Farabi's Funny Flora', pp. 245–47; Kochin, 'Weeds', pp. 399–416. Ibn Bajja uses it for the first time as a generic term 'to indicate positively both opposition in general, and in particular the private case of opposition which is individual and positive, and is under a hostile government'. Alon, 'Farabi's Funny Flora', pp. 226–27.

43 Fierro, 'Spiritual Alienation', p. 252; Rosenthal, 'The Place of Politics in the Philosophy of Ibn Bajjah', pp. 187–211.

consideration his position as court philosopher in the service of the Almoravids. This stance could mirror his personal anxiety because of his hazardous position in the court, which might at any moment turn against him like a sword of Damocles, or it could reflect a 'proclivity to alienation in the writings of the Islamic philosophers in general', as Sarah Stroumsa put it.[44]

However, Ibn Bājja consciously used these terms and values along with other traditions. In some cases, he explicitly parallels his conceptions to those of other contemporary currents of thought. Thus, for example, when speaking about the *suʿadāʾ*, the exultant men who have achieved the ultimate desired target of complete union with the separate intellect, he notes:

> The exultant ones (suʿadāʾ), if they can leave in these (imperfect) cities, will gain the felicity of the solitary man … as long as they disagree with the rest of the people. And it is to these people that the Sufis aim at when talking about the ghurābāʾ. Because, even when they are in their homelands, among their kin and neighbors, they are strangers in what concerns their thoughts. They have already travelled in their thoughts to other, different stages, which are their homelands.[45]

As a philosopher, Ibn Bājja co-produces the notion of *ghurba* together with current mystical trends, but adapts it to a philosophical vocabulary by combining notions of solitude inherited from the Hellenistic philosophical tradition with the concept of alienation, which was popular in his own times.

The Muʿtabirūn: Maghrebian Mystics

Much use of the *ghurba* concept was made by mystical thinkers and activists. Mystical currents in Al-Andalus consolidated during this era into a distinct school, sometimes referred to as The *Muʿtabirūn*. The school was headed by three prominent leaders: Ibn Barrajān (d. 1141), Ibn al-ʿArīf (d. 1141), and Ibn Qasī (d. 1151). They developed a mystical theory that self-consciously distinguished itself from the Sufis of the East and centred on contemplating God's signs in creation and in the Quran.[46] The Muʿtabirūn's messianic doctrines, as well as the use of the allegorical interpretation of the Quran, situated them *a priori* in opposition to the Almoravid authorities. What is more, all three mystic leaders were also active political opponents of the

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44 Stroumsa, *Maimonides in his World*, p. 184; Stroumsa, 'Philosopher King'.

45 Ibn Bajja, *Tadbīr al-mutawāḥḥid*, ed. and trans. by Palacios, p. 11.

46 Casewit, *The Mystics of Andalusia*. Casewit considers the three thinkers a link between Ibn Masarra (d. 319/931) and Ibn al-ʿArabi (d. 637/1240) and problematizes the label 'Sufi' that is usually given to them. García-Arenal, on the other hand, questions the term 'school' attributed to them, although she admits that they shared monistic beliefs and were all three persecuted by the Almoravid authorities. See García-Arenal, *Messianism and Puritanical Reform*, p. 134. Stroumsa calls them 'local, Andalusian philosophical mystics', Stroumsa, 'The Makeover of Ḥayy', p. 26. See also Stroumsa and Sviri, 'The Beginnings of Mystical Philosophy in al-Andalus', pp. 201–53.

Almoravid establishment. Ibn Barrajān declared himself Imam and received the oath of alliance (bayʿah) from several towns and villages,[47] and Ibn Qasī initiated, shortly after the Almohad attack on Morocco, a revolt against the Almoravids. He even succeeded for a short time in governing the region of Mértola, declaring himself Imam and Mahdi.[48] In 1141 Ibn Barrajān and Ibn al-ʿArīf were arrested by the Almoravid sultan, ʿAli b. Yūsuf ibn Tashfīn. Ibn Barrajān and Ibn al-ʿArif died in mysterious circumstances shortly after their release from prison.

The *Muʿtabirūn*'s opposing stance led them to embrace the notion of *ghurba* and to allot it a very central place in their ideology. They viewed themselves as a minority elite group alienated by a corrupt majority of deviant Muslims.

Ibn Barrajān and Ibn al-ʿArīf spoke about the ideal of the stranger in this world, one interested only in the spiritual world and aliened from his society, an *ʿabir al-sabīl* (*wayfarer*), eternal itinerant, endlessly wandering and never attached to any particular place.

Of special interest in this respect is the work by Abu'l-Qāsim Ahmad b. al-Husayn b. Qasī. Ibn Qasī integrated the concept of *ghurba* into his millenarian theory. He spoke about the *Mahdi*, who will be the leader of his time and will be called 'the stranger in his time' and his followers will be called 'strangers' and will appear among the faulty Muslims like 'weeds' (*nawābit*) in a cultivated field. The *ghurābāʾ*, according to Ibn Qasī, are the custodians of light, who preserve the true faith in a world dominated by corruption. He claimed that the end of the world was close and called believers to prepare for it. On doomsday, Ibn Qasī believed, all the miracles performed in the past would repeat themselves. In his own words,

> There is not one miracle carried out by the Prophet nor one divine friendship (*walāya*) received in the past by a friend of God (*walī allāh*) which does not later reappear in his descendants and in the strangers (*ghurābāʾ*) to his community.[49]

Ibn Qasī alludes here clearly to the famous ḥadith, mentioned above, confirming its cyclical conception of time and locating it within an eschatological scene. But, according to his interpretation, the 'strangers' who will reappear on doomsday are the saints and the performers of miracles, including himself and his disciples (*muridūn*). As he puts it, 'we are the first and the last'.[50]

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47 García-Arenal, *Messianism and Puritanical Reform*, pp. 134–35; Grill, 'La lecture supérieure du Coran selon Ibn Barrajan', pp. 510–22.

48 Dreher, 'L'imāmat', pp. 909–33.

49 García-Arenal, *Messianism and Puritanical Reform*, pp. 137–38; Dreher, 'L'imāmat', p. 204/209; Ebstein, 'Was Ibn Qasī a Sufi?', pp. 196–232.

50 Fierro, 'Spiritual Alienation', pp. 254–57; García-Arenal, *Messianism and Puritanical Reform*, p. 138.

Abu Bakr Ibn Ṭufayl (d. 1185) and Post-muwaḥḥidinism

The concept of *ghurba* was further developed during the Almohad period, and received a strong manifestation in Ibn Ṭufayl's famous novel *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān*.[51] This classical book is an allegorical novel in which Ibn Ṭufayl conveys philosophical teachings in symbolic language. Ibn Ṭufayl, Ibn Bājja's disciple, was a central figure in the Almohad court. He served both caliphs, ʿAbd al-Muʾmin and Abu Yʿaqūb Yūsuf, as qadi, personal physician, and vizier, leading a circle of learned men and close friends of the caliph (*Ṭalaba*) and conducting philosophical debates in the caliph's court.

Ibn Ṭufayl's book opens with a vision of humanity in a state of nature, isolated from society and politics. It tells about Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān, a boy who grows up on an isolated island, raised by an antelope. He learns the language of the animals and, by observing the stars, attains the knowledge of the most learned of astrologists. Through his explorations of the environment, he gains great knowledge in natural science, philosophy, and religion, and concludes that, at the basis of the creation of the universe, a great creator must exist. At the age of thirty, he meets for the first time another human being, Absāl, who has washed up on his island after a shipwreck. Ḥayy reveals to him all the wisdom he has acquired on the island and becomes his teacher. They both decide to go back to human society and save it by teaching and spreading the truth. They arrive at a perfect city headed by Salāmān, the most eminent man at that time. But Ḥayy realizes that even people in the perfect city are not ready to accept his teachings, as they are absorbed in the terrestrial world. He despairs of helping them and decides, together with Absāl, to leave the city and return to their isolated island, where they will be able to serve God in the right way.[52]

Ḥayy and Absāl are the ultimate solitary *ghurābāʾ*. Ibn Ṭufayl's story takes the ideal of estrangement to an extreme. Estrangement and solitude are the only ways to serve God. Alienation and detachment from human society are the only condition for those who strive to achieve ecstatic communion with the divine. If Ibn Bājja's solitaries (*mutawaḥḥidun*) could still find a place in the imperfect city as wild weeds, Ibn Ṭufayl's Ḥayy has no place at all among human beings. His alienation from human society is essential and total and cannot be bridged in any way.

Ibn Ṭufayl's story apparently contradicts his official positions at the Almohad court and is not in line with his other efforts to present the Almohad caliphs as the embodiment of the Platonic ideal realizing the perfect city governed by a philosopher-king. It is difficult to understand how Ḥayy's failure to educate the people of Salāmān's island and to teach them the true path, which implies the unfeasibility of a perfect city, toes the line with Ibn

51 Goodman, *Ibn Tufayl's Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān*.

52 On earlier versions of this story and these motifs, see Stroumsa, 'The Makeover of Ḥayy'.

Ṭufayl's activities as court philosopher and administrator at the service of the Almohads. It can be explained as a twist in his initial ideology or, better, as a concealed critique of the Almohad regime masked in the form of a fable, as Sarah Stroumsa suggested.[53] In any case, Ibn Ṭufayl contributed another layer to the dynamic co-productive process in which the concept of alienation was shaped in the twelfth-century Maghreb.

Hence, 'alienation' in the twelfth-century Maghreb turns out to be a loaded term and part of an ongoing process of co-production in which various currents of thought and political factions took part, not only among Almohad thinkers but also among their ideological and political opponents. The concept appeared not only in religious literature, but also in other fields such as philosophy and *belle lettres*. Religious scholars, philosophers, political administrators, and mystics co-produced the twelfth-century notion of *ghurba*, each of them giving it a different interpretation and loading it with new meanings according to their interests, worldviews, and life experiences.

While Ibn Tūmart, the founding father of the Almohad dynasty, and the Ẓahiri thinker Ibn Ḥazm, who held an outlook close to the Almohad worldview, apprehended the 'stranger' mainly as an oppositional dissenter and used the concept of *ghurba* to promote their utopic vision, the Malikite qadi, ʿAbd al-Barr identified him with the religious scholar, thus defending the privileged status of ʿUlamāʾ. The Malikite jurist and Ibn Tūmart's teacher, Al-Ṭurṭūshī, developed an elaborate historical theory according to which each generation in history generates a stranger of its own. The philosopher Ibn Bājja combined the notion of *ghurba* with that of the solitude of the philosopher-king in the perfect city, inherited from Hellenistic philosophy. Ibn Bājja, who served the Almoravid court, was perhaps the harbinger of the Almohad revolution using the concept of alienation to herald the new regime of the Almohads. The mystical Muʿtabirūn, who were also active rebels against the Almoravids, gave the concept of alienation an eschatological interpretation and apprehended the stranger as an eternal ascetic rambler. Ibn Ṭufayl, the trusted courtier of the Almohads, predicted the unfeasibility of their rule from within their court, using an allegorical novel in which he sent his protagonist, Ḥayy, back to his isolated island, concluding that the vision of a perfect society is not attainable and the only way to achieve divine inspiration is through alienation and absolute solitude.

The concept of alienation transcended the boundaries of Islam and found a place in Jewish thought, mainly through the agency of Jewish converts, such as Moses Maimonides.

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53 Stroumsa, *Théologie et philosophie au temps des Almohades*, p. 80.

Moses Maimonides

The concept of alienation in Maimonides' writings is especially evident in the way he portrays the patriarch Abraham, whom he considers to be the first monotheist believer.

Human history was for Maimonides a long march towards pure monotheism. Since polytheism is a natural human inclination, in the early stages of history all people were polytheists. Maimonides' Abraham was an outstanding revolutionary hero who understood the absurdity of idolatry, a universal thinker who discovered the monotheist truth by independent self-reflection and succeeded in rescuing the world from the futility of idolatry. As such he signifies a momentous stage in human history, namely the transition from idolatry to belief in one God.

> After this mighty man was weaned, he began to explore and think. Though he was a child, he began to think [incessantly] throughout the day and night, wondering: 'How is it possible for the sphere to continue to revolve without having anyone controlling it? Who is causing it to revolve? Surely, it does not cause itself to revolve'. He had no teacher, nor was there anyone to inform him. Rather, he was mired in Ur Kasdim among the foolish idolaters. His father, mother, and all the people [around him] were idol worshipers, and he would worship with them. [However,] his heart was exploring and [gaining] understanding.[54]

Maimonides sets the young Abraham in a primeval setting, similar to that of Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān's childhood. The same solitude surrounds Ḥayy on the isolated island and Abraham's early years in *Ur Kasdim*. Like Ḥayy, Abraham discovers the truth about the world and its creator all by himself through meditation.[55] Like Ḥayy, he decides in later years to spread the truth in the world, but unlike Ḥayy he did succeed in his mission and established the monotheistic 'house of Abraham'. Maimonides' Abraham is a weed, a *Nābit*, in the sense understood by his contemporary thinkers. He sprang surprisingly like a weed out of a totally idolatrous surrounding and stuck to his belief in opposition to the entire society. Unlike other *nawābit*, he did not remain in seclusion, but succeeded in attracting many people to his right path.

Nevertheless, when speaking about the prophet, or the perfect man, who has achieved intellectual perfection, Maimonides takes another stance, closer to Ibn Bājja and Ibn Ṭufayl's more pessimistic postures. He expects the prophet to live in absolute isolation and to detach himself totally from any contact with other humans:

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54 Moses Maimonides, *Avodat Kochavim*, trans. by Touger, Chapter 1, p. 12.

55 See Vajda, 'D'une attestation peu connue du thème du "philosophe autodidacte"', pp. 379–383, especially pp. 380 and 382. On the notion of *fitra*, the innate capacity of human beings to arrive at the absolute truth through meditation and divine revelation, see Stroumsa, 'The Makeover of Ḥayy', pp. 24–27; Stroumsa, 'The Father of Many Nations', pp. 29–39.

> It is likewise necessary for the thought of that individual [that it] should be detached from the spurious kinds of rulership and that his desire for them should be abolished — I mean the wish to dominate or be held great by the common people and to obtain from them honor and obedience for its own sake. He should rather regard all people according to their various states with respect to which they are indubitably either like domestic animals or like beasts of prey. If the perfect man who lives in solitude, thinks of them at all, he does so only with a view to saving himself from the harm that may be caused by those among them who are harmful if he happens to associate with them, or to obtaining an advantage that may be obtained from them if he is forced to do it by some of his needs.[56]

Maimonides betrays here a sharp sense of alienation. Like Ibn Bājja, he expects the perfect man to conduct a totally detached way of life and recommends for absolute solitude. Maimonides' perfect man resembles Ibn Ṭufayl's Ḥayy, who resolved to live a life of total isolation from any human being.[57] Hence, when Maimonides discusses the concept of estrangement, he clearly joins the mystical and philosophical discourses also current in the Islam of his epoch and takes part in the contemporary co-production of this concept by further developing postures inspired by contemporary thinkers such as Ibn Bājja and Ibn Ṭufayl.[58]

By developing the ideal of alienation, Maimonides and the Muslim thinkers mentioned earlier were co-producing a new idea related to a new system of values. Each could develop the new concept of alienation by anchoring it in his own religious tradition. The Muslim thinkers could rely on certain Quranic verses and hadiths, as well as on the basic ethos of a dissident minority group that characterized early Islam. Maimonides could base his call on the ethos embedded in some biblical verses concerning 'a people that shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations' (Numbers 23. 9), but actually all of them were engaged in co-producing a new concept which corresponded with the particular circumstances of their time and place, employing key terms well-understood in their contemporary Islamicate world. The years Maimonides lived as a Crypto-Jew situated him in a liminal region at a crossroads between cultures which enabled him to use this terminology and to participate in the general discourse of his time. This was not a one-sided process of reception or of cultural translation. The currents of thought mentioned above were all engaged

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56 Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. by Pines, p. 262.

57 On Maimonides' internal conflict, attested in his writings, between an elitist approach calling for alienation and detachment from the common people and the 'call to duty' and public responsibility he felt in his capacity as head of the Jewish communities in Egypt, see Stroumsa, *Maimonides in His World*, pp. 186–88.

58 See Stroumsa, 'The Makeover of Ḥayy', pp. 23–24.

in a process of co-production in which they could process and develop this new contemporaneous ideal, each of them contributing and adding to it another facet which could suit particular interests and situations at a certain point in history.

Conclusions

The twelfth-century Maghreb was imbued with utopian ideas, with the vision of the perfect city conducted by a philosopher-king, the legacy of Hellenistic philosophy, linked to an ongoing process of co-production with the revivalist vision of the Almohads.

This ambience generated two key concepts: migration and alienation. The concept of migration was needed for creating a pure space, a prerequisite for realizing the vision of a utopian society. By turning migration into an ideal and an obligatory commandment, the Almohads aspired to create a space free of infidels and deviant Muslims, again aiming at the construction of a utopian society. They engendered the concept of migration along with other contemporary currents of thought within Islam, on its borders, and outside of it. The concept of migration as a basic commandment and ideal way of life entered contemporary Judaism through converts and Crypto-Jews, such as Moses Maimonides. Maimonides too was driven by utopian aspirations, but unlike Ibn Tūmart, who aspired to create a physical utopian space, Maimonides aimed to establish a non-place through eternal wandering in an endless search for the ideal utopian place.

Alienation was another key concept co-produced during this period, forged by various currents of thought within and beyond Islam. Alienation is also an essential concept in utopian thought. It creates an inner distance from the defective present and enables a critical and dissident position which can undermine the faulty current situation and thus theoretically usher in a perfect future society controlled by another, better value-system. From within the inner alienation, one can view the wider world with an estranged gaze that has glimpsed a better way. The concept of alienation in both Islam and Judaism was presented as being based on old foundational narratives but was actually a product of the twelfth-century Maghreb with its new, almost revolutionary ideological and political currents, already dubbed by Maribel Fierro as a 'new religiosity'. Alienation formed an indispensable part of the mood and self-apprehension of these new ideological groups during their formative stage. It also permeated Judaism through Crypto-Jews who returned to Judaism, such as Moses Maimonides.

The twelfth-century Maghreb presents itself as an active arena of co-production in which variegated ideological groups of the Islamicate world produced new meanings and significance to concepts and values. Each group put the newly constructed concepts for its own use thus contributing its particular distinct aspect to the overall process of co-production.

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