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# Contesting French Aesthetics of Space and Nature Enjoyment in Moroccan Travel Writing in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century

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## Abstract

In their travel writings about Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Moroccan visitors compare and contrast what they see of the European artistic designs and aesthetic values with experiences from their own native cultures. In this paper, I analyze the discourse and rhetoric about the enjoyment of nature, landscape design and leisure aesthetics as explored in the travel writing of the Moroccan traveler al-'Amrāwī in his travelogue *Tuḥfat al-Malik al-'Azīz bimamlakat Bārīz* (1860). Here we see a significant engagement between the periphery and the center, from outlying 'pre-modern' cultures to the epicenter of Western culture and modernity.

## Résumé

Dans leurs récits de voyages en Europe, les visiteurs marocains du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle comparent ce qu'ils voient des valeurs esthétiques et des motifs artistiques européens avec ceux de leur culture d'origine. Dans cet article, j'analyse les écrits d'al-'Amrāwī, et notamment son *Tuḥfat al-Malik al-'Azīz bimamlakat Bārīz* (1860), du point de vue du discours sur la nature et les jouissances qu'elle donne, sur l'art des jardins, sur les loisirs et les esthétiques qui leur sont propres. Ce texte demande à être analysé sous l'angle des rapports entre centre et périphérie et pose la question de la relation entre cultures marginales et pré-modernes et un Occident perçu comme l'épicentre de la culture et de la modernité.

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During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, many Moroccan travelers to Europe observed facets of Western modernity in terms of spatial organization and the delineation of public versus private space; more specifically, they interpreted the constructed aesthetic landscape, as seen in the architecture of homes, palaces, and gardens, comparing them against familiar indigenous models. Such models were influenced not only by Moroccan culture but also by Islamic tradition. Specifically, the reading and representation of the massive urbanization they could see in metropolitan cities such as Paris prompted responses in which the Moroccan visitors engaged with European artistic designs and aesthetic values transnationally and, in some cases, contested their validity in comparison with their native cultures as they represented in their writings what they witnessed to a native, elite, male audience back home. This audience represented a small highly educated group of advisors to the Moroccan sultan, many of whom were religiously trained scholars and jurists. More specifically, I here focus on the representation of space/landscape as depicted by al-'Amrāwī's *Tuḥfat al-Malik al-'Azīz bi-mamlakat Bārīz*, (*The Masterpiece of the Beloved King to the Kingdom of Paris*; 1860).<sup>32</sup> As I argue here, despite general assumptions that Western aesthetics were held up as a broadly-accepted model of 'logical' and Enlightenment ideals in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the validity of Western models did not remain unchallenged by citizens outside Europe. As many such 'native' texts, such as al-'Amrāwī's, have remained untranslated into European/Western languages till recently, I believe it is essential that we bring these alternative perspectives into our intellectual discourse not only due to the relevance they have to 19<sup>th</sup> century literary and cultural studies today, but also, significantly, as they provide traces of a historical relationship between, broadly speaking, "East and West"—one that is often posited to be devoid of intellectually rigorous commentary from "the Other." I must add, too, that this marginalization of voices has not

only happened in European/North American academic culture, but also within the tradition of Middle Eastern Studies itself, as scholars from the Middle East have, until recently, almost completely ignored texts written on the periphery of the Arab-Islamic world such as those coming from North Africa. Through this discussion, I also argue, taking place within the historical context of French colonial presence in Algeria, and following Moroccan defeat at the hands the Spanish, who attack and claim the northern Moroccan city of Tétouan as Spanish in 1859-1860, this text appears within a discursive environment within which al-'Amrāwī's observations on French space employ a contestatory rhetoric of an aesthetics of enjoyment as a counterhegemonic mechanism that can be read as an attempt safeguard cultural agency.

## Background

Al-'Amrāwī himself was an intellectual, a religiously trained and well-respected *faqīh*, or religious scholar, with expertise in Arabic culture and Islamic jurisprudence. He was born and raised in the city of Marrakech but he received his education and training in Fès, the seat of political and administrative power during the period. As a member of the inner circle of palace administrators and advisors to Sultan Mohammed IV of Morocco (reign 1859-1873), al-'Amrāwī was sent by the sultan to Paris as part of a political envoy that sought to strengthen ties with Paris, seek its mediation and borrow money to pay Spain reparations in relation to their military defeat in 1860. Al-'Amrāwī's role included not only serving as both a political representative of the Moroccan sultan and a religious leader for the members of the mission, but also as a type of secretary, taking note of experiences and events that occurred and preparing a report that would be provided to the sultan and his court. In this role, we see him engaging with the environment and landscapes in and around Paris and commenting on specific aspects of public space such as the

<sup>32</sup> Idris ben Idris Al-'Amrawi, *Tuḥfat al-Malik al-'Aziz bi-Mamlakat Bariz* (Rabat: S.N., 1989).

relationship between people and nature, the socio-cultural dynamic of public and private space, and the relationship between leisure and pleasure as reflected through the interaction between people and their surroundings. Infusing all these relations is a backdrop of religious rhetoric used as a type of lens through which al-'Amrāwī sees and describes the world.

Prior to the official declaration of Morocco as a French protectorate in 1912, the interactions between North Africa and Europe went through various stages that go as far back as the Middle Ages. From conflict and dissension during the Crusades, to collaboration during the Golden Era in Muslim Spain, and past the expulsion of Muslims and Jews after the Spanish Reconquista (1492), these relations have often taken a religious tone and been marked by military conflict. By the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the scientific and technological advancement of the West, especially in terms of the art of war, enabled European imperial powers to extend their hegemony over the region of North Africa as they succeeded in destabilizing the socio-cultural fabric of Maghrebi countries. The governments ruling these territories went through a process of profound self-inquiry and sometimes made desperate attempts to safeguard their territorial sovereignty while some also launched social and economic reforms. This was particularly adopted on a larger scale in Egypt and later in Tunisia, in wake of the *nahda* or renaissance, movement and its Turkish corresponding equivalent of *tanzimat*.

The French colonial domination over Algeria in 1830 brought Morocco into direct friction and eventually conflict with the French. The escalation of the conflict over border control between Morocco and French Algeria and accusations of Moroccan support of the anti-French attacks and, more specifically, of the Algerian resistance led by Emir Abdelkader in the 1830s and early 1840s, culminated in the 1844 Battle of Isly near the city of Oujda on the frontiers between Algeria and Morocco. After the defeat of the Moroccan army, a Moroccan ambassadorial mission was sent to

France to work out the terms of the treaty between France and Morocco and diffuse the tension between the two governments to avoid further French penetration into Moroccan affairs. The visit of that mission to Paris in 1845-1846 has been recorded in a travel account by Muhammad As-Saffar,<sup>33</sup> who was very impressed by French technological advancements, the development of their public sectors, and socio-cultural system. Al-'Amrāwī's work belongs to a second set of European missions that followed fifteen years after As-Saffar's trip after Spain laid claims to the Northern Moroccan city of Tétouan.

## Traditions of Travel Writing in Islamic Culture

The cultural and geographical mobility experienced in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, enabled by new methods of travel (i.e., the steam locomotive and steam-powered packet boat) as well as by increased economic means to undertake travel, also introduced new relationships with other cultures and peoples. In addition, I argue, these processes of engagement also led, for citizens of Arab-Muslim countries like Morocco, to new methods of considering the identity of both self and other—methods often grounded in cross-cultural interactions with non-Muslim landscapes and spaces. Throughout most of the Middle Ages, Muslim travelers wrote about their visits, observations and impressions of other cultures in the Middle East, Africa and Asia, cultures with which they share many religious and socio-cultural affinities. In contrast, travel and sojourning in the non-Muslim West was typically, as recorded in numerous texts and documents, undertaken with reticence, apprehension and cultural insecurity.

<sup>33</sup> Muhammed As-Saffar, *Disorienting Encounters: Travels of a Moroccan Scholar in France in 1845-1846. The Voyage of Muhammad As-Saffar*, trans. Susan Gilson Miller (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992). For more on the work of As-Saffar and others in terms of interpreting the modernity of Europe, see Ahmed Idrissi Alami, *Mutual Othering: Islam, Modernity, and the Politics of Cross-Cultural Encounters in Pre-Colonial Moroccan and European Travel Writing* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2013).

Al-'Amrawi's text has, overall, a positive posture and an approving tone towards French culture. He praises their organization of public space, their development of government institutions and administrative practices, and their concern about public welfare—especially as seen in the public support of veterans and the military. As described in his account, he is impressed by the French public designs of the urban space and architectural style of buildings. He also regards as exemplary French devotion to science and learning. In describing their military, he emphasizes the soldiers' discipline, sincere devotion to service, sense of duty and nationalistic fervor. But this positive descriptive reporting, at times, involves the deployment of a critique of French cultural approach to nature and their modes of celebrating natural scenery.

We see his appreciation in sections where, for example, he records his feelings as he travels from Lyon to Marseilles. He is impressed by how the train makes its way through the well-attended plains and the picturesque hilly landscape. The beautiful scenery prompts him to render in poetic terms the Rhône River, which, compared to the Moroccan river Sebou, is bigger and its valley is scenic and nicer.<sup>34</sup> However, his moment of descriptive celebration is marred by the conflict he feels between the beautiful landscape and the emptiness and absence of human involvement with the surrounding trees, rivers and mountains. According to his assessment, this beautiful landscape appears wrapped in gloom and melancholy because of its people and because the French experience nature at a distance, divorced and detached from it.

## Humans and Nature

Al-'Amrāwī provides a reading of French people via his commentary on their interaction (or lack thereof) with nature. What is perhaps most striking about his comments is how he draws on

religion, culture and the arts to provide a background against which his Moroccan audience can gain insight into the world he describes. It is grounded in an epistemological nexus where morality, space and the aesthetics of leisure intersect and overlap. A good example of how he imposes his own, and his audience's point of view, occurs when he makes reference to the Moroccan ritualized experience of nature as embodied in the event of *nouzha* or *nazaha*, outings taken by many Moroccan families in spring to the outskirts of cities such as Fès, Rabat, or Marrakech, and during similar celebrations occur during *moussems*, or religious festivals, such as the popular *moussems* of Mouley Idriss.<sup>35</sup> On such outings, people have picnics on the grass, bring along often elaborate feasts, spread out carpets, drink tea, play music and enjoy nature. Such references would be easily understood by his audience.

To provide context for Al-'Amrāwī's views about nature enjoyment, one could see his position as invoking other classical representations of natural landscape in the lore of Arabic classical and popular literature, such as the epic romance of Antar and Abla. The following passage from the epic aptly illustrates the value assigned to the idea of the classical Bedouin encampment as a nexus where the human, the animal and the natural landscape appear to reflect a sense of harmony and pleasurable coexistence:

There came a day when Sheddad, mounted upon his famous mare Jirwet, was riding with nine other warriors in the country surrounding Sherebeh. And it happened that as they rode over the foothills of Mount Aja and Mount Selma, into the country of Qahtan, they came unseen upon a brave sight in the valley below them. The encampments of the Jezeela tribe lay there: a rich encampment, with its black tents, its silken banners streaming in the wind, and the shadows streaming out over the sand before the rising sun. Men and maidens moved between the tents, and servants from foreign lands, often with golden or ruddy hair, were busy at their work.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Al-'Amrawi, *Tuhfat al-Malik al-Aziz bi-Mamlakat Bariz*, 49.

<sup>35</sup> For examples of such excursions, see: [http://www.magnumphotos.com/C.aspx?VP3=SearchResult\\_VPage&VBID=2K1HZ0NYFCW9V&SMLS=1&RW=1263&RH=895](http://www.magnumphotos.com/C.aspx?VP3=SearchResult_VPage&VBID=2K1HZ0NYFCW9V&SMLS=1&RW=1263&RH=895).

<sup>36</sup> Diana Richmond, *Antar and Abla: A Bedouin Romance* (Landon & NY: Quartet,

In al-'Amrāwī's narrative, however, the representation of French approach to landscape and their modes of its appreciation contrast with this perceived Moroccan ideal for how to interact with nature and the aesthetic pleasure such scenes induce. In fact, he reproaches the French for their disinterested attitude to natural scenery, an attitude which might be construed as the effect of their bourgeois cultural hegemony and aesthetics.<sup>37</sup>

He laments what he perceives as the sad and melancholic character of the personified scenery: "Oh, what a loss for this splendid scenery! And woe to those beautiful glades, for they are rendered bleak by the inhabitants and they are dressed in dire mourning."<sup>38</sup> The qualities of beauty and grandeur that are perceived in nature are thus, in Al-'Amrāwī's view, contingent on the people who populate and inhabit it. His critique of French aesthetics of nature enjoyment proceeds from an entrenched model of Moroccan celebration of spring and nature.

The connection between art in its many forms and the space of nature and the garden is so essential that scholar James Dickie has argued that "...the study of Arab gardening is important in superlative degree for the correct interpretations of Arabic poetry."<sup>39</sup> Al-'Amrāwī also makes reference to both popular and classical poetry and music, including traditions such as the *qasidah*, which has a literary history stretching back to the Middle Ages and to the period of Arabo-Hispanic *convivencia* in Spain, and the more popular *malhūn*. *Malhūn* is a mainly urban popular form of poetic composition that originally emerged in Tafilalet in the southeastern part of Morocco and which flourished, and is still popular, in the cities of Fès, Marrakech, Meknès and Salé. Both forms of music and poetry would have been familiar to his highly educated audience. Another interesting

aspect of the tradition of *malhūn* in Morocco is that it was pursued by both Moroccan and Jewish musicians and, in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century, has been historically performed by both men and women.

More specifically, Al-'Amrāwī's comments may call to mind the celebration found in music and poetry, such as the descriptive segments in the *serraba* or introductory musical portion or prelude of the *qasidah*. This section of the longer poem often celebrates the beauty of nature through highlighting the manner in which men and women perform their celebration of spring as they eat, drink and play among trees, plants and rivers.<sup>40</sup> The celebration of the coming of spring provides a good example of the staple elements that constitute nature enjoyment as a performance of the human and natural as a symbiotic whole in which boundaries between man and nature are undone and the joy and fun extends from the human to the natural scenery which is humanized and aesthetically reconstructed along Arabic aesthetic values that invoke the traditional topoi and rhetoric of Arabic literature.

To contrast his experience in France, he suggests that the French lack the necessary aesthetics of enjoyment as he constructs them as cut off from their landscape and as destitute of empathy and sensitivity. I believe this privileging of an Arabo-Islamic worldview presents the contemporary reader with a fascinating moment of disconnect as most readers unfamiliar with Islamic aesthetics and art would not be prepared to challenge the superiority not only of Western modernity in terms of technology and military might in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but also of Western landscape aesthetics and leisure culture.

Based on the author's advanced premise that the physical natural landscape and the human realm are dynamically interrelated and interdependent,

1978), 26.

<sup>37</sup> Elizabeth A. Bohls has discussed the connection between this disinterested approach to nature and bourgeois cultural hegemony. For more on this point see Elizabeth A. Bohls, *Women Travel Writers and the Language of Aesthetics, 1716-1818* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 68-73.

<sup>38</sup> Al-'Amrāwī, *Tuhfat al-Malik al-Aziz bi-Mamlakat Bariz*, 49.

<sup>39</sup> James Dickie, "The Hispano-Arab Garden its Philosophy and Function," *Bulletin, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* XXI, (1968): 237.

<sup>40</sup> For more on the history and development of the genre of *malhūn*, see Ch. Pellat "Malhun," in *The Encyclopedia of Islam* vol. 6 (Leiden, The Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1991) 247-257; Muhammad el-Fasi, *Ma'lamat al-malhun*, 4 Vols., (Rabat, Morocco: Akadimiyyat al-Mamlaka al-Maghribiyya, 1986-97); Said Ennahid "The Archeology of Space in Moroccan Oral Tradition: The Case of Malhun Poetry," *QSA* 2 (2007): 71-84; Philip Schuyler, "Malhūn: Colloquial Song in Morocco," in *The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music Volume 6: The Middle East*, edited by Virginia Danielson and Marcus Reynolds. (NY: Routledge, 2002). Contemporary performances of *malhūn* (spelled also as *malhoun*) can easily be found online, for example, on [YouTube.com](#).

one can perceive the slippage in the discourse from a mere debate on the question of aesthetics to the discourse on behavioral and moral concerns. Al-'Amrāwī's cultural politics of place are illustrated in his depiction of the beautiful natural landscape and scenery as engulfed in a state of dire mourning because of the discord between them and the people around them. The French are viewed as divorced from their natural scene, and, by association, divorced from true understanding of God. In fact, he suggests that it is inevitable that Christians cannot properly appreciate what God has put before them. He writes:

Could it be otherwise as its inhabitants are worshippers of the cross and priests and others under the yoke of Satan? Their celebration of this beauty is not one of pleasure and relaxation whereby they could have set up tents around that river or organize sittings on these plains, nor did they ride horses or walk leisurely in them [these settings].<sup>41</sup>

He furthers this use of religious imagery as he suggests that those who do ride on trains through the countryside, i.e., the gentry riding for pleasure or work, are like goblins greatly feared in popular Islam, ones who must actually cut themselves off from nature (in taverns and bars) to find pleasure in alcohol, forbidden in Islam:

They pass through [this landscape] like 'afarit (goblins), looking like sick people riding on thundering trails and the piercing fire making its way through the land as if ascending to the heavens or dropping in a bottomless pit. When they grow bored and feel like relaxing and enjoying themselves, they enter stifling rooms inside the bar and they exchange bitter cups in the stinky smoke and they emerge drunk like pigs, dancing like monkeys and braying like donkeys, their faces disfigured by shaving and their talk whistling, babbling and giggling.<sup>42</sup>

The contrast that this formulation sets up between the author's mode of natural appreciation and the French approach contains both social and moral critique of industrialized Western societies. The

French abandon their environment for the bar instead of riding horses or setting up tents, both valorized as primal symbols of Arab indigenous nomadic culture. This suggests a position of Arabs as holding more authentic and superior coexistence with the landscape in which man and nature exist in harmony rather than discord. This privileged position of man in nature was actually popular in the work of several romantic artists who painted in Algeria and Morocco, like Eugène Fromentin.<sup>43</sup>

This connection between the aesthetics of space, nature, and gardens, also touches a moral core in the Arab-Muslim tradition as appreciation for God is intimately connected with depictions of heavenly paradise or *janna*. The Quran's representation of aspects of paradise emphasizes the value of water, trees, rivers and idealized images of nature. In fact, the word of paradise (*janna*) and the word for garden (*janan*) share the same root. Whenever the Qur'an describes paradise and its pleasures, idealized images of natural landscape are symbolically deployed to suggest the elevated nature of bliss and harmony that the true and sincere believers will enjoy.<sup>44</sup> As suggested in this section of the Qur'an, idealized natural perfection is enhanced by exemplary companionship and exquisitely delicious fruits:

But give glad tidings to those who believe and work righteousness, that their portion is gardens, beneath which rivers flow. Every time they are fed with fruits there from, they say: "Why, this is what we were fed with before", for they are given things in similitude; and they have therein companions pure (and holy); and they abide therein (forever).<sup>45</sup>

In other verses, the same qualities are reiterated and the harmony and pleasure are reinforced through references to the qualities of shade and

<sup>43</sup> Many French and European artists visited the Maghreb throughout the 19th century and produced famous paintings and literary works that highlight the natural landscape, the people and cultures of Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia. For an extensive discussion on this subject see Hartman Elwood, *hr nim t nth- nt r r n h rit r-arti t an th Ma hr b th lit rar an arti ti i ti n f rth Afri a b h hil a ti r, n r m ntin, and Pierre Loti* (Tubingen: Narr, 1994) and Mary B. Vogl, *Picturing the Maghreb: Literature, Photography, (Re) Presentation* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003).

<sup>44</sup> All Qur'anic translations are taken from Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an* (Beltsville, Md.: Amana Publications, 2009).

<sup>45</sup> Al-Qur'an 2:25; Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, 22.

<sup>41</sup> Al-'Amrāwī, *Tuhfat al-Malik al-Aziz bi-Mamlakat Bariz*, 49-50.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

coolness of these gardens to provide incentives for believers to seek truth and do good deeds:

But those who believe and do deeds of righteousness, We shall soon admit to Gardens, with rivers flowing beneath – their eternal home; therein shall they have companions pure and holy: we shall admit them to shades, cool and ever deepening.<sup>46</sup>

One could easily presume that the earthly garden is an attempt to replicate the imagined heavenly version or at least expresses a longing for eventually embracing that optimal state of plenitude in which the physical world of nature reinforces the spiritual happiness and eternal pleasure. In sum, through careful reading of how Al-‘Amrāwī’ uses references to indigenous concepts of nature and landscape, we can see how voices from what in postcolonial and cultural studies is perceived as the ‘periphery’ can provide insight into how 19<sup>th</sup> century aesthetics of space is constituted and contested.

## French Zoological Gardens

Another example of Al-‘Amrāwī’s strategic interest in knowing ‘the people’ of France by analyzing their use of space can be seen his discussion of zoological gardens and taxidermy. Al-‘Amrāwī devotes many pages to a description of the zoological gardens in Paris, naming and detailing each animal’s physical characteristics and its place of origin.<sup>47</sup> He is both baffled and impressed by the variety of exotic plants and animals imported by the French from Africa, Asia and the Americas.<sup>48</sup> After his visit to the zoo, he reflects on the potential benefits of such holdings and critiques French extravagance.

Al-‘Amrāwī is stunned at the amount of money being spent on exotic animals, as seen in the arranged spaces and personnel appointed to accommodate the animals from all over the world. He sees the whole enterprise of zoology, especially

taxidermy, the preserving of stuffed animals, as waste of money. He cannot understand how the French can spend so much money on such expenditure despite what he sees as their overall thriftiness:

A reasonable person would be baffled by the purposeless and waste of money spent to bring these animals and plants and the efforts spent sustain it and house it, given their miserly and cautious attitude with money spending for they do not spend a Dirham unless they are certain that it will yield a return of a dirham and a half or boost the image and grandeur of the state; but what benefit, tradition or esteem is there in collecting dogs, pigs, monkeys, wolves and insects and what advantage is there in storing useless and stinky corpses?<sup>49</sup>

Al-‘Amrāwī here reveals his utilitarian attitude towards nature and the animal world which conflicts with French scientific inquisitiveness and interest in the culture of collection of artifacts and animals.

## Travel Writing and Aesthetics

Critical examination of the role of travel narratives in the construction of national identity has often connected aesthetics of landscape with entrenched and imagined constructions of identity and difference. One encounters such an alignment in works such as Marjorie Morgan’s study on the construction of British identity in Victorian travel writing. According to her findings, the English travelers perceive differences in environment, food, manners and religion as indicators of national character. Based on such linkages between landscape and environmental factors, and the projection of otherness, an opposition was erected between qualities of the English “innocence, honesty, originality, frankness and moral independence” and “the artful, deceptive, conventional, imitative qualities thought to characterize Continental Europeans, particularly the French.”<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, she argues that

<sup>46</sup> Al-Qur’an 4:57; Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur’an*, 202.

<sup>47</sup> Al-‘Amrāwī, *Tuhfat al-Malik al-Aziz bi-Mamlakat Bariz*, 68-73.

<sup>48</sup> Al-‘Amrāwī, *Tuhfat al-Malik al-Aziz bi-Mamlakat Bariz*, 66-72.

<sup>49</sup> Al-‘Amrāwī, *Tuhfat al-Malik al-Aziz bi-Mamlakat Bariz*, 72-73.

<sup>50</sup> Marjorie Morgan, *National Identities and Travel in Victorian Britain* (Basingstoke



Scottish travelers, who “were comforted and felt liberated by the wild, desolate Scottish landscape, . . . placed great emphasis on the quality of liberty in landscape, and very little on that of order.”<sup>51</sup>

Similarly, Al-‘Amrāwī’s discourse on aesthetics of nature enjoyment constructs leisure and pleasure with reference to the position of the body and its proximity to nature. The notion of boundaries, like all other experiential aspects of being, rests on the assumption that modalities of appreciation and enjoyment are mediated, negotiated and ultimately dependent on modes of representation. Such an epistemological constructivism is central to the rhetoric of authenticity used to validate his aesthetics model of space and approach to landscape. This understanding is supported by critics such as William Cronon, who argues that “‘nature’ is not merely so natural as it seems. Instead, it is profoundly human construction.” Our approach to what constitutes value and beauty in nature proves that “the way we describe and understand that world is so entangled with our values and assumptions that the two can never be fully separated.”<sup>52</sup>

The cultural understanding of nature that structures al- ‘Amrawi’s representation of French landscape and its people reflects the author’s indigenous cultural mythologies and ways of regulating interaction with space and approach to scenery appreciation. As James Dickie points out, “The differences in psychology between Muslim and European are accurately reflected, for example, in their respective garden traditions. The high walls of the Islamic garden prevented its owner being seen from outside and insulated him against the clamour and dirt of the antipathetic life of the streets. There, inside his artificial paradise... he could enjoy in solitude the voluptuous pleasure produced by different perfumes, colours, and shapes in endlessly varied combinations.”<sup>53</sup> In fact, the incorporation of elaborate gardening models and exquisite plants, trees and running water

inside the walled compound of traditional Moroccan houses or *riads* is a highly symbolic statement of a vision of cosmic plenitude that reflect how the human and the natural are fully integrated and interdependent.

The role of the body in the Moroccan visitor’s interactions with French culture and space is primal to the ways in which he constructs French natural landscape and French modes of enjoyment. Similar insights have been offered by Kevin Marwell in his analysis of the discourse and myths that structure the construction of modern tourists to Malaysian parks when he states that “...nature is mediated in a myriad of ways from social structures and practices operating at a macro scale through to the bodies of the tourists themselves.”<sup>54</sup> Similarly, Al-‘Amrawi provides a structure within which French landscape ought to be seen and appreciated. He emphasizes not only the separation between humans and nature but he also critiques the absence of human interaction and the emphasis on the emptiness of the scene which is constructed as an abstract model of the visual eye. He locates what he perceives as an imbalance in the relationship between the natural world and French society. The dissociation of the people from their natural surroundings could be an effect of the increased urbanization of the industrialized culture in France which might engender a state of alienation the traveler experiences in unfamiliar terrains and socio-cultural practices in France.

Al-‘Amrāwī defends a model of synthetic coexistence between the natural and the human which is premised on the superiority of the Moroccan and Arab-Muslim model of nature appreciation drawn from his native aesthetic outlook. Probably, the excessive human control over nature in the modern metropolis represents a threat to the unscripted, spontaneous and harmonious interaction with the natural world back home, in which the medieval lifestyles are still accessible and operational. One here remembers the revolutionary renovations of Paris

and New York: Palgrave, 2001), 125.

<sup>51</sup> Al-‘Amrāwī, *Tuhfat al-Malik al-Aziz bi-Mamlakat Bariz*, 75–76.

<sup>52</sup> William Cronon, “Introduction: In Search of Nature,” in *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing nature*, ed. W. Cronon (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995), 23–56.

<sup>53</sup> James Dickie, “The Hispano-Arab Garden its Philosophy and Function,” 237–248.

<sup>54</sup> Kevin Marwell, “An Intimate rendezvous with nature?” *Tourist studies* 1, no. 1 (2001): 39–57.

undertaken by Georges-Eugène Haussmann (1809-1891) under Napoleon III and which was responsible for the demolition of most of medieval quarters of Paris and the construction of massive public systems of transportation, including railroads, boulevards, gas lamps and shopping centers.<sup>55</sup> Nature is made to appear as “the other” in advanced western cultures and this separation is reinforced through the demarcated spaces of parks and natural scenery as well as by the symbolic boundaries of cultural and social constructions that highlight enjoyment through the gaze and prohibits physical interaction. Instead of visual consumption, ‘Amrawi institutes a bodily experience of the natural landscape in which the senses of touching, smelling, hearing and sight are equally engaged and brought to bear on the experience of enjoyment.

what constitutes optimal modes of pleasure and modes of public leisure becomes, ultimately, an act of peripheral translational aesthetics of space and the politics that subtend his pattern of cultural resistance.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the sustained attack on French aesthetics of nature enjoyment, and associated leisure activities, can be seen to represent a postcolonial and counterhegemonic position vis-à-vis Western power and imperialism. This critique enables al-‘Amrawi to dispute French technological supremacy and enact his cultural resistance of its domination as he attempted to communicate his emotional experience of landscape in France to his native audience in Fès. In seeking to valorize his native aesthetic model of both high and popular art and culture and validate the Moroccan synthetic interaction with the natural world, he manages to construct self-identity and aesthetic agency that challenged what he encountered on display in France. The discourse about approaches to nature and ideas of

<sup>55</sup> Baron Georges Eugene Haussmann (1809-1892) was appointed by Napoleon III on June 22, 1853 to “modernize” Paris. In order to facilitate the flow of traffic and promote economic growth, Haussmann demolished many of the old, twisting streets and dilapidated apartment houses, and built instead modern wide, tree-lined boulevards and national parks which made Paris an exemplary model of modern technological advancement and landscape and urban planning. For more information on the work and accomplishments of Georges Eugene Haussmann see: of Georges Eugene Haussmann, *Mémoires du baron Haussmann*, 3 vols. (Paris: Victor-Havard, 1890-93), Howard Saalman, *Haussmann: Paris transformed* (New York, G. Braziller, 1971) and David P. Jordan, *Transforming Paris: the life and labors of Baron Haussmann* (New York: Free Press, 1995).