

Reterritorialising Literary Studies: Deconstructing the Scripts of Empire

Shanthini Pillai

Abstract

In this article, I demonstrate the ways in which archival material can be gainfully employed within literary studies. Focusing on the figure of the Indian coolie of colonial Malaya, I argue that adopting such an interdisciplinary paradigm is a necessary bridge to aid the quest for the story of the pioneer Indian immigrant experience for its trail stretches across two terrains of narrativisation, one historical, the other literary. As I seek out the texts that have constructed the base of the sign-system that has in many ways locked the subject in question within its confining structures, I also propose to read them against the grain, to dislodge their deeply embedded discursive pillars. In other words, I will proceed with what is primarily a deconstructive reading of the colonialist sign-systems of the coolie. The article thus demonstrates the reterritorialising of literary studies as it excavates the scripts of empire buried within the terrain of history through the mechanisms of literary deconstruction, thus re-reading history as literature.