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Kanchanakesi Channa Prajapati Warnapala

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DISMANTLING THE GAZE: LIMINALITY, SEEING AND JULIA MARGARET CAMERON'S SRI LANKAN PHOTOGRAPHS

By

Kanchanakesi Channa Prajapati Warnapala

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ABSTRACT

DISMANTLING THE GAZE: LIMINALITY, SEEING AND JULIA MARGARET CAMERON'S SRI LANKAN PHOTOGRAPHS

By

Kanchanakesi Channa Prajapati Warnapala

Colonial photography has mostly been European imaginings of the "other" immersed in more fantasy than reality. However, Julia Margaret Cameron's pictures of the Sri Lankans become problematic when viewed as mere derogatory representations of the native. To conclude that Cameron's Sri Lankan photographs are more imaginative fiction than reality is to disregard the tensions surrounding the photographs, which at the same time both empower and disempower the native. This paper attempts to demonstrate that these tensions arise because of Cameron's own position in the colonies, as a woman as well as a woman photographer, taking into consideration her own problematic status in Victorian society as a woman born and bred in the colonies.

Dismantling the Gaze: Liminality, Seeing and Julia Margaret Cameron's Sri Lankan Photographs

Although Julia Margaret Cameron has been acknowledged as one of the pioneering figures in the history of photography and many have examined her photographs for their beauty and mastery, her Sri Lankan pictures have remained largely ignored.[1] They have either been considered as amateurish work, unworthy of any merit or have been discarded as merely insignificant and hardly evocative of Cameron's photographic genius. When they have caught the attention of critics, it has been mainly to expose them as another instance of representing the native in derogatory terms. Of course, it is a difficult venture to read colonial photography as anything but imaginative fiction far removed from reality, where the native is not only depicted on unequal terms but also deliberately constructed as racially, socially, morally and intellectually inferior. Yet to conclude that Cameron's Sri Lankan photographs are simple representations of the native (derogatory or otherwise) is to disregard the tensions surrounding the photographs. Such tensions empower and disempower the native at the same time, although the distinctions get dangerously blurred in many respects. These can only be understood by examining Cameron's own position in the colonies, as a woman as well as a woman photographer, taking into account her own problematic status in Victorian society as a woman born and bred in the colonies. In order to decipher Cameron's peculiar location in relation to her Sri Lankan photographs as well as to (re)view her pictures of the native, we must first situate her work within the larger discourse of colonial photography itself.

Representations of colonized peoples reached their zenith in the late nineteenth century, when both professional and amateur photographers avidly traveled around the

world, recording native peoples for the purposes of display. Colonial exhibitions became immensely popular in this period where "so-called savages or primitives were made available for visual inspection by millions of strolling and staring western citizens"(Corbey 338). While these world fairs in the western metropolis sought to provide visual justification for the imperial process itself, which was in need of an excuse to validate any violence involved in the conquest and suppression of the intellectually inferior savage, photography served as a perfect medium to record the otherness of these peoples. Photography's supposed association with authenticity and objectivity validated these visual impressions of the native and helped photography adopt one of its pivotal roles, that of documenting the other. Its main agenda was to highlight the primitiveness of the other, and as Anne Maxwell aptly points out, "The idea was not just to expose the masses to the spectacle of racial difference, but also to make people of White Anglo-Saxon nations feel mentally, physically and morally superior to the colonized, using a language that the public would understand-a language of stark oppositions"(2). Graphic depictions of racial difference could be staged by photography where the snapshots served as evidence of a world of otherness hence only imagined or imaginatively depicted through painting.

At first glance, it seems as if Cameron does indeed employ this technique of highlighting difference when she chooses to depict her Sri Lankan women as distinctly different from her European models. When staging the Sri Lankan, she clearly discards certain photographic conventions that she adopts while living in England.[2] In order to demonstrate the particular vision articulated by Cameron, a critical analysis of some of her Sri Lankan pictures is necessary and for this reason, I shall closely examine three of

Cameron's photographs of a Sri Lankan woman taken during Cameron's not so brief stay in Sri Lanka which lasted almost five years till her death in 1879. These photographs clearly reflect that Cameron was engaged in a different project with her Sri Lankan prints.

In many respects, Cameron's Sri Lankan pictures seem Eurocentric when compared to her English photographs of women, which evoke a sense of religiosity and purity. While the English women are mostly rendered as historical, religious, allegorical or legendary subjects such as the Madonnas[3], the Sri Lankan woman has been stripped of such visual trappings. Whereas the English sitters are transformed into figures of mysticism inhabiting the heavenly rather than the earthly sphere, such as in the photograph the *La Santa Julia* (1867) [4], the Sri Lankan woman is denied the necessary mystical attire for such a metamorphosis. The native woman seems to be dressed in her habitual garb, the sari, and is not wrapped dramatically in fabric to evoke literary and historical figures. Instead she seem to satisfy the European stereotype of the visual difference between the colonizer and the colonized in terms of dress where the corseted Victorian woman is held up as the ideal against the indecently clad Sri Lankan in somewhat revealing clothes. Such visual depictions of the native woman conveniently play into the stereotype of the highly sexualized native woman who poses a threat to the white male. As James Ryan demonstrates such images "found their greatest expression in the salacious and pornographic photographs of the colonial harem manufactured by European photographers"(53) as evidence of the hypersexual non-western woman. If women's bodies become the focal point of interest in colonial photography, then the

clothes that cover that body too gain visual significance. In this case, the significant lack of clothing holds Cameron's attention.

Certainly the women in Cameron's English portraits are enveloped in layers of clothes. But the Sri Lankan woman is barely covered by them. For instance, the "half-length portrait of woman" (fig. 1) reveals the gulf between the European and the Sri Lankan native.

Figure 1 - Half-length portrait of woman.

Source: Lukitsh, "Simply Pictures of Peasants," 1996.

The way the sari is draped around the upper body of the woman model so as to leave bare her right shoulder hints at difference from the bountifully clothed Victorian women at the time. Likewise, the "unidentified girl standing by fence and vines" (fig. 2) and the

"Ceylonese woman, Kalutara" (fig. 3) seem to emphasize the sparseness of the sari as a covering for the native body, especially considering the tightly laced clothes women wore in Victorian England. Thus, nakedness, the stereotypical marker of difference, comes into play as the savage-civil divide is reinforced.[5] While colonial photography emphasizing such "primitiveness" served as a mode of visual justification for the Empire as well as for the European's civilizing mission, this Sri Lankan woman becomes testimony to the uncivilized presence of the "other" in need of the colonizer's civilizing project.

The emphasis on the nakedness of this woman not only hints at such a visual difference but also seems to enact violence on the native. The violence on the native is aggravated by the fact that the gaze of the photographer/spectator is usually associated with that of a patriarchal gaze. Cameron has been attributed a male gaze by critics, especially in her treatment of the English women who are after all cast as emotional, virginal and predominantly asexual. Hopkinson states that Cameron "saw women very much as a male photographer might have done, and how her predominantly male purchasers certainly would have done" by casting them as representing "beauty, delicacy, maternity and spirituality" (110), figures to be either ravished or venerated by the male viewer. Critics like Carol Mavor have suggested otherwise and have argued that although Cameron has escaped being labeled as perverse, the pictures nevertheless "move metaphorically between categories,, smearing the lines between sexual and not-sexual, male and female, earthly and heavenly"(47). But such observations leave aside the fact that sexuality and sensuality are only implicit by suggestion in the photographs of the English women and do not boldly emerge through the images, unlike her Sri Lankan portraits.

Of course such sexuality becomes disempowering for the native especially as male photographers have focused on the native female body as a sexualized object for their viewing pleasure. While native women were in certain instances forced to disrobe for photographs [6], such actions also allowed the photographer to depict the colonies as a place of sexual excess where the women were licentious and willing partners for the European male. Such portrayals then helped deflect the violence enacted on the native woman by depicting her as the immoral savage. To an extent, a male gaze functions in Cameron's Sri Lankan portraits when the native woman seems to be gradually stripped of her garments. Having said that, it is worthy engaging in a more detailed study of the Sri Lankan pictures. What we encounter in fig. 1, for example, is a half-length portrait of a young woman, whose head is slightly turned sideways. Although she does not face the camera, the fact that she is conscious of its effect is seen through her hand. She seems clearly uncomfortable at this bodily intrusion especially since her fingers are rigid. They are not relaxed. In fact, they jut forward in an awkward manner. She seems to be clearly tense and conscious that the photographic gaze, with its harsh lighting, acts as a voyeur cutting into her bare flesh. The way her thumb tries to conceal what it cannot is a sign of her clear embarrassment at this display of the nakedness. The sense of violence and entrapment becomes apparent in the positioning of her hands. It speaks of her vain attempts to conceal her self. The irony is that the very attempt to cover her nakedness has an unusual effect on the viewer. It directs his eye onto the very object it tries to conceal.

Similarly the "unidentified woman standing by fence and vines" (fig. 2) depicts a native who is literally trapped against the hedge, half undressed while the lighting acts so as to further bare her body. The focus is definitely not on her face but on her body and the

photograph is carefully staged presenting the viewer with her form. At first glance, we see a three-quarter length profile of a young woman. But immediately we perceive her somewhat awkward pose.

Figure 2 - unidentified girl standing by fence and vines.

Source: Lukitsh, 1996

Although she gives the impression of leaning against a hedge, her posture is far from relaxed. The body almost seems to be twisted, her hips facing the camera while her upper body is pictured sideways. It is hard not to notice the way her legs somewhat open out, deliberately putting the body on display. The fact that she is arranged before the camera is suggested through the positioning of her whole body. Her arms are held at the same angles as her legs, creating a picturesque effect, however inconvenient it is to the native model.

While the other Sri Lankan photographs clearly focus on the face and the expression of the eyes rather than on the body, the picture of the "Ceylonese woman, Kalutara" (fig. 3) seems to concentrate specifically on her body, instead of her face. The lighting reveals the bare shoulders and arms to the viewer. The face is not clearly discernible although the light does slightly trace the outline of her features. Her expression cannot be distinctly seen, nor can her eyes. Although it looks as if Cameron is trying to emphasize her hand with its numerous rings, the effect is that the viewer concentrates on the bare flesh even more. The light strongly cuts across her back, offering up her body further for voyeuristic pleasure and evoking sensuality. The rings and the chain around her neck draw the viewer's eyes not to the jewelry but to the bare back that is dramatically illuminated.

Figure 3 - Ceylonese woman, Kalutara.

Source: Gernsheim, *Julia Margaret Cameron*, 1975.

The violence becomes obvious from the positioning of this woman's hands. It is as if she realizes the violation taking place, as the lighting seems to cut across her bare shoulders, back and neck. She seems to shield her body from such an intrusion by covering herself with her arms. Cameron's choice of frame heightens this effect as well. The round frame clearly leaves no room for the viewer to divert his gaze. He is directed to the center of the frame where Cameron places her model. And the fact that the background is almost in the dark and the nakedness sharply focused by the light intensifies this effect. Emphasizing the bare, exposed skin speaks the language of sensuality and difference while these bodies become not only sites of pleasure for the voyeuristic gaze of the viewer but also sites of violence where the women become objectified mercilessly. As Alison Smith observes, in the mid nineteenth century such images of "women in various states of undress helped secure the notion that male desire was instinctive and needed constant gratification". Smith goes to add that it was "hardly surprising that pornographic images followed quickly upon the popularisation of a medium that was seen to transcribe the real so directly", especially as the "erotic was associated with the female body"(55).

Besides being subject to such violence, the Sri Lankan woman (fig.3) is also deprived of certain privileges accorded to Cameron's English women in garden settings. Cameron focuses on the eyes of these English women, attributing to them a sense of depth. The eyes are well defined in these portraits. Both *Maud*, 1875 [7]and *Aletheia* 1872[8], e.g., have an aura of mystery surrounding them. Both of these English women are made to look away from the camera, and although the lighting does expose the neck and face, it is the expression of sadness and a sense of solemnity that captures the viewer. The way the women are positioned within the frame so that their faces almost sink into the wall

caressing the foliage guides the viewer to take note of their countenance. Lukitsh points out that in these images of single female figures amidst flowers, "a more diffuse lighting makes the overall image more harmonious, suggesting the symbolic connection between femininity and nature"(Cameron 11). The distant expression in their eyes seems to attribute to both of these women an ethereal quality. But in the case of the Sri Lankan woman, the eyes are hardly visible, closing all avenues to any indications of such spiritual and hence ennobling sentiments.

The absence of a large body of Sri Lankan photographs has seemed to some critics to document Cameron's lack of admiration for the native. Hopkinson points out that Cameron's best photographic work was of "individuals whom she knew and admired, using intimacy to elicit what she called their souls through their expressions and features"(158). Of course, Hopkinson herself has posited the argument that such a lack of pictures was due to "the intense heat and humidity, the lack of a studio and perhaps also a shortage of chemicals or stimulus"(92). Yet such harsh conditions did not prevent other colonial photographers from setting up lucrative commercial enterprises in Sri Lanka during the nineteenth century.[9] Surely such external conditions would have been only a slight deterrent for a woman who after all converted her coal-house into a dark room and the chicken shed into a glass house or studio. As Brian Hill notes, Cameron had difficulty in even obtaining running water in order to develop the photographs in England. In Cameron's letter to an old Calcutta friend, she writes, "it has been real labor, for in all freezing weather, I have poured nine cans of water fresh from the well over each photograph"(Hill 106). Thus what is disconcerting is that Cameron did have opportunities

not only to take pictures of Sri Lankans but also to exhibit them although she seems to have chosen not to.

In fact exhibitions abroad were not totally closed to the resident photographers in Sri Lanka like W.L.H. Skeen, one of the foremost commercial photographers of Sri Lanka in the nineteenth century.[10] Then Cameron would have surely been able to make her Sri Lankan prints available abroad had she chosen to do so. This indeed places Cameron in a peculiar position where she does not choose to exhibit her Sri Lankan photographs or produce them on a large scale for exhibition. Such a move is out of character for a woman like Cameron who definitely relied on exhibitions not only for recognition but also as a means for sales.[11] So her lack of interest in exhibiting the Sri Lankan photographs perhaps indicates that the native Sri Lankan body could not live up to the aesthetic ideals embedded in the English beauties of Cameron.

So the argument that external conditions hindered her photographing the Sri Lankan seems to collapse and such an analysis clearly breaks down in the face of Cameron's enthusiasm to picture Marianne North while in Sri Lanka. North, in her autobiography, describes Cameron's passionate interest to photograph her: "[Cameron] made up her mind at once to photograph me, and for 3 days, kept herself in a fever of excitement about it"(315). Not only is Cameron's enthusiasm remarkable but also her manner of staging North. North is dressed up in "flowering draperies of cashmere wool", made to let down her hair, and is staged against a backdrop of coconut branches and later on amidst breadfruit leaves and fruits. Clearly Cameron yearns for the picturesque with the manipulation of dress and backdrop. Hence Sri Lanka has not apparently made her lose her flair for the photograph.

Yet the very manner in which Cameron casts North while in Sri Lanka is unusual. Her portrait of North cashes in on the exotic as North comes to be immersed in lush surroundings[12]. Cameron thus fits her European visitor into a familiar framework where Sri Lanka becomes the tropical paradise for the Western traveler. During this time, "photographers were seeking an ideal Ceylon for European audiences" and "the favorite themes were lush foliage plants and vegetation of an exotic nature to convey the ambience of an oriental country with a lush tropical climate"(Raheem 17). Cameron's persistent desire to picture North in an exotic setting is aptly conveyed by North herself. When Cameron's first efforts to depict North among cocoa nut leaves fails, she resorts to other plans: "Then [Cameron] tried me with a background of breadfruit leaves and fruit, nailed flat against a window shutter, and told them to look natural, but both failed" (315). Of course, what is significant in Cameron's act is the very fact that she does not place her native in such exotic surroundings.

While there is no doubt that such photographs presenting Sri Lanka as a land of bounty were appealing to a European audience, Cameron's refusal to exoticize the landscape actually hints at a complexity in her Sri Lankan photographs. Her move not to put up the native for anthropological display at exhibitions or freeze the native in a framework of exoticism clearly suggests that Cameron is not the usual photographer in the colonies. She departs from certain touristic conventionalities of depicting the subject race. James Ryan demonstrates how "scenes of tropical vegetation –improvised with paint and plants in the studio as well as in outdoor locations-were employed frequently as backdrops for images of exotic women"(53) during the late nineteenth century. In such instances, the exotic and erotic collude and even the landscape assumes the form of

"fleeting beauties to be conquered by the male and white power of endurance"(Ryan 53). This is heightened when the native woman is set against such picturesque scenery. Ryan goes on to add that the "stereotype of the sexually exotic Oriental woman" found expression in places like India where the photographers "exploited the existing associations between the Orient and sex"(53). Hence, both the feminized landscape and the eroticized native woman inevitably become subject to the penetrating gaze of the European. Cameron's significant lack of such photographs speaks of her refusal to accommodate such aesthetic conventions of her time and thereby make available the native to a voyeuristic gaze.

Cameron's blatant refusal to comply with such aesthetics confronts us in the form of "The Kalutara Woman" (fig.3). Even though this woman model initially gives the impression of being literally confined by the frame, this image acts out many of the tensions found in all of Cameron's pictures. The glimpse of the arm of the chair on which the woman is placed is significant. Although the portion of the chair that juts forward could be mistaken for a bamboo shoot, it still sticks out especially when the viewer looks closely at her hand and the bangles that are illuminated by the lighting. This actually interferes with the idyllic setting of a garden. Cameron has clearly not made her native model move a little forward so as to cover the chair. While this takes away from the aesthetic beauty of the photograph, it actually, in a strange fashion, attributes a sense of power to the Sri Lankan woman. It more than hints at the fact that she has been made to sit and pose for this photograph. In an era when the colonized native was being meticulously staged in studios with props and the necessary paraphernalia, Cameron's model is made to stick out as it were. This is perhaps a gesture on the part of Cameron to

indicate that many colonial photographs are artificially compiled according to the western appetite for visual images of the native that serve to affirm European's cultural and racial difference. The Sri Lankan woman is clearly not one emerging from the vines but one who is positioned in such a way for the purpose of a picture. Of course, while such a staging speaks of her literal capture by the camera, it also grants her subjectivity. She is not and cannot be completely contained within the frame as the photograph itself resists fitting into an aesthetic frame. The result is that the photograph does not accord the viewer the uninhibited pleasure of gazing at a native woman.

What is interesting is that Cameron's photographs of the Sri Lankan woman do not seem to satisfy the voyeuristic needs of the West. Helmut Gernsheim dismisses the Sri Lankan pictures as "quite unimportant", assigning them to an amateur (83). Hopkinson believes the Sri Lankan prints to be "surely among her least representative work"(34). One reason why these Sri Lankan pictures have been largely ignored could be that Cameron does not stage her native models amidst exotic surroundings. She actually uproots the native from an ethnological setting and does not crave to capture the scenery. The implications of Cameron's reversal of the usual norm of photographing the native in an ethnological setting can only be discerned by taking into consideration the work of other photographers at this time.

Although Cameron's apparent disinterest in capturing the native for photographs as well as photographic exhibitions might seem to hint at her privileging the English models as fitting subjects for photography over the Sri Lankan native, such an argument collapses when examining the genre of colonial photography. For instance, Cameron's refusal to ignore the current trend in colonial photography when picturing exotic peoples

in distant lands had become a lucrative commercial enterprise for many individuals, speaks volumes of her very regard for the native subject. While photographers like John Thomson, Samuel Bourne and Roger Fenton were photographing the native in different parts of the world, [13] Sri Lanka was very much in the picture where photography was concerned. Two figures that avidly pictured Sri Lanka were W.L.H Skeen and C Scowen. Sri Lanka attracted these individuals more for its scenic beauty and cultural history rather than the people per se. Whereas the foliage captured their interest and the talipot palm, the banyan tree and the screw pine became the preferred concern [14], people were not exactly insignificant but became secondary to the lush tropical vegetation. When the natives did become the point of interest, they became more ethnographical studies, serving as documentary evidence of various racial types in Ceylon in their various costumes. Men and women of different ethnic communities in their picturesque attire were arranged in the studio supplying documentary evidence for the existence of different communities in Sri Lanka.

Being resident photographers like Cameron, both Skeen and Scowen did not limit themselves to picturesque views of exotic landscapes. They did several studies of women. However these differ from Cameron's in significant ways. Scowen's picture of a girl with a vase[15] is a fitting comparison to Cameron's pictures although it bears slight resemblance to Cameron's "Ceylonese woman, Kalutara". The native Cameron depicts is seemingly made to turn away from the camera just as Scowen's models is made to do so that the focus is more on the body. Yet Scowen's photograph is different in that this girl's dress or the very lack of that much of covering is made obvious. She is apparently from the Rodiya caste, which seems to have created considerable interest amongst

English photographers due to their form of dress where the upper body is not covered. However, in this picture, Scowen is not simply documenting a type of woman of a certain group. He is also clearly highlighting her nakedness. The young woman is seated and is deliberately made to lean onto the vase she has placed against her side, the result being a generous view of her chest. It directs the viewer to gaze more at her bare breasts. But what is fundamentally distinct is that this picture actually enacts an eroticism that disables the photographic subject by satisfying the male gaze. The sexual voyeurism is obvious when the young girl's demure glance suggestively invites the spectator to feast on her adolescent body.

Photographers like Skeen were not just professionals who descended upon the colonies merely to picture Sri Lanka. His father, William Skeen had firmly established himself as a printer and according to Raheem and Thome, the photographic business was "primarily intended for his eldest son, William Skeen , who was training in England at the London School of photography"(14). In this respect, Skeen is similar to Cameron as both had considerable ties to the colonies although he chose to exhibit his work from time to time. His pictures of Sri Lankan women are different from Cameron, setting Cameron apart from the trend at that time. Skeen's pictures of women that are more artistic studies than documentaries of racial types still suggest a certain vulnerability that disempower the women. For instance, Skeen's picture of a woman holding a palm leaf over her head titled the "Tamil Lady"[16] depicts a native seductively lowering her eyes but at the same time teasingly holding the gaze of the viewer by a flirtish smile. Such a gesture seems to make her body available to the viewer, gratifying the spectator. The result is that the colonized woman relapses into satisfying patriarchal colonial prescriptions.

Cameron certainly creates a breach in convention when she separates the native from the usual setting of an ethnological backdrop. Figure 2 exemplifies this well. That the native woman is arranged to aesthetically please the viewer is apparent from the symmetrical angles of the picture. Her hands align with the positioning of her legs and head. But even though it depicts a desirable female placed against a picturesque backdrop, this picture serves to defy certain conventions of picturing the native. She is pictured against a setting that is devoid of ethnological markers. It does not place her in Sri Lanka, thereby signaling Cameron's refusal to place and categorize the native. Such a gesture implies an intimacy that complicates her attitude to the Sri Lankan photographs after all. Therefore, although the Sri Lankan photographs seem to conform to particular stereotypes, and while on one level they do, they are also extremely complicated pictures, signaling a perpetual ambiguity in Cameron in reference to her Sri Lankan photographs.

Even though it could be argued that Cameron creates a dichotomy between the virginal purity of the English woman and the sensuality and sexual licentiousness of the native woman, the fact that she does not dismantle the Sri Lankan woman of her individuality by reconfiguring her as a type (for instance, the Virgin Mary) supports the idea that Cameron in fact empowers the native woman.[17] The fact that the Sri Lankan woman is not presented in allegorical terms perhaps suggests that she can stand alone as an individual, instead of an imaginary fiction. During this period, allegorical paintings of natives especially as harem women had become popular. Ryan illustrates that "Drawing on an established iconography of the Orient in painting, literature and architecture, photographers invented their own 'Orient' in the studio with props, backdrops and the directed poses of scantily dressed 'Oriental' female models"(53). The work of Roger

Fenton, a Victorian photographer of the Crimean war is such an example. What is striking is that Fenton recreated Crimea in his own London studio, depicting women stretched out on divans in harem-like settings. [18] Yet Cameron clearly steers her native model away from the allegorical.

Although the nakedness literally strips the native of her dignity and subjects her to violence, it also grants her agency when one examines Cameron's English portraits, once again reinforcing her ambivalence towards her Sri Lankan photographs. Her English pictures frequently depict the Madonna who is chaste and beautiful, accompanied by one or two children, only to reinforce the woman's role as the nurturer. This mother-child motif often occurs in colonial photography taken in Ceylon. For instance, Henry Cave, an English photographer who took a series of pictures of Ceylon captures the native woman in the role of the mother. His photographs of the Gram Vendor and the Grass Cutter[19] emphasize their maternal roles while still engaging in fatiguing work. So by accentuating the role of the woman as nurturing, loving, dutiful and self-sacrificing, these photographs inevitably desexualize these subjects into pure passionless creatures who can only be enervated by the desiring male gaze. Even though such depictions can be seen as attempts to incorporate the native woman into certain mainstream photographic conventions, such a reading blatantly disregards the fact that such poses are reductive. They are almost nostalgic, evidence of a land that is literally domesticated by European male presence and hence posing no threat to his masculinity.[20]

Annie E Coombes points out how motherhood was an exploited theme especially in African colonial photography where the "symbol of the African woman served as a means of chastising feminist tendencies amongst white British women"(100) who were

neglecting their true vocation in life. Yet such pictures take on additional significance within the dominant discourse of the civilizing mission. When the emphasis on racial purity reached intense heights due to the threat of miscegenation in the nineteenth century, such pictures of women with children surely ease the tensions between the white male and the dusky woman. These dark bodies are clearly bound by motherhood erasing any anxiety on the part of the white male, thus cleansing the imperial project of any probable impurities. Perhaps this is why a photographer like Cave chose to depict the Sri Lankan woman in her motherly role.

Yet what is noticeable is that Cameron does not visualize her native women in this maternal role. Hence, she grants them sexual agency, especially by transcribing sexual energy into their poses as well as their looks. She thus refuses to be "womanly" and proper by limiting herself to picturing this woman purely in terms of her reproductive role. Although some critics have read sexuality in her English photographs, they have mainly been categorized as safe, and as Mavor suggests, Cameron "has been saved by her maternal life-style, which includes a house full of children"(25). Mavor indicates that "like good Victorians, historians have preferred to bathe in the apparent 'neutrality' (as conventionally defined) and 'purity' of her pictures"(25). But Cameron curiously empowers herself with her Sri Lankan photographs by throwing off the banner of respectability by assuming the mantle of sexuality. Although Madonnas were one of her favorite themes in England, she abandons it in Sri Lanka, the result being her own empowerment as well as the Sri Lankan woman. This is precisely because the Madonnas "appear to conform with the expectations of a Victorian woman. Using Christian typology, the pictures properly contain woman's sexuality within a space of holy

motherhood"(Mavor 47). If this is the case, the fact that the Sri Lankan woman is not visualized hence suggests that Cameron is daring to be different carving a different visual space for herself in terms of photography as well as her own identity as a woman photographer.

Cameron's model erodes any pleasure that the male viewer might experience in seeing the woman in her "proper" and safe role and the woman artist adopting appropriate subjects for representation. Cameron ceases to become the respectable artist in Sri Lanka by openly defying male expectations. By evading exhibition of such prints, she aligns herself with the Sri Lankan by rejecting prevailing photographic conventions, which failed to take into account the feelings of the colonized. Even though they could be taken as instances of publicly undressing the colonial subject, the woman is still not in demure poses, averting her eyes away from the spectator in recognition of the patriarchal forces evaluating her. Her eyes are, on the other hand, embodiments of a power of their own, the eroticism serving to challenge male viewers. These photographs disable the voyeuristic viewer's power to gaze and then walk away from the photograph with supreme satisfaction, under the illusion that he has been in control of the act of viewing, controlling any erotic feelings produced through the process of the gaze. Cameron unravels this illusion of power by assigning the woman model a gaze that is preoccupied and outside the grasp of the viewer. Cameron makes visual consumers of her women models when they daringly engage in this act of looking and take in sights only reserved for the male gaze. So however much Cameron's native woman seems to be objectified and subjected to the European gaze, the photographs are not without their disruptive tensions. The eroticism acts to enable the native woman, in a strange fashion. It does not

strip the native woman of agency but actually interrogates the sexual prudery of the European at this time. While such a representation highlighting nakedness seems to signal the physical and cultural divide between the colonizer and the colonized, these depictions also show Cameron's rejection of certain Victorian demands, interrogating Englishness itself. Cameron perhaps challenges the male prerogative of representing nudity during the Victorian era by incorporating nakedness into her images.

Yet it is remarkable how Cameron herself realizes to a certain extent that the gaze is "a masculine prerogative, with woman positioned as the object of the voyeur's scrutiny"(Smith 55). As the woman's body is inevitably coded as erotic, Cameron's choice to sexualize it is bound to objectify the woman. It seems as if Cameron in a subtle fashion aestheticises the pictures by adopting strategies used by eminent Victorian artists such as Frederick Leighton and Lawrence Alma-Tadema who were experimenting with the nude while grounding their work in the neo-classical mode. Leighton's *Venus Disrobing for the bath* (1866-7) and Alma-Tadema's *A Sculptor's Model* (1877) are both depictions of the nude in classical style. As Smith points out, the classical style and subject matter sanctioned the nude, justifying it as art.

Cameron surely would have been aware of the debate surrounding the nude and how certain artists like Leighton negotiated their work around such heated topics. She herself seems to adopt such strategies especially when depicting the dress of the Sri Lankan women. Her fascination with the sari becomes obvious when she seductively uses it to cast the women as almost semi-draped models. Indrani Sen demonstrates how the sexually titillating sari had been "culturally inscribed as a sensual mode of dress"(57) by the English.[21] By lingering on the sari, Cameron unravels western notions of modesty and

immodesty by almost exalting the sari to evoke the classical. The folds of the sari in figure 2 evoke the technique of Leighton and Alma-Tadema where "drapery falls in broad, weighty folds which richly swathe the whole body"(Barrow 51).[22] Such artistic maneuvering in order to depict nudity shows that Cameron was invested in these Sri Lankan works as aesthetic photographs.

The fact that Cameron chose to evoke one woman figure in these photographs further illustrates Cameron's regard for the Sri Lankan woman model. It is as if Cameron sees artistic potential in this figure and seems to be dissatisfied with only a single facet of that image. The native woman is not an ethnological exhibit who is observed as evidence of a particular ethnic group but is an individual who has caught Cameron's avid interest. She becomes a constant reminder of Cameron's detailed studies of her favorite niece, Julia Jackson, for whom she had a great regard. Cameron's varied profiles of Jackson show the photographer's fascination with her model. As Violet Hamilton notes, Julia Jackson was one of the few individuals Cameron never chose to cast as a legendary or allegorical figure. Hamilton goes on to add that she was "one of the few women whom Cameron portrayed as herself (without association to archetypes)"(38). Likewise, the native model ceases to be just another woman encountered in the colonies. Instead, she becomes a woman Cameron looks at with pleasure, who commands sufficient allure to spur this woman photographer to focus on the Sri Lankan's figure, seriously challenging any previous arguments that Cameron did not view her natives as likely models.

Further, Cameron's use of nudity does not strip the Sri Lankan woman of individuality. Linda Nochlin observes that "the very term "erotic art" is understood to imply the specification 'erotic-for-men'"(9) and that man is ultimately not just the subject

but also the customer for all erotic products. In this instance, her argument that "there seems to be no conceivable outlet for the expression of women's viewpoints in nineteenth century art, even in the realm of pure fantasy" could be interrogated by Cameron's portrayal of the native woman. Cameron seems to find that very outlet in the colonies when she eroticizes the native bodies. In England, Cameron is compelled to be cautious and act out the role of the respectable artist cum mother when she clearly keeps away from the nude. Lukitsh remarks that "when women artists did not have access to the nude model for life-study classes, the child was Cameron's only opportunity to photograph the human body"(Cameron 12). But what is significant is not that Cameron sexualizes the native bodies but that she does so in a fashion that challenges the male gaze.

The passivity fundamental to the nude, emerging out of the notion of the "artist as sexually dominant creator: man-the artist-fashioning from the inert matter an ideal erotic object for himself, a woman cut to the very pattern of his desires"(Nochlin 15), is problematized in Cameron's pictures, signifying her ambivalence towards the native. Connolly posits two kinds of erotic images, one in the form of a "potential amatory exchange between the depicted and the spectator" or the imaginative encounters that become erotic precisely because the women elude the "imagination's hot embrace" (17). Both of these possibilities are complicated by Cameron to a certain extent by assigning an active role to the native woman model. In fig. 1, the native is inaccessible precisely because of her gaze. She does not shyly look away from the viewer but deflects his gaze by guiding his eyes towards the direction of her look, a space he cannot even imaginatively penetrate. She is not totally contained in the photographic space as she is hgiven a look that moves beyond the frame. By looking away in to the distance, she

creates a visual space for herself in the process, which is beyond the sight of the spectator. Thus she disrupts the image of herself as the passive object and in turn frustrates her viewer as she has refused to cooperate with him and allow him uninhibited sexual access to visual gratification of her body. He is compelled to locate his voyeuristic gaze on a visual space that guarantees him no access, thus nullifying his gaze altogether. Then the focus of the photograph comes to center on the viewer's unease rather than the half-clothed woman model's body. Hence roles reverse, as the spectator becomes the object.

So Cameron dismantles the binary between the active viewer and the passive object, thereby thwarting the desires of the west to subdue the native. The evading look of the native subject does not automatically imply passivity. On the contrary such a look is more a detached gaze while the photographic subject herself becomes an active participant in this process of looking as a result of the intimacy between the photographer and the native woman. In the case of Cameron's Sri Lankan photographs, while the spectator tries to subject the native to his gaze, she is gazing at another object inaccessible to the viewer. She seems to be totally detached from the process of taking a picture, thus eluding the control of the camera in objectifying her. She also confronts and interrogates the viewer by not only evading the camera but also gazing at this other object far removed from the sight of the viewer and even from the immediate vicinity of the photographer. Here, the object of the gaze-and the subject of the photograph- becomes the viewer in turn with the power to look, not by confronting the camera and in turn the viewer but by engaging with another object away from the grasp of the viewer, thus challenging his power to gaze. Therefore the object of the male gaze-the native woman-

is displaced, as there is no sole viewing object or an exclusive viewer. Cameron maps out alternative objects/spaces that are not within the command of the spectator standing outside of the frame. In this process, she assigns a spectatorial position to her native subject apparently caught within the frame, thus interrupting the whole framework of the viewer flaunting masculine control with the power to look and the passive feminized subject who can only be looked upon. Consequently she breaks the unity of the photographer's gaze (which is considered to be complicit with the spectator's gaze) and that of the spectator.

The woman (Fig.1) is also not depicted as delicate and fragile although her partial nakedness makes her vulnerable to the gaze of the viewer. Moreover Cameron's technique of blurring the distinction between the background and the model actually speaks of a sense of mystery and unavailability. She does not become the locus of the fantasies of the European gaze specifically because she commands a power that is crystallized in her refusal to aesthetically please the European gaze. Perhaps the sensuality embedded in these photographs is unwelcome not because it is not visually pleasing but because it cannot be harnessed and hence controlled. While the eroticism does not incapacitate the native, making her compliant and demure, it speaks more of this intimacy between the subject and the photographer. Cameron does not view her model as a client would with the intention to possess but rather sees her as an autonomous individual. The woman model is not monopolized into satisfying the fantasies of the spectator. Cameron makes no such allowances when she threatens to disrupt the pleasure of viewing the spectator has so far taken for granted. In this respect, Cameron's affinity for her model becomes visible.

For instance, fig.1 demonstrates this intimacy well. The woman is not frozen within the photographic space, forced into interaction with the voyeuristic gaze of the spectator but is staged so as to convey the impression that she has the ability to move away from the retarding gaze whenever she wishes by commanding her own gaze. Such license granted to the native is curiously empowering. It speaks more of an individuality than of a stereotype of either the sexually promiscuous native woman- who poses a threat to the European male who finds her attractive but repulsive at the same time- or the submissive dependent female. Further, the photographer's gaze under which the woman's gaze operates does not negate the native woman's look, thus opening up spaces of intimacy between the photographer and the object of the photograph. Such fissures undermine the notion of the photographer as an owner of the subject he depicts and hence commands. The photographer does not collaborate with the spectator in these photographs. These novel spaces disclose alternative modes of visualizing the relationship between the photographer and subject.

Such complexity embedded in the photograph can only be explained through the triangulated relationship between the photographer, the native woman model and the male gaze. Cameron problematizes the inevitable identification/collaboration between the photographer and the spectator by clearly assuming the role of the photographer but not that of the spectator. Thus, the woman model's refusal to meet the viewer's gaze is not a sign of her passivity. It is as if the viewer almost does not exist, an individual whose masterly eye sums up the object he owns. The Sri Lankan woman is almost oblivious to the presence of the spectator because she need not fashion herself according to his dictates. In this sense, she is not confined within the photographic space because

Cameron fashions other sites that the woman model can inhabit without necessary intrusion by the spectator. The native is not being observed by the woman photographer and therefore is not subject to surveillance where she must either accept or refuse the male viewer's inviting gaze.

In this picture, the light and dark play dramatically across her face but the brightness of her gaze speaks of her refusal to be an inanimate object. But while the lighting tries to reveal, it also tries to hide. For example, in fig.2, by actually not differentiating between the woman's clothes and the background of vines and leaves, Cameron lets the native woman almost blend into her backdrop. She is made to almost twine around the leaves, the color of the vines, the sari and her bare flesh being similar. One hand actually disappears into the hedge while the other emerges from the vine. In this instance, one cannot distinguish between the hand and the leaf, if not for the jutting out of the index finger and the thumb. Likewise, her hair becomes a part of a bunch of leaves as it is difficult to discern which is what. Even the way her lower body vanishes into the darkness serves to highlight this tendency of blurring the forms of her body and allowing her to disappear into the frame. The result is that she is inaccessible to the spectator who seeks his own sexual empowerment through the imaginary possession of the object. What is quite striking and somewhat odd is Cameron's wish to not totally envelope the woman in vine leaves and her decision to leave one portion of the backdrop bare. This blank space is highlighted by the way the bamboo shoots spring upward, focusing on the bare background right above. While it definitely emphasizes and almost blends in with her bare back, it also speaks of Cameron's wish to hint at another visual space beyond the frame. This space speaks of another reality from which this native

woman emerges. Thus she is not literally fixed in space and time in terms of the photographic frame. It attributes a sense of freedom to the woman. It hints at a past as well as a future. In other words, she has an identity of her own, and therefore is in no need of being assigned one. Her assured stride across the frame speaks of her confidence of that power.

Even in fig.3, while the picture does reveal, it also blurs the obvious. Once again, the woman blends into the backdrop. She seems to be seated against the hedge and almost merges with the leaves that surround her. There is no distinct difference between the plants and the shades of the sari that she wears. Her sari blends in with the color of the leaves whereas her bared flesh takes on the hue of the bamboo shoots. One arm seems to appear out of the hedge whereas one disappears into the leaves. Her hair falls down her back but vanishes from the eye of the viewer after a certain point. In addition, the fact that the native woman is not clearly cut off from the picture adds to this elusive quality, leaving the spectator in disarray.

This photograph of the Kalutara woman is clearly different from Cameron's English women who are placed in gardens. These European models are clearly captured within the photographic frame, although in a different manner. Their eyes suggest pain and sorrow, hinting at the tragic. On the other hand, the almost impassive expression on the Sri Lankan woman's face hints at a sense of defiance. While the other two English women models almost appeal to the viewer to share in their experience, this picture clearly makes no attempt at an emotional connection between viewer and subject, thus breaking down the dominance of the gaze. This actually serves to empower this portrait because although the woman seems to be captured and her body on display, it still speaks

of a power that the viewer cannot participate in. Therefore, although the compressed visual space guides the viewer to exclusively gaze at her body, it still ceases to be pleasurable as her eyes do not sanction or appeal to such action.

Thus Cameron's lays claim to a distinct gaze as she simultaneously assigns her native model her own look. Yet the dilemma is whether Cameron can ever position herself as a spectator in the first place, even in terms of an artist, let alone adopt either a male gaze or a woman's look. As Griselda Pollock points out, while women came to be seen predominantly in their reproductive roles, the artist was defined as "anti-domestic", the result being this contradiction between the "ideological identities of the artist and woman"(49). Therefore, the woman artist must first resolve this inherent contradiction within herself whereby she becomes both passive as well as active. In this respect, Cameron literally has access to command a male gaze as a photographer because she has the power to "capture" women within her lenses. Yet Cameron questions the one-directional male gaze by refusing to objectify the woman, at least whole-heartedly.

Indira Ghose discusses how a woman's gaze is fractured, a "notion of subjectivity as shifting and contradictory"(60). At first, Cameron seems to hold such a fractured gaze, where she is not in absolute command of either the male gaze or the imperial one. She cannot assume the privileged status of the spectator or voyeur as "women were after all both observer and observed...subject to the regulatory gazes of their own patriarchal society"(Ghose 60). But Cameron cannot escape being subject to the scrutinizing gaze of the patriarchal society monitoring her every action as a white woman. She becomes doubly surveilled as a threatening force, being a woman as well as a woman with colonial affiliations who does not fall into the category of the helpless decorative white woman.

Then the question is whether Cameron can ever adopt a woman's look to picture the Sri Lankans. Laura Mulvey elaborates on the gaze of the female spectator who constantly vacillates between a male perspective (engaging in the pleasures of voyeurism) and the female perspective, engaging in a narcissistic identification with the woman depicted. Cameron's Sri Lankan pictures invite such an analysis, especially when Cameron tries to objectify the woman model adopting the male gaze but at the same time begins to relate to her native by identifying with the Sri Lankan woman. Yet Cameron is also essentially different in that she cannot comfortably oscillate between the two points of view, as she does not occupy either position with authority and confidence.

Ghose aptly points out, "what needs to be scrutinized is the site from which women gaze, that is the position of power in which they are located"(9). Cameron is surely not the typical woman in the colonies, especially with her privileged but limited access to hold the male gaze. But she is not the quintessential white woman in the colony either, whose gaze cannot be differentiated from the act of gazing in an imperialist fashion. Her superior position to her photographic subject (the native) in terms of race assigns her an imperial gaze. But she cannot be relegated to the category of the usual white woman traveler/photographer in the colonies, as she herself is no stranger to the Indian subcontinent. Cameron seems to occupy a somewhat dubious position in the colonies, especially considering the status of Anglo-Indians amongst Victorian society. Hence, her Anglo-Indian origins deny her an untainted white woman's look.

This predicament where Cameron is denied footing to access any gaze with conviction situates her in a peculiar position as a woman with undesirable racial affiliations whose gaze is constantly being policed by her male counterparts. Cameron

attempts to make her gaze partially that of the colonized, the result being that the native woman need not return the gaze of the white photographer as there is no tension between the two. This bond is obvious through the self-confidence she grants her native woman, a self-confidence Cameron partially holds emanating from her status as a professional woman photographer. This singular position grants her a different gaze, which actually creates an intimacy between the subject and the photographer. This is not an intimacy enacted between a desiring male spectator and a willing female subject where the latter must succumb to the impositions of the former. Cameron redefines intimacy to an extent when she relinquishes her hold on the woman model and ceases to become watchful over her subject by letting the native woman assume her own look.

Jackie Stacey argues against Mulvey's theoretical position of the gaze by raising the question of the pleasures of the female spectator. She discusses the possible fascination with the other woman which is "neither purely identification with the other woman, nor desire for her in the strictly erotic sense of the word. It is a desire to see, to know, to become more like an idealized feminine other"(115). Cameron seems to relate to the Sri Lankan pictures in such an unpossessive manner. The somewhat taut posture with the head held stiff is an indication that the woman commands power over herself. Joanne Lukitsh in her discussion of Cameron's Sri Lankan photographs in "Simply Pictures of Peasants: Artistry, Authorship and Ideology in Julia Margaret Cameron's Photography in Sri Lanka, 1875-1879" sees similar confidence in the figure of the "half-length portrait of woman". Lukitsh observes that the "low camera angle gives stature to her presence, even as this representation of her self-possession is undermined by the stiff gesture of the fingers of her hand"(5). She observes that Cameron is employing "mixed

aesthetic modes" or "incompatible visual codes"(5) in her Sri Lankan images when her "authority as a woman colonizer over the colonized subject she represented was partial and the Sri Lankan woman model's look evidence of a resistance to it"(5). Lukitsh registers such ambivalence in the representation of the Sri Lankan as evidence of Cameron's incomplete authority over the native. Yet this leads the discussion away from a possible intimacy between the photographer and the photographic object, which is a central component in Cameron's Sri Lankan prints.

Of course Cameron seeks to differentiate herself from the native woman somewhat by continuously contradicting her own gaze, viewing the native as inferior, evident in her attempts to objectify these women slightly. The continual tension in Cameron, where she seems to objectify the native by stripping away agency from her but simultaneously complicates such a venture by empowering the Sri Lankan woman can only be understood by reflecting on Cameron's own attitude to the colony itself. Although from a privileged background, Cameron truly blossomed not in India where she spent her first 32 years but in England. Her photographic successes were all enacted on English soil with access to exhibitions and recognition in the field of photography. Thus the decision to once again leave for the colonies would have perhaps been a disheartening one for Cameron.[23] The biographies suggest that the departure was purely for Charles' sake, although Cameron indicates in several places that it was an opportunity to be with her sons. Giving up her work, friends and familiar surroundings would have then been a difficult decision for Cameron, which perhaps fostered a sense of hostility to the colonies.

A sense of distaste towards the colonies, especially India would have been intensified by her own unusual looks, which set her apart from her family noted for their

good looks. After all, her mother was considered a beauty and so were her sisters. Hopkinson makes an interesting remark, that Cameron "remained all her life devoted to the Indian subcontinent although her olive complexion and dark hair need not denote the mixed blood that has been sometimes ascribed to her"(34). This is intriguing, especially when considering certain racial theories that were in circulation at this time.[24] If Cameron's olive skin was a constant reminder of the debilitating effects of the climate, and she hints at such racial degeneration (something Victorian society would have found conspicuous enough), her rejection of any colonial affiliation would be understandable, manifest in her photography of the native. This might have contributed to a possible resentment against her own upbringing in the colonies, which would have led her to exhibit photographs of individuals such as Edward John Eyre.[25] Perhaps she seems to highlight certain differences to establish and confirm her own racial self. Cameron after all tries to distance herself from the native woman by depicting the Sri Lankan as sensuous and sexual, qualities that the Victorian England only associated with working class prostitutes.

But what is never taken into account is that Cameron perhaps needed to declare her English affiliations whilst in England, especially as she was a woman from the colonies.[26] Therefore, Cameron's decision to select particular pictures when she does cannot be judged without looking into her own vulnerable position as a woman who probably needed to exhibit the portraits of famous men at the time to gain recognition and attention. So while Cameron seemingly rejects her colonial ties while in England, she appears to identify with the native while in Sri Lanka, this tension being apparent in her photographs of the Sri Lankans. She constantly tries to disrupt the binaries established by

English women in the colonies by trying to align herself with the native manifest in her social behavior to the native as well as her depiction of the native through photography. In other words, an alien "other" does not exist in terms of Cameron's relationship to the colonies. This is suggested in part in her blatant adoption of Indian dress.[27] Nupur Chaudhuri elucidates how the Anglo Indians adopted a mode of racial exclusiveness and rejected "Indian objects in their colonial homes and refused Indian dishes in their diets"(232) and would not wear Indian dress. So while the memsahibs were refusing curry and Indian attire to maintain the cultural divide between the ruler and the ruled, Cameron's wish to embrace such Indian dresses by adopting them in various ways while in the colonies as well as in England as well articulates her wish to break down those barriers between the colonizer and the colonized.

Hence there is a simultaneous acceptance and denial of connections to the colonies that is reflected in Cameron's Sri Lankan photographs where she seems to strip the native models of agency but only to accord them power consequently. The fact that she chooses to depict the native in a manner that is both enabling and disabling perhaps reflects her own fragile position as a woman, who must negotiate a space for herself between empowerment and disempowerment. After all, not only was Cameron a woman affiliated with the colonies, but also just a woman in the colonies, although being European elevated her to a position of power over the colonized. Cameron was clearly dependent on her sons for financial assistance, and Hopkinson discusses how in one instance, she was disappointed with her son Ewen's decision concerning the allocation of money. Cameron, then, possibly sees herself as marginalized and powerless, not only in Victorian society, being somewhat of an outsider, but also in the colonies where

European women did not have the same access to photograph the colonial body as European men did. Although such constraints were partly due to the Indian Mutiny of 1857 [28], these racial tensions would have carried south to colonial Sri Lanka where the dusky native might have instilled fear in the English. The 1848 rebellion in Sri Lanka did have an impact on the British consciousness when the Kandyan peasants revolted against the British regime, which left many Singhalese natives slaughtered by the British officials. Therefore the set of conventions that a white woman had to submit to in India would have restricted Cameron's movements in Sri Lanka as well although Sri Lanka never became a space ridden with such intense racial anxiety. Cameron is not an agent but an object, almost as powerless as her Sri Lankan woman model is, as an imperial subject. Then, such a predicament where Cameron is not entirely in command of her location in Sri Lanka introduces the idea that by looking at the "other", she was actually looking at her own self. [29]Therefore just as she carves a niche for her native model within the photographic space in several ways, Cameron herself seems to try to bargain such a space that allows her to express her own conflicting identity.

Cameron then is situated in a peculiar position. She is not simply a woman brandishing a camera, which only males have handled so far in the colonies. She embodies in herself the tag of a professional photographer, a career which had been set aside for men. Romita Ray points out that for most British women in the subcontinent, "sketching and painting were confined to genteel pastimes undertaken in privacy" although "a simple hobby to keep the eye and hand occupied proved to be an agreeable solution for adjusting to a foreign landscape"(89). Cameron's standing in terms of

photography makes her a misfit amongst other women who were dabbling in such projects merely to while away the time.

Thus, Cameron's portraits emerge out of certain anxieties that are embedded in Cameron herself. She cannot simply be categorized as a colonial photographer especially because there are no indications on her part either to make photography a commercial venture or to send out her portraits for display. Moreover, Cameron cannot maintain the distance necessary between the colonial photographer and the native subject as she herself constantly shifts ground from the position of photographer to that of the native. Her Sri Lankan portraits clearly demonstrate her struggle to distance herself from the native amidst her strong desire to identify with the woman and therefore not picture her at all in the sense of a detached photographer. Since Cameron inhabits somewhat of an in-between space, she is unable to retain the distinction between her own self and the "other". This threatens to disrupt her photographs, in which the photographic subject -the native- shifts back and forth from agency to powerlessness. For Cameron to visualize the native as the "other' is indeed a difficult task as she is always already "othered" in this Victorian discourse of difference. Cameron does not occupy a stable self in order to picture the native.

Yet Cameron makes amends by somehow attempting to allocate different viewing positions to her native model and experimenting with spaces within the photograph to locate the woman model. Therefore the native woman's need for her own space to articulate her own subjectivity within the photographic space becomes emblematic of Cameron's own desire for such a site of expression. But what is crucial to the understanding of Cameron's location is the site of Sri Lanka itself. Sri Lanka, or British

Ceylon, occupies an altogether different space as far as the colonial imaginary is concerned. Notwithstanding the fact that British India's mere size would have overshadowed her neighbor, Sri Lanka still played her part as a major supplier of tea and coffee to her imperial masters. But what is more interesting is that Sri Lanka became a point of transition for many travelers during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, mainly a site for transit from one destination to another, usually from the center to the periphery although Sri Lanka itself is a peripheral locale.[30] It is then a liminal space or an in-between space where Cameron finds herself in terms of location. Cameron herself is the paradigmatic liminal subject who has no unified sense of a racial or a gendered identity. She cannot be isolated solely as the conventional white woman in the colonies as she is a professional photographer, and as far as her racial self is concerned, she occupies an elusive space, having inhabited both Anglo-India as well as Victorian England, and not belonging completely to either world. She has no distinct sense of home where she actually belongs as she has been denied presence both in Anglo India and England. Then such a liminal space as Sri Lanka allows Cameron to discard the banner of pro-empire that she carries to continuously assert her 'true' Englishness. While Cameron simultaneously is subject to a myriad of gazes in England and India, Sri Lanka provides her an outlet where she can represent her own vision, although she can never escape being constantly observed. Sri Lanka, to an extent, provides this woman photographer with an alternative space to refine and redefine herself through her work.

Such an alternative space perhaps lets Cameron rethink a different perspective. While standing on such a threshold transiting from one state to another, Cameron articulates a different outlook through her Sri Lankan photographs. There is a moment of

disjunction when the boundaries dissolve, when Cameron is ready to move into a different viewpoint. Perhaps this very disjunction is the cause for the constant ambivalences in the photographs, where she tries to objectify her native subject. It is at these severing moments that the male gaze colludes with the imperial gaze somewhat and foreshadows the sari clad native woman who is depicted as "improperly" dressed carrying traces of the savage, needing the civilizing presence of the white European male. Yet this is not to disregard the fact that Cameron's particular look, despite the ambivalences, is a look that actually sees the native. While colonies were places for not only the visual consumption but also the literal sexual consumption of native bodies, the native woman's body becomes the site of definition and affirmation of white male sexual potency and superiority. Within such a context, both the male gaze and the imperial eye cannot see as they are too preoccupied in their own subjectivities. This is not to say that their gaze is totally invalid. Only that their masterly gaze has overlooked the photographic subject and has merely eyed the native woman in order to fashion their own redemptive narrative. Yet Cameron's look is far more complex, especially as any claim to either an imperial or male gaze has always been denied to her.

Norman Bryson distinguishes between the gaze and the glance, arguing that the gaze which is related to the term "regard" is "vigilant" and "masterful". The gaze indicates "an impatient pressure within vision, a persevering drive which looks outward with mistrust' and "actively seeks to confine what is always on the point of escaping or slipping out of bounds"(93). Thus Bryson theorizes the gaze as leaning towards "violence (penetrating, piercing and fixing)"(93). Such a phallic gaze is differentiated from the "glance" which is not as violent and probing as the gaze but is more " a furtive or

sideways look", not disembodied from the act of viewing. The glance "does not seek to bracket out the process of viewing, nor in its own techniques does it exclude the traces of the body of labor"(94). It is clear that Cameron does not enact Bryson's gaze as she clearly tries to avoid casting her native woman as a passive victim, subject to the visual thrust of the voyeur. Yet Cameron does not employ the glance either even though she keeps away from the "cold" and impersonal act of the gaze. Although her work is akin to the glance where the process of viewing is not erased and she is involved in the act of creation, evident in the manner in which she sees her own subjectivity through the native model, Cameron's photographic representations are clearly not attempts to view the Sri Lankan. She is too deeply involved in her Sri Lankan woman to ever look at her. Implicated in the act of looking is some sense of distance away from the subject that Cameron is clearly unable to maintain in her photographs.

But Cameron need not necessarily look in order to visualize her native woman model. On the contrary, she experiences this process of seeing by never participating in the act of looking. Perhaps this is why her photographs visualize the woman in unconventional ways. For instance in fig.2, the woman's head is cut off from the frame, which is unusual. Such cropping in a photographic portrait is awkward and defies the viewer's expectations. It could be assessed as carelessness or an error on the part of the photographer. Yet it also reflects an uncalculated process of seeing where some signs miss the eye of the beholder. If Cameron did look in the sense of analyzing the object, she would have incorporated such elements into her images. Yet seeing the native woman would imply an interest in certain elements and not on others. Therefore, Cameron seems to betray a fascination in the native woman's sense of motion rather than in arresting her

entire figure on to the image. Cameron is not deliberately subjecting the woman to a debilitating gaze by fixing her body on to the plane of the photograph. The woman's body is not dissected on the photographic surface by a surgical eye. Instead certain things are left outside of the purview of the picture, apparently not seized by the photograph. The result is proximity between the photographer and the Sri Lankan woman. Further, seeing also diverts power away from the one who looks to the one who is the object of that look. Whereas the gaze/glance suggest visual power embodied in the individual who directs his eye towards the object, seeing implies a shared sense of power. It is a shared activity where more power lies in the object, which permits the act of seeing. It is some element in the object itself that drags the eye and consents to the act of seeing. Thus seeing becomes more reliable as it has almost occurred by accident.

Thus Cameron's most complex work seems to have taken place in the colonies after all although many biographies have suggested otherwise. Her peculiar positionality helps Cameron formulate a series of photographs where she demonstrates unpossessive intimacy towards her native. This affirms that Cameron never becomes merely a spectator. She simply cannot as she is unable to step back and look at the native. She is drawn to the native, which disrupts any attempt to gaze at the woman model, and reveals a new mode of visualizing the Sri Lankan. Her Sri Lankan prints reveal Cameron invoking the native and attempting to perhaps explore the many facets to her figure. As mentioned before, this introduces the idea that Cameron need not look at all in order to picture the native. Such a series of photographs of English women came out of a long standing relationship between Cameron and the model. Yet this cannot be simplistically discerned as Cameron's fascination with the Sri Lankan woman. The Sri Lankan pictures

reveal a complexity of her subject that Cameron was perhaps trying to perceive herself. The multiple images of the Sri Lankan suggest a depth in the colonial subject that hitherto had been unacknowledged by many a colonial photographer. While colonial subjects were considered simplistic objects easily identified, categorized and classified, Cameron sees plurality in the woman that she cannot grasp as easily. It is almost as if the Sri Lankan woman cannot be mapped onto a photograph in just one shot to elicit her character. It is significant that Cameron pictures the woman in different poses and settings, in and out of the studio. For instance, fig.1 portrays the Sri Lankan sitter gazing into the distance, and the left side of her face is exposed to the viewer along with her eyes in order to create an intense effect. Fig.3 of the "Ceylonese woman, Kalutara" features the native completely turned away from the camera. Fig.2 allows movement to the model, where her face is not clearly discernible but the body is. It is as if Cameron rotates the woman assigning her the power of the gaze and freedom of movement each time, yet dissatisfied with each attempt. This intertextual relationship between the photographs shows how Cameron glimpses the many possibilities of seeing this woman. It seems as if each time Cameron sees the model, she sees a different aspect of the Sri Lankan she wishes to represent. Cameron persists in attempting to fathom what she sees instead of using the image to aid her view of herself. She sees limitations in showing the native woman as a frozen object and invites the eye to see the intricacy in these photographs. The tensions arise when she herself gets caught in a web of gazes -male, imperial and her own shifting gaze that surfaces in order to escape the patriarchal gazes -resulting in ambivalence.

Endnotes

[1] For one of the very few discussions on Cameron's Sri Lankan photographs, see Joanne Lukitsh, "Simply Pictures of Peasants": Artistry, Authorship and Ideology in Julia Margaret Cameron's Photography in Sri Lanka, 1875-1879"

[2] For a survey of conventions see Joanne Lukitsh, Julia Margaret Cameron

[3] Violet Hamilton, 41.

[4] Reproduced in Lukitsh, Cameron 71.

[5] For a discussion of measures adopted to photograph the colonial body, see Anne Maxwell, 38-59.

[6] For a discussion on how certain natives like aboriginal women were forced to pose naked, see Maxwell, 140.

[7] Lukitsh, Cameron 121.

[8] Gernsheim, 160.

[9] For a more extensive discussion on photographers of 19th-century Ceylon see Raheem and Thome, 9-41.

[10] Raheem and Thome state that photographs of W.L.H. Skeen were acclaimed at international exhibitions and that "Skeen was not the only photographer who attained international status; photographers like Cave and Andree too achieved recognition and acceptance"(22).

[11] Gernsheim notes how Cameron competed with her contemporaries at exhibitions and Brian Hill points out that "Julia was always eager to get her work shown to the public in any photographic exhibition"(126).

[12] Marianne North, 314.

[13] See a discussion of this in James R. Ryan, 45-98.

[14] Raheem and Thome, 17.

[15] Falcon and Raheem, 20.

[16] See P de Silva, 2.

[17] In many respects, Cameron's depictions of the English women cannot be seen as satisfactory. Hopkinson regards the "heavenly" purity of the English models as the only means at hand for Cameron to empower the women in any way: "fantasy characters like these paradoxically allowed female models greater scope for individual expression than they had in being themselves"(16). While Cameron's famous men are rarely reconfigured as mythical or allegorical figures, her fair women can hardly pose as themselves. Nancy Armstrong argues that the "semi-transparent otherworldliness" apparent in Cameron's English women hints at an interiority: "transparency in a woman is the sign of individualism, the transformation of her body into a sign of the moral and emotional qualities contained within that body"(112). Yet the very need for transformation into exalted figures implies that they lack autonomy as individuals. Their otherworldliness not only disables them but also purges them of agency and desire. Hopkinson's observation that these women are depicted as "alien to the worlds of power, politics and intellect"(110) further reinforces the view that they are far from autonomous individuals. While the European women seem to be confined in their mystical, unreal attire, the Sri Lankan woman is less restricted in that she poses in her own dress, the sari.

[18] Gordon Baldwin, Roger Fenton: Pasha and Bayadere (Los Angeles: Getty Museum Studies on Art, 1996) 87.

[19] Henry W. Cave, 86.

[20] Griselda Pollock argues that by the nineteenth century, women were securely confined to a domestic sphere, and that "femininity was exclusively domestic and maternal"(48). She shows how "the category woman was limited to those familial positions" and when women transgressed those clearly defined spaces, they "were penalized for it and treated as unnatural, unwomanly and unsexed"(48).

[21] Sen argues that this 'immodest garment' was "denigrated for its transparency and invoked as a signifier of 'native' female libidousness as well as the sensual moorings of Indian culture"(57).

[22] Most of Leighton's and his contemporary Tadema's work employs classical rippling drapery. For instance in Leighton's *Flaming June* (1895) "the glowing diaphonous draperies draw attention to the body beneath, revealing the breast and thigh, and heightening the erotic impact"(Barringer XX). Even Leighton's earlier drawings such as *Electra at the Tomb of Agamemnon* (1869) and *Greek Girls picking up Pebbles by the Sea* (1871) involve a classical style that perhaps was noted by Cameron.

[23] Gernsheim notes how Cameron was in the midst of illustrating Tennyson's "Idylls of the King" when the Camerons suddenly left for the colonies. Hopkinson explores Cameron's reaction to relocating in Ceylon and concludes that Cameron's feelings were mixed, being somewhat caught between the need to reunite with her sons in Ceylon and keeping close ties to her friends at Freshwater. Hopkinson states that Cameron was at the "height of her professional success"(79) when her husband's health failed which compelled the family to go back to the East.

[24] Ann Laura Stoler elaborates on these real or imagined concerns over "racial survival"(355) and "degeneracy"(355). Stoler describes this fear surrounding the physical

and moral degeneration and miscegenation of the White European race in the colonies where tropical climates were said to cause low fertility, permanent sterility amongst the European races. According to Stoler, such fears of physical and sexual contamination were rampant, and hill stations were actually a means of seclusion, providing European like environments.

[25] See Jeff Rosen, 158-187. In this article, he actually argues that Cameron utilized some of her photographs of individuals such as Edward John Eyre and Thomas Carlyle "overtly to affirm both the justness and justice of British imperialism"(158) during controversial times although these photographs were embedded with inconsistencies and anxieties. Rosen discusses Cameron's "celebration of the 'heroic' members of the Eyre defense Committee"(159) and her pictures of the Prince Alamayou of Abyssinia as a sign of her endorsement of harsh actions taken in the colonies, in spite of the debate in England about Eyre's tactics. Eyre's brutal suppression of the rebellion in Jamaica was criticized by many including the "Jamaica Committee". Yet some supported Eyre, especially people like Carlyle whose photographs Cameron exhibited boldly in 1868. Rosen sees Cameron's move to exhibit Eyre and Carlyle along with her other allegorical photographs as testimony of her need to depict Eyre as heroic. Thus the fact that she shared the sentiments of Carlyle that the "Almighty Maker has appointed the [black] to be a servant"(164) and Eyre's belief that "the negroes form a low state of civilization" and "could not properly be dealt with in the same manner as the peasantry of a European country"(Rosen 165) introduce this idea that Cameron perhaps did not have much regard for the "other" she encountered in the colonies. Also See Julia Margaret Cameron, "Annals of My Glass House, 15. In this, Cameron's attitude to the colonies becomes

evident in her account of her various correspondences with Sir John Herschel. She writes once in a letter, "I was then residing in Calcutta, and scientific discoveries sent to that *then benighted land* were water to the parched lips of the starved" (15, my emphasis).

[26] Anne Maxwell develops Stoler's ideas further and elaborates that colonial settlers who were "morally suspect" were "forced to imitate the centre's own representational practices if they wanted to be accepted as 'true' Europeans"(4).

[27] Hopkinson says that "even in the most ordinary circumstances her habit of wearing numerous skirts, swathed about with lace mantillas and oriental shawls, struck many observers as, at least, unusual"(76). Even Marianne North observes Cameron's dress: "the lady herself with a lace veil on her head and flowing draperies. Her oddities were most refreshing"(314).

[28] See a discussion of the constraints placed by the Indian mutiny in Sinha, 98-119.

[29] See Ghose,15.

[30] Raheem and Thome mention "Ceylon's geographical location and the vital role it played in the Indian Ocean trade routes"(22) during the nineteenth century: "In the years before air travel, virtually every passenger plying between Europe and Asia (and also Australia) had to pass through the ports of Galle or Colombo before continuing their journey"(22).

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