

Decolonizing Seascapes: Imaginaries and Absences on an Island Hub

Rapti Siriwardane-de Zoysa

Abstract

This paper calls for the need to go beyond an understanding of oceans, seas and littoral spaces as merely territories that feature in post/colonial imaginaries of exploration, trade and conquest. In grappling with some of the ways with which to “decolonize” seascape epistemologies, I begin with the significance of marginalized knowledge systems via imaginaries, and their diverse ways of knowing and being in the marine realm, as opposed to the terrene. Drawing on postcolonial Ceylon/Sri Lanka, I explore the question of how some of its more visibly contemporary articulations of (is)landness retain a distinct inward-looking land-based imaginary despite its self-referential seascape identities as a historical maritime “hub” and a neoliberal tourist destination, while having further peripheralized its diverse oceanic/littoral memories and knowledge systems. Furthermore I question the very lived implications on retaining elemental land-sea distinctions in everyday life, particularly in coastal and island contexts.

Key words: coastal and marine epistemologies; decoloniality and border thinking; knowledge hierarchies; island studies