Chapter 3

Colonial Belonging and Longing: Sense of Place in Landscape Paintings

Modernity is fundamentally about conquest, the imperial regulation of land, the discipline of soul and the creation of truth.¹
Nothing here is natural: this is modernity.²

3.1 Introduction

Critical opinion has often attributed the emergence of landscape painting as a genre to the history of imperialism. Kenneth Clark, in his pioneering work on landscape painting, identified it ‘as a chief artistic creation of nineteenth-century England.’³ Later historians, while acknowledging Britain’s contribution, also referred back to its precedence in other cultures. They pointed out that landscape painting could be traced back to European landscape art of the fifteenth century that spread with trade and empire to more distant outposts of British and European cultural influence.⁴ Another intervention was made by W. J. T. Mitchell who contested the idea of locating the origins of landscape painting in Europe by shedding light on the Chinese contribution to landscape painting and landscaping environment. He further argued that the emergence of landscape painting in China, Japan, Rome, seventeenth-century Holland and France, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain establishes the connection of the genre with imperialism.⁵

³ Kenneth Clark, Landscape into Art (London: John Murray, 1949).
⁵ ‘Chinese landscape painting flourished most notably at the height of Chinese imperial power and began to decline in the eighteenth century, as China itself became the object of English fascination and appropriation, at a time when England was beginning to get its first taste of imperial power.’ W. J. T.
On the other hand, Edward Said, while talking about the great voyages of geographical discovery from da Gama to Captain Cook, argued that 'they were motivated not only by curiosity and scientific fervour, but also by the aspiration to dominate.'\(^6\) Thus, 'representation of landscape is not only a matter of internal politics and national or classical ideology but also an international, global phenomenon, intimately bound to the discourse of imperialism,' as has been suggested by Mitchell.\(^7\)

As a cultural phenomenon, other historical factors and cultural actors, besides imperialism, mediated the emergence and spread of landscape painting as well. 'Seventeenth-century scientific revolutions in thinking and a new worldview, coupled with the mechanistic view of nature, significantly shaped landscape as an object of study that furthered colonial trade, medicine and military interest.'\(^8\) Picturing, mapping, mirroring and representing the world emerged as the only reliable way of knowing that produced a modern consciousness of self based on territoriality. Nicholas Green emphasized that 'it was the material conditions and cultural developments germane to capital that generated those vocabularies of looking which were capable of bringing nature into visibility as a significant form of social experience.'\(^9\) It can therefore be inferred that landscape painting is a bourgeois form of authority and a 'way of seeing fashioned by capitalism' that displaced older aristocratic historical paintings.\(^10\) Denis E. Cosgrove argues that landscape constitutes a discourse through which identifiable social groups historically formed themselves and their relation both with the land and with other human groups, and that\(^11\) this discourse is closely related epistemologically and

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technically to a way of seeing. Consequently, one could argue that the mechanics and the socio-economic process which determined the emergence of a bourgeois class, concomitantly contributed to the development of the landscape genre in painting as a signifying system.

Debates in the middle of the eighteenth century located perception in the subject of philosophical inquiry that inaugurated the most inventive period of landscape aesthetics in the West. Culture of travel, leisure and a growing interest in gardening further contributed to this objectification. In Europe, the possibility of adventure in distant colonies and the prospect of painting scenes never painted before, held more attractions than say, a visit to Italy. In this regard, voyages to the Pacific often formed the prelude to world travel. India became a key destination for many. While in England, the aesthetic enabled a re-enchantment of domestic rural landscape, abroad it gave free rein to alternative fantasies of ruggedness, turbulence and the primeval power of nature. All of India was seen as virgin terrain awaiting a "picturesque" invocation.

Art historians have long noted the proliferation of landscape painting in early modern capitalist cites. In such market-dominated contexts, artworks were no longer produced primarily for individual commission but through anonymous demand. Further, they also point out how landscape painting came to be popular among amateur painters. It also, in a way, bridged the art-craft binary. This shift in patronage and artistic engagement changed the very material presence and size of the painting. Watercolours, prints, and the easily portable support of paper became a popular medium for these paintings. Their convenient transportability allowed a wide range of cross-cultural exchanges. Hence, it is evident that the expanding worldview—possible through imperialist projects, capitalist economy, growing scientific interest in natural history, possibilities for long distance travel—with the available aesthetic code, bourgeois class

interest, and newly emerging non-aristocratic art patronage, all contributed to the emergence of landscape painting in the nineteenth century.

3.1.1 Representing Landscape: Representing Place

Based on Jane Marshall’s argument that landscape, like things, seems to hold something else in reverse, Elizabeth Helsinger argues that ‘landscape is also at once an epistemology (a mode of expression) and a practice (a mode of participation), a site of agency. Landscapes assume this form when they are both made and noticed, acted or lived or thought with some degree of consciousness.\textsuperscript{15} She further argues that the act of representing a landscape involves the ‘processes of active shaping, material and mental, social and individual that turn an unnoticed forest into landscape.'\textsuperscript{16} In which case, landscape in painting is a ‘representation of the already represented or a view of the view.'\textsuperscript{17} Thus, landscape in painting is clearly a cultural, not a natural or physical category—something that has come about historically through human cultural, economic and legal practice.\textsuperscript{18} In landscape, the invitation to look at a view is, as Mitchell points out, ‘to look at looking itself.'\textsuperscript{19}

‘Landscape is a signifying system of great but unappreciated political and social importance, and offers enormous promise as an object of study,’\textsuperscript{20} ‘in relation to both structural political practices and individual intentions.’\textsuperscript{21} Yi-Fu Tuan mentions a ‘diaphor’ in which the concept of landscape gains power, because it combines at least two dissimilar appearances or ideas, thereby generating a ‘tensive meaning’. This tension derives from the fact that landscape means both ‘domain’ and ‘scenery’. A domain, in this context, is understood as a place, region, country or land inhabited by people and

\begin{footnotes}
\item[16] Ibid., 326.
\item[17] Hereafter, I use the word landscape for all forms of representational forms of nature but not the unconceived vast nature. Similarly, I also take the liberty to use the arguments, which are not originally addressed to landscape painting as such but to the representational form of nature without distinguishing each other.
\item[18] ‘Scape’ in landscape derives from the old English skipe and it is related to the word ‘shape’, which is connected to shaping in a physical sense.
\item[21] Ibid., 5.
\end{footnotes}
thus belongs to the discourse of politics, economics, community. Therefore, domain is implicated in the art of place making. Scenery, on the other hand, belongs to the discourse of aesthetics of space. 'The diaphoric meaning of landscape, according to Tuan, lies not in one image (concretely known) pointing to another, but rather in both equally important—imaginatively synthesized.' Hence, any meaningful discussion on the subject of landscape painting involves the study of domain and the way in which it gained an accessible aesthetic form.

Yi-Fu Tuan, while differentiating the experience of non-subjective position of space from the subjective position of place, explains place as a felt value and a feeling of stability, intimacy, belongingness and permanence. As a state of rootedness, place is a subconscious level of identification with a specific locality. He also explains how a particular form of human relationship and memories and memorized history produced a sense of attachment called place. Further, place is, instead that within and with respect to which subjectivity is itself established—place is not founded on subjectivity, but rather that on which subjectivity is founded, argues Malpas. Since the place in landscape painting is a place that reflected upon the artist's subjectivity, there is a reflectivity between place and subjectivity in the case of representation.

In this respect, colonialism displaced the colonizer and the colonized from their earlier temporal and spatial locations. Landscape painting of the nineteenth century, one could argue, is an outcome of the conditions of coloniality or modernity embedded in the experience of rootlessness. As Bunn has pointed out, the European colonizer must negotiate between two worlds: the recently lost metropolitan home and the uncoded otherness of the present. The new prospect is measured against the old familiar order, and is usually found lacking. Similarly, the colonized have to mediate between their precolonial memory and the colonial reality or between the colonial present and the

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23 Yi-Fu Tuan, Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).
24 J. E. Malpas, Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topography (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 35.
postcolonial imagination. This is further explored by Said who discussed the nature of displacement in colonial experience, as the replacement of one's geographical sovereignty, an imperialist one, by another native force. More subtle and complex is the unending cultural struggle over territory which necessarily involves overlapping memories, narratives and physical structures. This chapter envisages that the looking captured in landscape painting signified the painter's specific emotional and power relationship to the land at a particular moment. Further, it tries to argue that the act of landscape painting itself is an act of place making or negotiating with the lack, founded in the new prospect and the familiar order. Alternatively, it visualizes landscape painting as a mode of appropriation which signifies the controlling and proclaiming of the new social as well as physical space.

By probing the shift in the sense of belonging through landscape paintings, this chapter tries to identify the process of forming a nation state from a colony. It tries to interrogate how, by employing the same visual tactics of colonial landscape painting, the local upper class represented the 'nation' differently.

3.2 Visual Production of a Colony
Documents of cartography, topography, scenic paintings, images of the ruined historical sites and colonial built environments produced a new intertextual visual experience of coloniality. These materials demarcated the phenomenological, physical and ideological body of colonial state. Spectacle became the language of this proclamation.

3.2.1 Making of a Cartographic Colony
As discussed earlier, landscape painting came into existence with other modes of representing or documenting a geographical space, such as surveys and mapping. They operated—as a system of aesthetic, conventional, and ideological ordering useful in the management of political contradictions—exported from metropolitan Britain to the

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imperial periphery. In the precolonial society, land was a fluid category. Colonial surveying and mapping played a crucial role in the transformation of land as a fixed category. This fixation was implicated with a definite sense of boundary. Boundaries have a special significance in determining the limits of sovereign authority and defining the special form of the contained political regions. With the colonial laws of ownership, land became a commodity that could be owned and transacted.

In Ceylon, there was no separate establishment under the civil administration to undertake topographical surveys and the construction of roads, bridges and buildings until the establishment of the Civil Engineer and Surveyor-General’s department in 1834. The Quartermaster General’s Department mainly executed the work. Even though the colonial survey department was established in 1800 and grew to be the largest department within the colonial administration by the mid-1850s, its first officially surveyed map of the island appeared in 1903. One of the reasons for this delay was the department’s busy engagements in surveying isolated blocks of land for coffee plantation which by the 1830s had become the colony’s principal source of income. Therefore, economic and military concerns prioritized the agendas of colonial surveying and mapping. The discourse of mapping was the paradigm within which both administrative and military operations worked and served.

29 The word 'survey' in English evokes a wide rage of activities: to look over or examine something, to measure land for purpose of establishing boundaries, to inspect, and to supervise or keep a watch over persons or place. In other contexts, it can mean to establish the monetary value of goods and objects. Bernard S. Cohn, Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: The British India (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 7.
30 While in precolonial kingdoms, the centre was more important than peripheries that are flexible according to the political and military strength of the centre, the periphery/boundary is crucial for the modern state.
33 Ian J. Barrow, Surveying and Mapping in Colonial Sri Lanka (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008), 2. It is important to note here that the Portuguese and Dutch were engaged in surveying activity in the coastal regions of Ceylon and produced numerous maps before the British.
34 Ibid., 5.
In the nineteenth century, colonial surveying and mapping redefined and renamed places, rivers and mountains and brought a new cartographic order to the land. As Perera argues, modern cartography homogenized the world within the grid of longitudes and latitudes. Each place was to derive its uniqueness in accordance with the colonizers' grid. Scientifically calculated distance produced a numerical relationship between the metropolitan centre and the colonial periphery. These activities transformed the local landscape into a measurable property of colonial power and position within the grid of colonial knowledge. In effect, 'Europeans constructed the nature, temperature, and culture of the non-European world.' This perceptual change transformed the land into geography; a fluid precolonial region into a fixed colonial state called Ceylon.

The logo-map produced from colonial cartography, Anderson argues, penetrated deeply into the popular imagination, forming a powerful emblem for the evolving anticolonial nationalism in the early part of the twentieth century. The national state can be seen as the natural embodiment of history, territory and society. The formation of the nation state was further implicated with the production of individual identities based on the notions of citizenship and nationality. In this process, the state or nation’s boundaries became the boundaries of one’s personal identity.

3.2.2 Production of a Scenic Colony

In the latter part of the nineteenth century, other than being a part of the leisure activity in the private sphere of families of the European elites stationed in Colombo and plantation areas in the central hill land, landscape painting in the public domain in Ceylon existed, but not as an artistic mode. Topographical documentation operated as an objective record of an actual place, major tool of documentation, similar to the activities of surveying,

39 Ibid., 172.
mapping and collection of natural history. Common mapmaking tools like pen and ink, and watercolour tints were portable and convenient to use outdoors and in remote locations. Early topographical drawings were often the work of surveyors and mapmakers of the colonial public works department or colonial military apparatus; the techniques of perspective and topographical drawing were regularly taught in military academies. Sumathy Ramaswamy, in her seminal work on cartography and bodyscapes in India, argues that the lack of emotional grip in scientific mapping encouraged artists to incorporate anthropomorphic forms of colonial or national state within their emblematic or cartographic forms. One could extend her argument to understand the landscape painting activities of surveyors and military officers. Perhaps the lack of emotional expression in cartographic representations, in a way, encouraged these colonial officers to paint landscapes. In eighteenth-century Britain, topographers were commissioned to make topographical portraits of properties of landed patrons, to paint famous stopping points of grand tours and antiquarian, naturalist and archaeological expeditions.

Apart from this, a few travelling watercolour painters, both amateurs and professionals, captured the ‘exotic, wild land’ and the people as part of their exploration and expeditions. These painted landscapes represent the painters’ longings, curiosities, expectations and prejudices about the newly possible world enabled by colonization and modernization. Primarily, consumers of these landscape paintings were people in the metropolis. Metropolitan others’ wild and distant lands and their history—both natural and cultural—became consumable, exchangeable and portable through these paintings. Purchase of these prints, Helsinger argued in a different context, ‘might help gain at least visual access to the land. They also represent circulation; they provide an analogue for experiences of touristic travel.’ The landscape representation of Ceylon in the colonial period was preoccupied with three themes: scenic landscapes, archaeological sites and modern dwellings.

43 By the end of the eighteenth century, tours of Britain were popular among the upper and middle class British. The sights which these tourists preferred to visit included ruins and natural wonders as well as contemporary houses, parks and industries belonging to private estates. Drawings and paintings of such
John Webber, William Alexander and Gordon Cumming documented Ceylonese landscapes in 1776, 1792 and 1802 respectively. Topographical artists like William T. Lyttleton, John Deschamps, Charles Donatus Corbet O'Brien were stationed in Ceylon in 1814, 1828 and 1845—1866 respectively. Charles Auber, who served under the 67th Regiment, came from India to assist the British forces in Ceylon to suppress the Uva Rebellion of 1817—1818. Auber, who held the post of Deputy Assistant Quartermaster General, was retained in Ceylon because his services proved useful in topographical researches and surveys and was much required in addition to those of officers now in the Quartermaster General Staff. Samuel Daniell and Andrew Nicholl were two important professional landscape painters then active in Ceylon.

Picturesque and 'Regional'

The *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary* defines 'landscape' as a large area of the countryside, especially in relation to its appearance, or a view or picture of the countryside or the art of making such pictures. Interestingly, this reveals the reciprocity between landscape painting and the countryside. The word picture here is associated with a particular way of seeing that is picturesque. The 'picturesque' is the term used for beautiful landscape views that lend themselves particularly well to painting. There is a reflectivity between the representation and perception of landscape. With the ideal of the picturesque, natural views began to be looked at from a painterly perspective, and the

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46 *Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, Third edition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). By 1780, 'picturesque' beauty referred in general to scenes which recalled two different kinds of paintings—on the one hand, the ideal classical landscape of Claude Lorraine, Poussin and Salvatore Rosa; on the other hand, the naturalistic views of Ruysdael, Hobbema, Cuyp and Van Goyen. It was these two groups of artists that cultured men and women in England in the eighteenth century had seen on the Grand tour and had grown to admire. During the 1790s, books provided a working aesthetics: Richard Payne Knight's didactic poem 'The Landscape' (1794), Uvedale Price's 'An essay on Picturesque' (1794), and Humphry Repoton's 'Sketches and Hints on Picturesque Gardening' (1795). As a result, men and women gradually found themselves looking at landscape in a special way, equipped with this new vision. Mildred Archer, *British Drawing in Indian Office Library. Volume 1: Amateur Artists* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1969), 18–19.
general ideal of nature also become 'wilder'. Picturesque in painting is well marked by a foreground, background, middle ground and side wings. In his series of guides to the painting of picturesque scenes produced between 1782 and 1809, Dr. William Gilpin pointed out that:

The nature is imperfect from the point of view of a picture and needed to be ordered and improved. The composition must be organized to contain a background, and off-skip, and a foreground with side screens; for each of these parts of composition he listed the most suitable ingredients. Mountains and lakes were best for the background; rivers, woods, and valleys for middle distance; and rocks, leafy plants, ruins, waterfalls and broken ground for foreground. The picture also needed to be enlivened with groups of human figures and animals.

The idea of picturesque proved to be a powerful framing device for the way in which non-western culture came to be perceived and represented. To the European artist and explorer, 'the picturesque...provided...a congenial, respectable, eminently civilized standpoint from which to study and enjoy the wildness. To store national ego...the picturesque added to controlling aesthetic vision—wildness-subduing "eye"—to help organize, shape, and even half-create a native landscape.' A notion of each country included a particular type of landscape, or in Humboldt's words: 'a certain natural physiognomy' a formulaic solution, which becomes evident in nineteenth-century landscape painting. Smith calls this a 'typical landscape' and relates this with the attempt of early ethnographic descriptions. He further reveals that these typical landscapes emerged from a tension between the convention of romantic description and more scientific ethnological information. James Turner characterizes seventeenth-century landscape descriptions as 'composite', not a portrait of individual place but an ideal construction of particular motifs. Their purpose is to express the character of a

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region or a general idea of good land. Hence, in the early landscapes of Ceylon, there was a conscious effort to identify the colony by certain typical scenes. However, these typical scenes did differ with shifting political and economic intentions of the patrons.

Early picturesque representation of Ceylonese countryside can be seen in engravings of the Dutch, which capture a panoramic view of the coastal landscape from a comfortable vantage point, the dock of the steamships. Here, the land became possesable from the outsider’s distant view. These colonial panoramic or picturesque views not only erased traces of the locals, but also their own conception of their surroundings (Plate 3.1). This was in contrast to many of the seventeenth-century Dutch paintings which portray a view of the ocean or sailing vessels from land that depicted the idea of voyage and adventurous journeys to colonial shores.

Even though a similar approach is evident in the British representation of Ceylon, their intervention in landscape painting is marked by a shift in the focal point: from the coastal to the hinterland of Ceylon, i.e., to the hill country. Colonial painters and photographers’ overwhelming interest in the interior mountainous landscape for their picturesque exploration has valid historical reasons. The Kandyan kingdom that covered the entire hill country persisted as a challenge to the colonial regime until 1815 when the British finally subdued it. Chains of mountains, deep valleys and rain forests became a site of curiosity as well as a threat to security. Further, the capitalist economic encroachment in the form of coffee, tea and rubber plantations added a new economic validation to the region. In addition, the pleasant climate suitable for European life style converted the hill country as a holiday home for most of the English colonial administrators and visiting painters. In this context, the painted landscapes of Samuel Daniell, William Lyttleton, Gordon Cumming, Charles Auber and Andrew Nicholl and

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53 Picturesque was theorized as ‘passive’ and bound by rules of viewing (as experienced by a powerless traveller). On the other hand, and subsequently, the picturesque was theorized as ‘active’ (as enacted by the powerful colonialist). Eric Hirsch, “Introduction,” in *The Anthropology of Landscape: Perspective on Place and Space*, ed. Eric Hirsch and Michael O’Hanlon (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 12.
the picturesque photographs of Charles Scowen & Co. and W. L. H. Skeen & Co. that focused on the hill country became major visual texts to understand the colonialist search for the ‘regional’ in the Ceylonese landscape. These images produced Ceylon as an exotic, scenic as well as oriental location.

Samuel Daniell died in 1811 at the age of 36 in Ceylon. Five months after his death, the Ceylon Government Gazette advertised sales of his belongings and equipments that included a telescope, copper plate, paints, brushes, cakes of watercolour and crayons. This reveals the technical and material means that made the picturesque landscape paintings possible and accessible. The Gentlemen's Magazine in 1812 referred to his death thus:

Mr. Daniell was ever ready with his own eye to explore every object worthy of research and his own hand to convey to the world a faithful representation of what he saw.

This comment further clarifies the mechanics and politics of optics operating behind these kinds of representations. In these representations, seeing became a powerful tool of 'exploration', and that was combined with 'faithful representation'. Further, this exploration and its conveyance depended on the 'worthiness of object'. The judgement of worthiness was solely from the onlooker's point of view.

In one of Samuel Daniell's depictions, interlocking land with the waterfront provided a panoramic view of Trincomallee (Plate 3.2). The Fort of Frederick on the right side of the picture plane further frames the view. The juxtaposition depicts how land is connected to colonial expansion, inevitably coupled with military surveillance of the imperial state. This fort, built by the Dutch in 1622 on the site of a shrine dedicated to Shiva and conquered by the British in 1795, served as a haven for the Duke of Wellington. The artistic intention here was far from naively representing the beauty of natural surroundings. The scenery reminds one of Mitchell’s observations that the

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55 At the end of the eighteenth century, 'artist's viewers' became popular—a small lens in a case like the pocket magnifying glass of today. As people drove or rode through the countryside seeking a picturesque subject for sketching, they looked through the glasses to find a suitably composed scene. Mildred Archer, British Drawing in Indian Office Library. Volume 1: Amateur Artists (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1969).
57 Trincomallee natural harbour became so crucial to maintain a military balance in the region with the British establishing storage facilities for adequate fuel.
standard picturesque landscape is especially pleasing to the eye because it typically places the observer in a protected standpoint (a ‘refuge’) with screens on either side to dart behind or to entice curiosity, and an opening to provide deep access at the centre.\(^5\)\(^8\)

As Marry Louise Pratt points out in a South American and African context, colonial landscapes are often imagined to provide dramatic or romantic contexts for the individual explorer, but they are also frequently emptied of rival human presence.\(^5\)\(^9\) She further states, the passiveness created by the ‘virgin’, uncultivated, uninhabited land is not threatening, but inviting or justifying further inversion, insertion, exploration and exploitation by the European male.\(^6\)\(^0\) Samuel Daniell’s representation is similar to another watercolour capturing the panoramic view of the same location by Gordon Cumming (Plate 3.3). Here, his panoramic survey from the fort suggests a total visual control over the sweeping land. The success of these paintings lies in the visual capturing of accurate representation of tropical light and climatic condition.

The politics of colonial looking could be further understood through the critical observations of the panoramic view. To describe the new bourgeois vision called panorama, Foucault employed terminologies such as ‘eye power’ and ‘sovereign gaze’.\(^6\)\(^1\) Alan Wallach calls it the ‘panoptic sublime’ to indicate the ‘thrill of visual mastery’. Alan Wallach further points out that inhabiting the panorama is possible if the visitor’s relation to reality is mediated by his or her identification with the power of the state. The panoramic mode, in effect, supports the state’s claim to stand over and above society as well as its claim to centrality in a world in which the distant and foreign falls under its purview.\(^6\)\(^2\) Hence, the comfortable, thrilling viewpoint in these colonial landscape paintings was always from the position of the western world. Pratt observes that in the


\(^{60}\) Pratt argues that the colonial views are from the capitalist binary of improved and unimproved. The European improving eye produces subsistence habitats as ‘empty’ landscapes, meaningful only in terms of a capitalist future and their potential for producing a marketable surplus. Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eye: Travel Writings and Transculturation* (London & New York: Routledge, 1992), 61.

\(^{61}\) Panoptican—a type of prison, and the panorama—a form of mass entertainment, marks the beginning of a new epoch in the history of visual domination.

eighteenth century, systematizing of nature as a European knowledge-building project created a new kind of Euro-centred planetary consciousness. In addition, employment of telescopes and viewing tubes allowed viewers to experience a heightened sense of the colonial via a visual dialectic between panoramic breadth and telescopic detail.

Pairing of panorama and panopticon by these authors, on the other hand, suggests a close relationship between the aesthetics of panoramic landscape and the act of surveillance. In his letter to Major Charles Doyle in 1818, military artist Auber described the nature of the landscape, some of which he sketched in Ceylon. His concerns reveal how military interest and aesthetics of optics went hand in hand in these paintings:

I have traveled through the whole of the interior and have visited all the passes and defiles and I can in some measure give you a description of this extraordinary country and the course of extraordinary system of warfare that has been carried on in it. The greater part of the interior is composed of chains of mountain, the hills covered with thickest jungle, and wood I ever beheld, the valleys between so narrow that musketry forces from either side can take effect. Had the present force been in the country it is probable that no rebellion would have broken out and even if it had, it might have been nipped in the bud.

Gordon Cumming described the panoramic view of the surroundings of Lankatilaka, Kandy (Plate 3.4) in his diaristic information:

It is most beautifully situated on the crown of a great mass of red rock, which rises...from the deep circular valley, all devoted to rice fields, which at the time of my visit were flooded, like innumerable blue curving lakes...the exterior is so picturesque that I gladly devoted all my time to secure a large sketch of the whole scene from across the valley.

His way of writing reveals the interrelation between the textual and the visual as well as the literal and the poetic in the colonial landscape representations. His association with the land is more on visual terms. Gordon Cumming’s painting ‘Breadfruit Tree in Uduvakanda’ (Plate 3.5) brings out the immeasurable depth of a valley behind a Breadfruit tree that was studied in detail. The contrast of detailed documentation of natural history and a scenic landscape added depth as well as tension to the scene. This reveals the colonial painter’s anxiety to measure the local landscape at both micro and macro levels. It is also relevant to remember Smith’s acute observation with regard to the Pacific region. He notices that the European conventions of representation (both visual and textual) were transformed through the encounters with people and places. His work exemplifies the tension in representational techniques; between a picturesque mode premised on neo-classical ideas of Italian origin and ‘descriptive’ mode associated with observation, empirical record making and experimentation. Moreover, in ‘Breadfruit Tree in Uduvakanda’, the visual depth and atmosphere of the hill country suggests the artist’s mastery over the depiction of distance and weather that had become accurately measurable with the scientific developments of the period.

What is important to note here is that the land captured in these paintings is from the point of view of the outsider rather than the insider. The reference to the local architecture of the Buddhist temple of Lankatilaka and details of tropical plants like the Butter fruit tree help the artist feed the ‘expected’ notions of an exotic oriental landscape for a European audience. Further, as surveillance, accurate detailed documentation of the colony gave a sense of control and stability to the painter as well as the colonialist viewer.

W. H. Lyttleton’s ‘View from Amanpoora, on the Road from Colombo to Kandy’ has a sombre appearance (Plate 6.6). The vastness of the picture plane and the diminutive scale of the locals, while expanding the visual field through the play of proportion, place the locals as part of nature, engaged in day-to-day activities. The local people in the foreground and the vast, hilly land in the background are interspersed with the commodious barracks capable of containing a strong detachment of the British

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administration/army. Sombre hilly landscapes and the locals with their cattle are shadowed by the moving clouds while the middle ground is occupied by the English detachment which is bathed in bright sunlight. Abdul R. and Jan Mohamed argue in a different context that the interplay between darkness, race and visibility created the continuing tension in colonial paintings; it is perhaps also intimately related to the compositional strategy in English landscape painting that relegated rural labourers to the shadowy areas of the picture plane. Moreover, R. K. de Silva observes that the land in the surrounding area of the detachment shown in the painting is the newly cultivated land with English vegetables. In which case, the locals in the foreground could be labourers of that newly emerging cultivation for the colonialists’ needs. By depicting the cultivated land flooded with light and the labourers in the shade, the painting sidelines the presence of the locals. Closeness between the colonial settlement and the cultivated land, on the other hand, suggests that the English as cultivators were cultured as against the locals bound to nature. Further, as Burn argues in a different context, impoverished urban proletariat is offered the utopian vision of being able to move into a new economic system where commodities present themselves without the intervention of labour. In the process of visual transition of local scenes into colonialist landscape paintings, the locals became insignificant and were a part of nature that could be controlled. The locals appeared as servants engaged in their daily work or nomadic wanderers in an ‘alien’ land with their cattle. In contrast, the colonial masters, the settlers, were painted in the posture of enjoying leisure or supervising the servants or viewing the landscape.

In sharp contrast, a painting titled ‘Town of Kandy from the Castle Hill’ (Plate 3.7) brings the colonial masters within the picture frame. Three military officers, one of whom is authoritatively pointing his finger towards the ‘tooth temple’, which is visible on the right side of the Kandy Lake, occupy the centre of the foreground. The panoramic view is achieved from the castle and the colonialists are placed at the centre of the view,


69 R. K. de Silva, Early Prints of Ceylon (Srilanka), 1800—1900 (London: Serendib Publication, 1985), 44.

between the sky and the mirror of water, in a commanding position. The whole landscape is frozen by its extreme stillness. The only disturbance to that calmness is the active bodily position of the colonialist. Since the city of Kandy was seen as the last seat of local political power, which was forced to surrender by the British Raj and a holy pilgrimage site of Ceylonese Buddhism, the painting codifies the message of British conquering of local territory, history and society.

A couple of apt examples would be an 1890s photograph titled 'View on the Colombo-Kandy Railway' from the stable of W. L. H. Skeen and Co. (Plate 3.8), and a newspaper illustration that appeared in Graphic on 8 January, 1876 (Plate 3.9), depicting a railway engine on top of the 'sensational rock' employing a panoramic picture frame. The newspaper print went a step further in the panoramic display by depicting the Prince of Wales (who left for Colombo from Kandy on 2 December, 1875 by the mountain railway), assertively surveying the landscape passing by from the locomotive engine. Immense visual depth in the print characterizes this bird's eye view of the immeasurable sweeping landscape. The newspaper reported:

You are not looking down upon a flinty surface of barren rock. On the contrary, nowhere else is vegetation more abundant and you see myriads of trees, flowers which cover the ground.\textsuperscript{71}

The country is thus opened up before the visitor in full view. In general, the print suggests technological revolution and human rational superiority over nature or the rationalizing civilizing mission of the British against the irrational, uncivilized, under-developed colonies. In colonial Ceylon, the combination of train and hill country in particular implied the expansion of capitalist plantation economy. The railway was initially introduced between Colombo and Kandy to link the harbour with the plantation estates. The royal presence in the steam engine proclaimed the English legacy over the colonial world in the age of speed, capitalism and technological revolution. Interestingly, this particular print suggests how the technique of surveillance was associated with the economic and technological encroachment of the colony. Capturing the viewer and the viewed within the frame, the print produces a third person's view. In light of the

afore-mentioned advent of the railway line in Ceylon, the view expressed by William Boyd, a planter, is worth recounting.

[A] new era is dawning on Ceylon. ... The steam engine will be heard in every hollow, the steam horse will course every valley; English homes will crown every hillock, and English civilization will bless and enrich the whole country, causing the wilderness to blossom as a rose, and making Ceylon, as it was in former times, a garden of the world and the granary of India. 72

The above statement justifies colonialism as 'a blessing of English civilization' by referring to the introduction of the train. Moreover, without mentioning the developments that led to the present stagnation, the statement valorises the colonial future akin to a 'golden age' of the past.

The years spent by the celebrated Irish painter Andrew Nicholl in Ceylon were not so peaceful in the island's history. Around mid-1848, there was general unrest in the Kandyan region as a reaction against the imposition of taxes by the colonial administration. Nicholl wrote a detailed account of his tour, published in two parts in the Dublin University Magazine. 73 Nicholl described all that he saw around him in exact detail, suggesting the eye of a trained observer. Nicholl's descriptions include minute observations of natural history against the picturesque description of landscape. As a colonial painter, he fetishized the periphery in terms of its sheer use value (Plate 3.10).

In the month of July 1848, three of us left Colombo in a hired palanquin carriage to proceed to Kandy... the roads run parallel with the Kelany Ganga, from the bridge of boards. The scenery is of a beautiful sylvan character, its banks being lined with alternate rows of jack and teak trees. ... Passing native gardens of citron, pomegranate, clove, orange, and lime trees, with the brightest many-coloured convolvulus-formed flowers hanging in garlands from their branches. Suria cotton trees and coffee bushes appear, as you approach the secluded vale of Ambepusse, where there is an excellent rest house. 74

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74 Ibid., 5.
On leaving Sigiri, we obtained a magnificent extensive view...over 150 miles of forest; which appeared like a vast sea, studded with islands...with glimpses of the Mahavelli Ganga, winding among the most wonderful trees, the rarest and most costly wood in the world with which this great forest abounds—calamander, japan, jack, teak, satin, ebony, tamarind, sago, halmille, and iron trees interspersed with beautiful flowering shrubs, which filled the air with fragrance.75

In these descriptions, representation of local inhabitants is negligible. In her discussion about European travel writing on Africa, Pratt observes that the landscape is written of as being uninhabited, unpossessed, unhistorized, unoccupied even by the travellers themselves. The activity of describing geography and identifying flora and fauna structures a social narrative in which the human presence is marginal, though it was of course, a constant and essential aspect of travelling itself. European authority and legitimacy are uncontested, a vision undoubtedly appealing to the European reader.76 Nicholl's writings and his paintings show how both media shared rhetorical similarities and played identical political roles in the hype of colonialism.

He conveys to the reader the sense of awe occasioned whilst travelling at times in rugged, forbidding terrain, and at others, through uncharted tropical jungle. The curiosity to know coupled with social and economic recognition in the metropolis has an element of heroism; an adventurism that thrives in these paintings and writings. Inventionist fantasy completely displaced the reality of landscape before the onlooker and became the content of the vision. On the other hand, the same element constructs the colony both as beautiful and dangerous. Here is an example from Nicholl's writings.

Thus terminated my sketching tour through the forest of Ceylon, the most interesting I ever had in my life: and although attended with both danger and fatigue, yet enjoyment which I derived from it far more than compensated for the hardship of the journey, and will ever be considered by me the most delightful of all my sketching excursions, either at home or in distant lands.77

As Heisinger points out in the context of British landscape paintings, colonial painters' affirmation of conventional travel views, expressed in British travelogues of the period,

75 Ibid., 7.
77 Ibid., 11.
can be read as an assertion of different modes of possessing colony, not simply by owning or appreciating it as landscape. Also, inhabiting and naturalizing it through activities that will be viewed as morally, aesthetically and legally transgressive from the perspective of the dominant culture. By the framing of colony’s geography through the imperial optics, colonialists produced a landscape, which is neither colonial nor metropolitan.

Ruins and Monuments
Ancient monuments and archaeological sites appeared as an important branch of colonial topographical documentation. This tradition of painting, which captures the archaeological monuments in picturesque mode, owes its legacy and continuity to similar practices in Britain. In this process of painting, places, like fossils, went through a discursive transformation from archaeological site to artwork. As Tapati Guha-Thakurta argues, ‘the process of transformation of objects into images nevertheless involved various layers of aesthetic mediations, for the aim was also to give buildings better perspectives, to play up their magnitude and their contrasted tones, to achieve pictures that were both authentic and pleasurable.’ These mediations are not purely aesthetic in nature. They are also tailored by prejudices, misunderstandings and miscommunication. Thus, the juxtaposition of picturesque views with a historical site produces an intertextual place with objectification of historical site from the colonialist’s position. As Anderson points out, this objectification strengthens the power of the mapper rather than the actual history of a particular site or its producers. This is similar to Helsinger’s discussion about English landscapes where he argues that the juxtapositions enhance the power of the cultural and natural monuments, a power that belongs implicitly not to the local figures who ignored them, but to the viewer of educated sensibilities who can

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appreciate them. Anderson further elaborates the role of ‘history maps’ in establishing imperial custodianship over a colony’s precolonial past.

Through ‘history maps’ the colonial regimes began attaching themselves to antiquity as much as conquest. ... As time passed, however, there was less and less openly brutal talk about right of conquest, and more efforts to create alternative legitimacies. ...

Monumental archaeology, increasingly linked to tourism, allowed the state to appear as guardian of a generalized, but also local, tradition. The old sacred sites were to be incorporated into the map of the colony, and their ancient prestige.

These documents appeared in parallel with setting up of the archaeology department and museum. In the absence of photography, paintings and drawings of these monuments evolved as a mode of collecting, documenting and displaying the past.

In his five-week long sketching tour within Ceylon in 1845, Andrew Nicholl transformed ruined temples, colossal statues, tanks, dagobahs into picturesque paintings and drawings (Plates 3.11, 3.12). He invariably enveloped the antiquities in their natural background and described them with meticulous care, creating virtual ‘photographic’ images.

Imagination cannot picture anything more striking and interesting to the traveler than its wonderful ruins, buried in the depths of impenetrable forest and jungle wastes... still these wonderful relics remain, to remind us of its grandeur in the days of old...it has now dwindled into a poor, mean village, containing a small bazaar, a few huts, a courthouse, and a cottage of the Government agent.

In his writings, the artist contrasts the rich cultural property of the past with the economically poor local occupants of the present to establish the colonialist’s interest. It shows how colonial discourse on cultural property entangled with the denial of locals’ legacy over their past. His monochromatic, meticulous study of monuments in the ancient cites of Polonnaruwa, Dambulla, Mihintale, Kandy and Anuradhapura with ‘Europeanized’, ‘exoticized’ palm trees convey a sense of wonderland, museumized

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84 Dublin University Magazine, quoted in Ibid., 10.
against the temporal colonial present. On the other hand, these writings also brought his feelings of an extraterrestrial presence and the fear of the unknown and its history. As in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century European literature, these depictions established an enduring structural relationship between the colony and the metropolis. As Cohn argues, India was found to be static and the land of oriental despotism as opposed to Europe which was progressive and changing. Therefore, the metropolis had all the legitimacy to own, rebuild, rewrite and occupy.

Lt. Charles Auber’s ‘Hermitage at Kurunegalle’ (Plate 3.13) in a way exactly reproduces Dr. William Gilpin’s formula of painting picturesque landscapes. The ruined Vihara in the foreground, functioning as side wings of a proscenium theatre, leads to the view of Adam’s Peak in the horizon. The tonal variation and the play of scale bring a sense of depth to the whole picture and transform a ruined site into a picturesque location. Dr. Davey described this scene as building the highest idea of the picturesque and sublime. Similarly, Gordon Cumming juxtaposed the ancient sites in their devastated condition with the ‘beautiful’, ‘pleasing’ picturesque setting and brought a surreal quality to the location. Unlike his predecessor Nicholl, he wrapped the monument within its natural surroundings. Naturalization, in a way, neutralized cultural markers and transformed the cultural history into natural history. This is clearly articulated in ‘Lankatilaka’ (1874) (Plate 3.4), a temple built in 1344 in Kandy.

In another watercolour, he documented the ruined twin ponds of Anuradhapura—‘Kuttam-Pokuna’(1873)—where the stairways and their balustrade are dislocated by the overgrown vegetation, the ruined pond looks as if it has been just discovered amidst the dense jungle (Plate 3.14). The size of the overgrown trees shows that the site had been abandoned for centuries. An archaeologist’s sense of discovery is evident in the painting. A similar archaeological intent is visible in the photographs of Joseph Lawton, particularly in ‘Part of the Bund on the Giritale Tank’, ‘Polonnaruwa and Ruins on the South Side of the Kaludiya Pokuna’ and ‘Mihintale’, photographs taken in 1870–1871. In the late 1870s, along with Joseph Lawton’s photographs of Polonnaruwa,

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87 Joseph Lawton also took detailed close-up photographs of ancient architecture and sculpture.
W. L. H. Skeen & Co. issued several photographic views of ancient cities for the commercial market. This reveals a growing demand for these images among both tourists and the local population (Plates 3.15, 3.16).

What is interesting to note here is the absence of human presence in these paintings and drawings. In the rare occurrences of a single local body, they were included to suggest the scale of the monument and solve compositional problems. While this disparity displays the earlier concerns in Nicholl’s works about the contrast between the rich colossal monuments and their present poor ‘occupants’, they dislocate the local and deny them the right of being heirs of their own heritage. In a way, the kind of scale employed in these works brought a sense of remoteness in place and time and a threading presence of unknown history that had to be studied, classified and framed within the modalities of modern knowledge. Anderson argues that ‘the reconstruction of monuments by the colonial administration often placed them away from the earlier utility value of religious ceremonies or pilgrimages, so far as possible. Hence, they were repositioned as regalia for the secular colonial state,’ and later lay the foundation for orientalist and nationalist imaginations. ‘The portraits and proxy are not the same; depicting is not speaking for,’ as Spivak reminds us. We cannot assume that these colonial painters’ depictions of the local endorse their political claim to a place. Moreover, as Helsinger points out, the genre of landscape painting, structured and directed towards a spectator outside it, limits even the portrayal of subjects within it. This consciousness of a relation to land or nation—their sense of place, individual or collective—is not easily accessible, if at all.

Thus, by displacing the monuments from their spatial and temporal locations, these picturesque views placed them in the contemporary moment, as a museumized past of the colony. Locals became outsiders in this process of painterly appropriation. While these images were produced to cater to the metropolis’ desire for exotic images of its other, the orient, the locals received them differently. Local elites soon appropriated these

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spaces as places for their new identity within the invented past. They linked the locals and their heritage properties through the rhetoric of nationalism. In addition, the ruination and devastation made visible in these images was repeatedly underlined as that resulting from Indian invasions, not the result of British or any other European conquest. \(^91\) Since all colonial visual documentations of ruins were Buddhist sites, this racial interpretation gained currency and solidified into the homogenizing process of the national identity of a Sinhala Buddhist nation.

**Cityscape and Urban Place**

Though there was no reference to local towns as well as building environments documented in these landscape paintings, there was a grandiose display of British mansions and administrative buildings in colonial towns. As Kenneth Bendier observed regarding similar works by the Daniells on Indian cities, hardly had any vegetation looked neat, rational, and completely manmade geometrical arrangements in these images. In contrast, the ancient sites were depicted as overgrown or set within nature. The urbanity of British life was an important point of differentiation. \(^92\) In contrast to the objectification of natural and ancient sites of the colony as expressive of feebleness, irrationality and remoteness, the gigantic presence of the colonial cityscape suggested the triumph of colonial rationality and 'progress'. Hence, the scenic nature and the historical sites indulged the fantasy and adventurism of the colonialist placed in the colonial mansion. The colonial building environment also directly projected a home away from their metropolitan home.

The first painters of cityscapes were people who worked for the engineering or survey departments. John Fredrick Garth Braybrooke and Charles Donatus Corbet O'Brien (Plate 3.17) placed railway bridges and modern buildings within vast scenic backgrounds in their visual documents. These modern constructions traverse across the serenity of the rural landscape. Andrew Nicholl painted street and market scenes of

\(^{91}\) It may be relevant to note here that similar images of ruins of Hindu temples appeared in south India as well as in other parts of India during the same period, that were later interpreted as an iconoclasm of Muslim invasion.

Colombo city. In contrast to his other landscape paintings, locals appeared in considerable numbers and engaged in mundane activities as sellers or buyers in the market (Plate 3.18). However, there is no reference to the Europeans. Similarly, the striking presence of Victorian architecture and local street in the colonial city was documented in the photographs of Frederick Fiebig.

3.3 Local Elites and the Colonial Telescope

Activities of European amateur and professional artists, while actively ordering the colony as a scenic sight, constantly and consistently influenced the practice of landscape painting in the metropolis. The images that present Ceylon as picturesque/oriental/ruined/exotic in the metropolis encouraged more travellers and traveller-painters to undertake those ‘picturesque voyages’. These artists followed a pre-regulated touring and exhibition circuit operating in the ports of south Asia, south east Asia and Africa. These circuits popularized as well as customized touring spots of the East in a stereotypical picturesque mode.

The Times of Ceylon described the exhibition of the Russian artist, M. Ivan Kalmykoff, held at Galle Face Hotel in 1920, as one of the many of its kind. The exhibition showcased several canvases, which were only ‘lately completed’ from rough sketches made by the artist while in India, and a number of pictures of Colombo and Ceylon, which were made since the artist’s arrival in Ceylon. The show included 300 Ceylonese and 300 non-Ceylonese scenes and most of them were natural life and landscape paintings. In 1934, the same newspaper reported about another exhibition, identical in nature.

Alfred Coffey, an artist from Sydney, who made several sketches of Ceylon scenery, has been exhibiting his works at the Art Gallery. ... He will paint bigger pictures from his sketches, exhibit them in Sydney, and later bring out a brochure with a description of his trip illustrated with colour plates.

93 Hippolyte Silvaf also documented a few street scenes.
94 The Times of Ceylon, June 9, 1920, detailed the list of buyers where most of them were of European origin. On June 10, the paper reported an extension of the exhibition by a week after which it would travel to Java.
95 The Times of Ceylon, April 20, 1934.
The Ceylon Observer recorded a 1931 exhibition by Prof. Arnold Bush (Professor of the Academy of Art, Breslau) at the German Consulate, Colombo.

Although Bush is an artist of great distinction in his country, he had naturally been attracted to the more radiant East and they saw the result of this in Java, Sumatra, and Ceylon.... Bush spent the past eighteen months in various parts of the East.96

Copious newspaper accounts of this period reveal well-schematized artistic expositions that encompass visits to the hill country and ruined cities for painting or sketching and then exhibiting their harvest in Colombo. These exhibitions included landscapes of other countries that the artists visited en route to Ceylon along with a number of Ceylonese landscapes. Similarly, Ceylonese landscapes found a place in exhibitions in other port cities of the world. Generally, most of these painters visited the same sites that the pioneer artists painted and described in their travelogues. The earlier works not only influenced later travels but also decided their choices of site and views. Through their recurring visits to selected destinations and stereotypical representations, these painters established the notion of the 'typical' Ceylonese landscape. In the early part of the twentieth century, expeditions and exhibitions of the traveller-painters institutionalized the telescopic view of landscape among the colonial elite.

Further, the availability of reproductions of paintings by European painters, the place of landscape paintings in private and imperial collections, and their role in the decor of the elite drawing rooms, significantly fashioned the local elite tastes. Ample availability of the photographic images of local landscapes through reproducible means and circulation97 strengthened the idea of telescopic view in landscape painting. Now, landscape painting became a paradigm to judge realism in art. The bourgeoisie believed that art should be real the way landscape is.

When the newly emerged colonized leisure class appropriated colonial city spaces and its institutions and adopted the colonial lifestyle to suit their mediatory role in society, landscape painting too entered their public and private spheres as a symbol of their newly acquired status. Landscape painting's close association with the leisure activity of elites is evident from the activities of the Portfolio Sketch Club, Drawing Club...

96 The Ceylon Observer, March 07, 1931.

97 It is interesting to note here how photo studios and the cinema in the same period invested in picturesque sceneries for their melodramatic and romantic imagination.
of the Burgher’s Union and various private art schools. In the early decades of the twentieth century, it was fashionable to be a landscape painter. From the size and material of landscape paintings produced in this period, one may conclude that the market for these images was part of the souvenir culture or for private pleasure. Hence, it existed as a minor art form.

These developments reframed the city elites’ vision that learned to look at its own surroundings through the colonial masters’ telescopes. They also followed their masters’ touring routes and list of picturesque locations in Ceylon. When the local elites imbibed the mode of viewing and representing the land, they concomitantly assimilated the power discourse or the visual mechanics of encroachment embedded within the mode. On the other hand, the colonized elites imaginatively started living in the pictorial paradise constructed by the colonialis just as they appropriated other colonial institutions and building environments. Through mimicry, they attempted to place themselves in the viewing position of the picturesque as a way to identify as well as compete with the colonial power. Helsing, while discussing English landscape paintings, observes that through the activities of viewing, representing and displaying, participants of landscape paintings claim England as their national aesthetic property.98 Helsing’s observation helps us to understand the intention of growing bourgeois interest in landscape painting in Colombo. They represent the local elites’ claims on the state, competing with the colonial masters and their heavy accumulation of landed property by marginalizing the subaltern masses. Mitchell points out that the expansion of landscape is understood as an inevitable, progressive development in history, an expansion of ‘culture’ and ‘civilization’ into a ‘natural space’ in progress. Empires move outwards in space as a way of moving forward in time; the prospect that opens up is not just a spatial scene but also a projected future of ‘development’ and exploitation.99 In the Ceylonese context, the process of the local elites’ accumulation of landed property as well as landscape representations pushes local subalrens towards the periphery. That makes rural—‘a green and pleasant land’—an emblem of elitist national identity. Although, locally

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they subverted larger territorial claims of imperialism, their imaginations were confined
to national boundaries.

Homi Bhabha and Spivak have argued that European imperialism was not only
territorial and economic but also cultural, and thus invariably involved in the constitution
of subjects. Objectification of one’s own surroundings repositioned the anglicized local
in an ambiguous place and constituted a new sense of subjectivity. The accounts of the
local exhibitions reveal that most of the early amateur landscape painters belonged to the
Euro-Asian community. The dual or hybrid identity of these communities produced a
predicament in their sense of belonging. By following the vision of the colonialist, most
of the local amateurs produced neo-orientalist paintings of their own landscapes. They
became unoccupiable picture postcard like spaces of perfection, devoid of any
humanizing flaws. Their works also show the influence of western amateur artists and the
cheap reproductions of European scenery paintings.

Among the first generation Burgher landscape painters, van Dort and W. W.
Bcling, through their approach that diverged sharply from the general trend, signalled the
carliest localizing process. The built environment of the newly emerging city naturally
influenced van Dort who worked in the Survey Department. As Raheem observes, ‘van
Dort with his contemporary Hippolyte Silvaf, unlike the majority of British artists, was
not in search of picturesque or scenic landscapes, but set out to explore the variety in the
life of the town—its people, costumes, streets, shops, buildings etc. His works are not
merely paintings but also descriptive social documents of an era.’

van Dort’s real contribution was the employment of close-up views of colonial buildings. His approach
positioned the built environment in a slippery space, between the traditions of still life
and landscape paintings (Plate 3.19). Close-up views brought a rupture with the
picturesque views through which the local could gain the agency to represent his/her
individual subject position. These close-ups facilitated a capturing of the individual
property against the earlier depiction of region. Unlike the traveller-painter who was an
outsider looking for picturesque regions, van Dort, as an insider, was interested in

100 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture,
101 Homi K. Bhabha, Location of Culture (London & New York: Routledge, 1994).
102 Ismeth Raheem, A Catalogue of an Exhibition of Paintings, Engravings of Ceylon by 19th Century
Artists (Colombo: British Council, 1986), 47.
specific individual property of the present. Present-day colonial buildings were more important for him rather than the ruins of the past. It marks a different consciousness that emerged with colonial surveying, colonial laws of ownership and urban environment.

W. W. Beling's (1867–1928) great body of work—including seascapes, images of the Colombo harbour and rural landscapes in watercolour and oil painting and watercolour sketches in impressionist style—exhibit multiple discontinuities with their precedents (Plates 3.20, 3.21). His impressionism in the early twentieth century is something worth considering. He used both the middle frame as well as distant views. However, in both instances, he hardly employs Gilpin’s picturesque framing, which in a way brought the onlooker closer to the view. On the other hand, the choice of exotic empty, rural landscapes with mirror effect on the waterfront, and the visible appearance of a horizontal line bring a sense of serenity and comfort traceable to the early colonial depictions.

Apart from the Burgher amateurs, A. G. C. S. Amarasekara was one of the few professionals associated with the CSA who was known for his landscapes in watercolour (Plates 3.22, 3.23). Thematic representation of Colombo as a very picturesque garden city and the woodlands of upcountry dominated his frames. He, as a ‘realist’, employed the picturesque for his portrayal of ‘rural’ or ‘ruralized’ urban. His substitution of rural for the colonial ‘region’ has larger ideological and aesthetic implications. His idea of rural could be read as construct of his experience of the colonial city as well as the orientalist/national search for pure local, untouched by colonialism. Hence, the combination of self and realism produces a sentimentality and romanticism in his landscapes. The over consciousness of the ‘local’ or ‘regional’ led to a sentimentalism that artifices the landscape. Further, his attempt to create exquisite scenery also contributed to an unrealistic colour palate, cerebral wash painting technique, and a suggestion of non-tropical nature. Paradoxically, his localized interpretation was viewed as being alien as is apparent in this comment from the Daily Telegraph:

Incidentally, Amarasekara's painting demonstrates the great variety of Indian Scenery—from the rich, flowered coloured avenues in the low lands to the rugged, almost Scottish-looking highland landscapes, four thousand feet above the sea level.102

102 Quoted in The Ceylon Observer, August 09, 1924.
Even though Amarasekara was known for his portraits in oil, his landscapes in watercolour were of a portable size and affordable as well. Thus, most of his buyers belonged to the floating population of the city, primarily tourists or transit passengers. These local landscapes were clearly inspired by the non-Ceylonese or orientalist idea of Ceylon. Using Pratt's argument of a similar condition, one can say, he attempted to represent the local in the colonizer's terms, and produced his paintings as 'auto ethnographies'.

Even though he proclaimed himself to be an academic realist, his sentimental inclination reduced the distinction between 'elitist' and 'popular' visual forms. One could argue that Amarasekara's romanticism is located in the emerging consciousness of belonging or longing rooted in the shifting location from colony to nation. Notions of region in European colonialist paintings are now recorded as the geographical character of a newly emerging national territory or the capital. As regions in colonial paintings, nations are now believed to have an identifiable character in terms of their geography and landscape. Amarasekara's picturesque landscapes attempted to differentiate Ceylon from other nations. The fact that the buyers of landscape paintings of early painters were mostly non-Ceylonese gives an ironical twist to their engagement.

3.4 Imagined Rural

James Elkins opines that landscape is an exemplary encounter with subjectivity, understood as a kind of unity, which reflects or articulates the sense of self. Geeta Kapur points out that 'there is indeed a chronological fix between nationhood and modernity, and both may stand in for a quest in self-hood. For Indian or third world artists, even the task of subjectivity is unresolved and requires allegorical exegesis often via nation.' With the emerging consciousness of nation and exposure to Parisian modernism, the local artists' painted landscapes underwent a drastic change. Thus, I would argue that the stylistic changes were more ideological than mere formalistic

rephrasing of modernist genre into local sceneries. The national consciousness, rooted in the modern sense of geographical territory and subjectivity, cultivated the field for the relativization of the modernist mode.

Euro-Asian by origin, David Paynter represents a transitional phase in colonial Ceylonese art from academism to modernism, colonialism to nationalism, amateurism to professionalism. He was affiliated with both the CSA and CAC, and worked in a Gauguinesque style. However, he was not a landscape painter in the specific sense of the term, his figure compositions and biblical themes were both set in the local landscape. He undertook a painstaking study of the natural surroundings of Ceylon. In several of his paintings and drawings, Ceylonese plants, flora and fauna came under the artist’s close inspection.

Paynter employed local landscapes to indigenize biblical episodic narration (Plate 3.24). Here is how the artist described his intentions.

Having studied art for some time in Italy and France, I found that the painters there had painted their own countries and their own times. Piero Della Francesca painted as if the biblical incidents had happened at Arrezzo where he lived all his life. Benezzo Gozzoli painted his religious pictures in a Florence setting. ... So I decided to paint in the way I did, with more or less Ceylonese landscapes and more or less Ceylonese types. Besides, I intensely dislike many of the paintings of comparatively recent times where Christ has been portrayed as a bold Englishman wearing Arab Costume. 106

Juxtaposing of Christian themes and human bodies in Hellenistic posture within local landscapes in David Paynter’s works suggests appropriation and adoption at many levels. This combination of styles and approaches, while localizing the content, frame the ‘local’ within the norms of western classical paintings. The expressionist liberty of using colour as a vehicle of emotion, on the other hand, gave a subjective flavour to his landscapes. Paynter looked at the Sinhalese and their natural surroundings with the eyes of Gauguin who exoticized and eroticized Tahiti people and landscape. As I will discuss in Chapter 4, Paynter’s notion of the local is a construct from his subjectivity that was rooted in the Euro-Asian dilemma in precolonial Ceylon. This process, which initiates indigenization by employing local landscape and body type to visualize Christian themes, transforms

the artist's identity and locates him outside of the landscape as an 'other' in his social, historical imagination. Thus, the artist's own location became exotic.

Cropped compositions have demonstrated a sharp break from the earlier picturesque or panoramic views, by making one feel that these frames are portions of a wider view. Paynter employed this strategy while shifting his focus from the celebrated locations of hill country to the coastal areas full of rocks, lush mangroves, deep, brooding sombre-hued water, overcast sky, and bright sun (Plates 3.25, 3.26).

One of my favorite haunts was the east coast of Ceylon, north of Trincomalee. There the lagoons, the dry zone jungle, and the strange rock-formation fascinated me. Just before the northeast monsoon breaks, the weather becomes thundery, heavy, and lowering in the east. Nearly every evening towards sunset, shaft of sunlight from the west, lights up the landscape in a strange, unreal vivid way. I have seen this so often and I painted as I remembered it.107

He introduced emotion into Ceylonese landscape painting by liberating it from its earlier dependence on objectivity and the burden of pictorial conventions. His post-Impressionist approach, cropped compositions, and new locations show the logical extension of what van Dort and W. W. Beling had already started in Ceylonese painting. In a way, his approach reduced the depth of the illusionist space, and moved towards the two dimensionality of space.

Apart from the fact that few artists from the next generation had opportunities for art training in England and France, the message of modernism in the field of landscape painting, particularly in Paris, reached the shores of Ceylon mainly through reproductions and exhibitions by traveller-painters. In this context, Winzer and Otto Scheinhammer had a momentous impact on the local landscape painting practices through their radical modernist approach. Scheinhammer, a German artist,108 apart from holding solo shows, also participated in the CSA group exhibitions. He released the local landscape from its earlier colonial, representational, documentation obligation (Plate 3.27). He explained his intention and approach to Ceylonese landscape as follows:

107 Ibid., 9–11.
108 Otto Scheinhammer follows no particular school, though he studied the art of great masters. He is modern, but with a modernity all his own. His work is highly individualistic, but it is never irrational or unconventional for the sake of shocking. His training was influenced by the greatest of living German painters, Max Liebermann. The Ceylon Observer, December 02, 1928.
It is to make the people feel, to see what beauty is around them, to educate them to realize the possibilities of modern painting in the interpretation of tropical colour and light. It is to show them, not the work of any school or of painting 'like' this artist or that, but paintings by one—showing your Island as I see it and as it impresses my imagination. For him, it was not merely a representation of visual facts in front of the painter, waiting to be revealed or processed, but beauty that impressed imagination and awaited interpretation. Hence, his modernist eye interprets and simplifies Ceylonese jungle scenes, seascapes and street scenes into non-representational polychromatic planes and membranes, which overlap with each other. His colours, liberated from their earlier representational meaning, as in the expressionist paintings, became the main vehicle of innovations and expression. His approach fully positioned the artist's gaze outside the frames of the picturesque. His other intention was to educate the locals about modernism and help them discover the beauty of their own land. While accepting the fact that this land belonged to the locals, he also felt that the locals were oblivious to the beauty of their land. He, therefore, had a didactic role to play. Ironically, his didactic intention and search for the exotic in distant lands harked back to the colonialist, orientalist attitude.

In contrast, Winzer, as landscape painter, insisted upon the study of nature and design as dual tools to come to terms with the modern. His drawings exhibit a minimalist approach to his surroundings. His minimalism and simplification had immense influence on the paintings of Geoffrey Beling, Keyt, Ivan Peries and S. R. Kangasabai. Stimulated by reproductions of Parisian modernist art and Winzer's radicalism, Beling adopted the genre of landscape painting as the site for his personal pictorial inquiry and emerged as an important modern landscapist of the period. In 1931, Winzer commented:

Beling's landscapes are admirably constructed and his handling of the endless variety of greens in tropical nature is an achievement in itself, is very relevant in this painting. Unlike his father who painted extraordinary exotic sceneries of leisure in an impressionist technique, Beling painted ordinary scenes effortlessly. That, in a way, allowed him to go beyond the pictorial surface appearance, towards understanding the internal structure of visual appearance or aspect of design. In Neville Weeraratne's words:

109 Ibid.
110 Reproduced in the Catalogue of Senior Artists' Exhibition, organized by CSA, June 17, 1974.
Geoff’s painting was simple, austere, and fundamentally architectural. The form he chose, whether in landscape or in still life, was placed carefully to create a unity and a balance between disparate objects. His colour, too, was restrained and sombre but always clean and fresh. The brushwork was unobtrusive. There never was ambiguity in the statement that finally emerged from his contemplation of the various elements that attached his mind.  

Trained in architecture at the J. J. School of Art, Bombay, Beling’s paintings are constructed landscapes, as in the case of post-Impressionist painters Cezanne or Scurat. The division of plane into horizontal and vertical colour strips and the flat application of pure colour reduce the whole representation to the basics of design, building a sense of stillness. As in Giorgio de Chirico’s paintings, the absence of any living beings produces a feeling of melancholia. Being a close associate of Winzer, he was naturally influenced by Winzer’s conviction that placed design as the governing principle for both modernist art and Eastern traditional art. The search for design provided the definitive answer to nationalism’s political and modernism’s aesthetic quest. One could argue that the modernist approach of pure design was, in a way, localized and naturalized by the sentiment of nationalism. This combination of artistic and political content of design, in Beling’s case, produced a balance between the rational and the emotional, thereby avoiding becoming cerebral.

The juxtaposing and interlocking planes of architectural and natural environments characterize Beling’s landscape paintings. In most cases, nature has been framed/formed by architecture; through the window, door, curtain or veranda in the foreground of the painting, as in Proscenium arch (Plates 3.28, 3.30). Hence, they are not about unbound nature or colossal, sweeping, overpowering landscapes but private places that are handy, convenient, personalized individual property, plot or portion of a larger property. Unlike the colonial picturesque, landscapes in architectural frames are predominantly designed, cultivated, maintained. Thus, manmade and constructed, artificially formed gardens act as

\[112\] In 1926, at the age of nineteen, Beling joined the J. J. School of Art to study architecture; there he also took art lessons. After his father’s death, he abandoned both courses and returned to Ceylon in 1928. Neville Weeraratne, 43 Group: A Chronicle of Fifty Years in the Art of Sri Lanka (Melbourne: Lantana, 1993), 56.
a structure of architecture. If the colonial picturesque views are about leisure, travels, holidays, Beling’s are about the ordinary, mundane, effortless and personal. His paintings are also about boundaries—physical and emotional, personal and public, outer and inner. It is also important to remember here that these spaces are both domains—private and public that are strongly marked by Victorian and traditional values of gender and its performances. However, the spaces of landscape and architecture are caught between each other, framed, and formed by each other.

Pictorially and thematically, the focus is on the middle ground that suggests both: a place in the foreground, which is home, and space in the background as a piece of land or greenery or the world. By avoiding horizons in composition, as in Seurat’s landscapes, Beling limits the space and stops the movement of the eye, which in a way brings the exterior closer to the viewer as part of the interior. Views in his paintings are always from a domestic interior (Plate 3.29). Thematically, they represent the urban domestic environment, strongly marked by class lines. While serving as an Inspector of Art for schools in the Department of Education, Beling got the opportunity to travel and paint the length and breadth of the island. Undoubtedly, he unified a variety of Ceylonese landscapes through artistic engagement. Hence, the idea of place in his painting is not attached to a particular region but to the essence of experience.

George Keyt’s painted landscapes, made during his twenties and thirties, share similarities with Beling. Inhabited land combined with garden and domestic architecture became the prime focus in the works of both painters. Their landscapes are characterized by simplification. Geoffrey Beling, in his letter to Ivan Peries, says about George Keyt’s landscapes:

It was kind of you to say that I...inspired Keyt to paint his most beautiful landscapes. ...
I never met Keyt until I was about nineteen or twenty and Keyt was twenty-five odd, at Lionel Wendt’s. Meanwhile he had been painting inspired by the landscape of Kandy and Kandyan people and the French painter Derain. ... His early landscapes were very monumental and representational.

113 The hillscapes he handled in the latter period, lack the architectural framing, but they maintain his earlier architectural quality and middle frames.
Like his contemporaries, Keyt too chose close-ups at the expense of panoramic views. As Winzer observes, Keyt reflected all the currents of contemporary painting (even though he never visited Europe), remaining however by the choice of motifs, composition and colour schemes, entirely individual. Influenced by the approach of synthetic cubism, Keyt approached landscape as a site of a modernist laboratory for formalistic experimentation. However, unlike the monochromatic painting of Picasso and Braque, Keyt used a polychromatic palette that gives an emotional touch to his works. He saw the rural through modernist and urban paradigms. In contrast to Beling, Keyt looked at the colonial mansion from the 'rural' outside, therefore the natural environment envelopes the building (Plate 3.31). A combination of the colonial mansion and the rural land indirectly brought the nature of national imagination to the surface (Plate 3.32). It spoke of a new class interest in rural property without losing its colonial and urban earnings and leanings. It also showed how the rural landscape became a comfort zone in the elitist imagination, as in the case of the colonial mansion. The elitist imagination of rural life and the subaltern realities of rural hardships exist in two different planes that never meet. In addition, the modernist romanticized idea of the artist as an individual and nationalist idea about authenticities influenced George Keyt into a self-imposed isolation as a modern Yogi. He consciously adopted the dress code of an oriental artist and chose to live in a remote village in Kandy, away from the colonial city.

Harry Pieris' series on street scenes of Colombo are unique in their own way in understanding modernity in landscape paintings. Trained in Slade, he was strongly inclined towards the academic painting tradition. However, his years in Santiniketan and interaction with Rabindranath Tagore, in a way, fashioned his sensitivity to his own cultural moment. Decked with rows of shady trees, his painted streets hark back to Colombo's glorious, colonial identity as Asia's garden city. Thus, urban streets looked like rural scenes and the absence of buildings and people further romanticized the emptied land and emphasized its ruralness. He took the ruralization of the urban to such extremes that most of his Colombo street scenes (Plate 3.33) could hardly be distinguished from his rural landscapes of Santiniketan. He valourized the rural by erasing traces of the urban in various streets of the city. Nevertheless, the irony is that

115 Reproduced in the Catalogue of Senior Artists' Exhibition, organized by the CSA, June 17, 1974.
what is natural here is, in a way, manmade: parks and planted trees on the side of the streets (Plate 3.34). As in Beling's landscapes, the whole thing is not nature as it might appear, but an artificially constructed environment, designed specifically to produce sociability of modern life premised on the spaces of leisure such as the park. As Wood argues in the context of Impressionist representation of Paris, 'nothing here is natural: this is modernity.' On the other hand, titles for these paintings take the name of the road that is colonial and alien to the local. One could argue that through the act of painting, Harry Pieris tried to appropriate the sites of the colonial city in the same way as roads were re-named in the post-independence period. What is important to note here is that these attempts never produced a precolonial landscape.

Born in a coastal suburb of Colombo, Ivan Peries spent most of his artistic career in self-imposed exile in London. He painted the southern coastal landscapes of Ceylon imaginatively. Coconut trees, fishermen's huts, catamaran and elongated half-nude bodies constitute his empathetic beach scenes. Ivan's simplification of seascapes in basic horizontal, vertical and curved lines and monochromatic palette helped him synchronize the built environment, human figures and nature with his personal emotion. In the process of synchronization, semi-abstract, minimalist human figures were transformed as subjects of their own surroundings.

In contrast to the view in Dutch prints, which depict land from the distant sea, Ivan's canvases view the sea from land, with a catamaran ready to sail (Plate 3.35). The rising sun suggests time and direction, the whole composition is about a voyage, or anxiety and expectation of embarkment. The feeling of expectation persists with a feeling of uncertainty. Agonies of an ambiguous present drove him towards the shores of his homeland and placed him in between anxiety and anticipation, of past and present. This expression is further heightened by the presence of isolated, bony dark figures of men and women and a frightening cyclonic cloudy sky and a suspiciously calm sea

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117 Ivan Peries studied under two important landscape painters of Ceylon before his art training in St. John Wood School of Art in London owing to government scholarship. Neville Weereratne, 43 Group: A Chronicle of Fifty Years in the Art of Sri Lanka (Melbourne: Lantana, 1993), 115.
118 For a detailed account of his life and work, see Senake Bandaranayake and Manel Fonseka, Ivan Peries (Colombo: Tamarind Publications (Pvt.) Ltd., 1996).
(Plate 3.36). Eric Hirsch sees the idea of landscape as process and suggests that "this process is one which relates a "foreground" everyday social life ("as the way we are") to a "background" potential social existence ("as the way we might be")."\(^{119}\) In Ivan's beaches, the trunks of the coconut trees barricade the human figures in the foreground from their background or everyday social life, the land from potential social existence, the sea. Similarly, in his painting titled 'Homage to El Greco' (Plate 3.37), the tree trunks act as railings of a cage or a gate, policing or fencing the house from the viewer. This division of worlds is something similar to a Marc Chagall painting titled 'The City' (reflective of the artist's exiled existence in the city of Paris), where the mythological two headed dog 'Cyrus' guards the boundary between the home and the house in the exiled land. Nervousness of losing one's footing in one's own land, bourgeois anxiety about the future, uneasiness of simultaneously living in different planes of real and imagined, past and future, local and global, all manifested as the reality of modern man in Ivan's paintings.

Like the parks in the Parisian modernist paintings, tree-lined avenues and gardens occupied Ceylon's modernist landscape paintings. Interestingly, most of the modernist painters use the middle frame for their landscapes. Middle frames, with gardens and streets, talk about the emerging new consciousness of spatiality among the city-based local bourgeoisie. These middle grounds in painting characterize the Ceylonese modernist engagement with place that is neither fully urban nor fully rural, still in the process of emergence. This middle frame also typifies the elitist social-cultural position, its duality and ambivalence.

Weerasinghe observes that Ceylonese painting did not come to terms with the urban until the 1990s. The themes, until then, were fundamentally pastoral and bucolic.\(^{120}\) Nevertheless, Nicholas Green argues that in France, development of landscape painting was associated with the lifestyle of metropolitan Paris that created conditions for bringing the countryside into view in a distinctive way. In a sense, it was the lack of special views


in urban Paris, together with other factors that stressed the experience of commercially produced spectacle, which facilitated the emphasis on visualizing nature as 'landscape'. In the colonial south Asian context, this may be associated with the adaptation of colonial lifestyles and territorial claims of nationalism and orientalism on the rural as the 'true' 'authentic' site of the nation state. Landscape emerged as a form of resistance as well as dominance in the bourgeois cultural sphere. Further, unlike the European bourgeoisie, the elite class in Colombo, in order to climb the social ladder, invested their surplus in landed property to give themselves a 'feudal facade'.

As Denis E. Cosgrove argues, 'through the vocabulary of various conventional forms—signs, symbols, icons, and special tropes, in the landscape—people, particularly powerful people, tell morally charged stories about themselves, the social relations within their community, and their relation to divine order.' While discussing the painting of Gainsborough titled 'Mr and Mrs Andrews', John Berger points out that the bourgeois society's rural representations can be seen as a way of exhibiting their property and proclaiming their newly achieved position. In this context, landscape as content is equally political and social. I would argue that the pastoral and bucolic in pre-independent Ceylon is a construct of urban modernity. The Ceylonese modernist's interest in representation of rural and pastoral arises from the expectation and anxiety of both producer and consumer of art, who share the ideology and tastes of the urban middle class. When the colonial practice of landscape painting was accommodated within the local bourgeois sphere, the regional in the colonialist documentation transformed into rural. This allowed the local colonial elites to find a comfortable 'national place' within colonialism's 'visual discourse' without much alteration. In addition, spatial and temporal distance from the rural created by the urban reality and nationalist imagination have engendered feelings of nostalgia or melancholia or romanticism in these paintings.

122 In Ceylon, the elite class was neither wholly capitalist nor feudal, but contained within it elements of both. For a detailed study on this subject, see Kumari Jayawardena, Nobodies to Somebodies: The Rise of Colonial Bourgeoisie in Sri Lanka (Delhi: Leftword Books, 2001).
Exile was considered an experience specific to the condition of modernity. As discussed earlier, George Keyt and Justin Daraniyagala\textsuperscript{125} preferred to settle in rural areas of Kandy and Passiyala respectively both as a criticism of and escape from city culture. The flip side of this decision could be nationalism’s romantic idea of village as a form of social unit as well as living organism untouched by colonialism, therefore celebrated as ‘pure’, ‘traditional’ and ‘authentic’ as opposed to the city. Interestingly, this notion fixed rural as unchanging, static, hence always belonging to the past similar to the earlier colonialist idea about the non-European world. Ivan’s determination to be a professional painter forced him into self-imposed exile in London. Nevertheless, the inhospitable conditions of the city and the constant struggle to establish himself within the art market fuelled his longing for home in a distant land. His images of the rural, coastal southern Ceylon resonate with a feeling of loss. Shuttling between the two locations implicated peripatetic experience, perpetuated by the conditions of modernity. Figures in his paintings speak about the modern individual’s existential crisis, aloof from his/her own physical and social environment, similar to the figures in Giacometti’s sculptures. There is a persistent feeling of longing or nostalgia in his paintings. Psychoanalytical theory explains nostalgia as a feeling of loss that is acknowledged with no possibilities of returning.\textsuperscript{126} It could be argued here that nostalgia is a distinctive feeling that emerged from the experience of worlding of modernity.

A similar sense of rootlessness and loss of place are visible in the works of other Ceylonese modernist landscape painters as well. However, in the case of Beling and S. R. Kanagasabai, it is not clear what has been lost. That turned into a feeling of melancholia.\textsuperscript{127} The same sense of rootlessness caused Harry Pieris to paint Colombo’s streets in a manner that they appear rural thereby connecting the rural with the urban. Thus, the past is connected with the present and nature with culture. It is also important

\textsuperscript{125} Daraniyagala belonged to the traditional feudal class, which still held a fair amount of landed property both in Colombo as well as in the rural towns around Colombo.


\textsuperscript{127} The OED definition of nostalgia is that it is a form of melancholy caused by prolonged absence from one’s country and home.
to note here that this sense of loss coincided with the emergence of the nation as well as nationalism. In the case of Ivan Peries, the expression of nostalgia arose from his inability to identify with the adopted land, thus indicating a clear sense of displacement from homeland. However, in the case of other modernist painters, though they were physically placed within the boundaries of homeland, there melancholic expression may have resulted from their dual belonging; desire to be modern and traditional at the same time, living the urban life style but worried about urbanization of the rural. Representation of incommensurable realities of urban and rural, gained impressive presence in the montages of Lionel Wendt’s photographs. His photomontages successfully produced a dreamscape by superimposing and juxtaposing human figures, historical buildings and rural and urban environments. This symbolized the bourgeois place that was invariably connected with the earlier colonial virtual space present in topographic representations that dealt with scenic landscapes, historical sites and colonial built environment. Even though the visual language of modernist landscapes varies from realism to surrealism, the enduring feeling is about desolation. This feeling represents an ambiguous relationship connected to both affiliation and disaffiliation with the nation and that demands a continuous negotiation between the subject and the nation.

3.5 Conclusion

Colonial landscape paintings represent the imperialist claim on conquered territories and local contests over imperial property. Artistically, these struggles were also linked to developments in the metropolitan art world. In this context, picturesque and the idea of regional embedded in the imperial landscape paintings was later appropriated into the elites’ national imagination. The colonial search for regional identity in landscape painting metamorphosed into the rhetoric of rural in the national discourse. Local painters, through mimicry, subverted the colonial gaze entrenched in the picturesque to challenge the colonialist as well as to strengthen their dominance over the subaltern. The elitist (national) place in colonial landscape painting is an ambivalence produced by the imagined rural, exclusiveness of elite culture and colonial mode of viewing and representing. Though these landscapes seem to represent a rupture in the colonial gaze, the empathetic view, from a new subjective position of the colonial local elites, fashioned
by coloniality and modernity, differentiated it from its imperial counterpart. The local cultural elites' ambiguous relationships with nationalism and colonialism and their dual existence both in national and international space characterized their place as surreal as well as melancholic.