From the seventeenth to twentieth centuries, approximately 380,000 transportation convicts journeyed to and around locations across the British Empire. This article explores the scale, reach and significance of these convict flows in the period after 1788, arguing for a transnational history of penal transportation in the Australian colonies and Indian Ocean. It quantifies convict numbers, and maps convict destinations, providing comparative data on their intra-imperial character to construct a new cartography of criminal justice and Empire. Focusing on Asian convict flows, this enables an articulation of the relationship between transportation, population management and repression, as well as other forms of coerced labour migration, including African and Asian enslavement and indenture. The history of penal transportation proposed here thus moves beyond an exploration of its role in the outward metropolitan expansion of Empire, and towards an appreciation of its importance in labour extraction and governance within the larger imperial world.

For over three hundred years during the seventeenth to twentieth centuries, around 380,000 transportation convicts journeyed to and around the plantations, penal settlements and penal colonies of the British Empire (Table 1). The first early-modern transportations were from Britain and Ireland to the Americas, including Bermuda and the Caribbean islands, which together received around 69,000 convicts. They were often indentured into servitude for fixed terms, and worked on plantations alongside African slaves. The American colonies were closed to convicts following the declaration of Independence in 1776, and for a short time transportation continued to the forts and trading posts of West Africa, which received in total about one thousand convicts.
In 1788, following the end of transportation to Africa, Britain established its first penal colony in the Antipodes, in New South Wales (NSW, 1788–1840), followed by Van Diemen’s Land (VDL, 1816–53), Norfolk Island (1825–55), Port Table 1. Convict transportation flows in the British Empire, 1615–1939.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Origin</th>
<th>Destination</th>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Britain and Ireland</td>
<td>American and Caribbean colonies</td>
<td>1615–1789</td>
<td>69,100</td>
</tr>
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<td>Military service</td>
<td>1766–1826</td>
<td>15,000</td>
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<td>British colonies</td>
<td>1766–1816</td>
<td>832</td>
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<td>New South Wales</td>
<td>1788–1839</td>
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<td>Norfolk Island</td>
<td>1825–1853</td>
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<td>Britain and Ireland</td>
<td>Port Phillip</td>
<td>1844–1849</td>
<td>2,064</td>
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<td>Britain and Ireland</td>
<td>Western Australia</td>
<td>1850–1868</td>
<td>9,669</td>
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<tr>
<td>British colonies</td>
<td>Australian colonies</td>
<td>1807–1868</td>
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<td>Britain and Ireland</td>
<td>Bermuda</td>
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<td>Britain and Ireland</td>
<td>Gibraltar</td>
<td>1842–1874</td>
<td>4,618</td>
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<td>Bengal and Madras Presidencies</td>
<td>Amboyna and Bencoolen</td>
<td>1797–1823</td>
<td>2,823</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bengal Presidency</td>
<td>Andaman Islands</td>
<td>1793–1796</td>
<td>265</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bengal, Bombay and Madras Presidencies, and Mysore and Hyderabad</td>
<td>Straits Settlements</td>
<td>1789–1860</td>
<td>11,919</td>
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<td>Bengal and Madras Presidencies</td>
<td>Burma</td>
<td>1830–1860</td>
<td>6,518</td>
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<td>Straits Settlements, Burma and Hong Kong</td>
<td>Bombay and Madras Presidencies</td>
<td>1836–1864</td>
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<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>Singapore and Penang</td>
<td>1846–1856</td>
<td>404</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>Labuan</td>
<td>1851–1858</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British India and Ceylon</td>
<td>Mauritius</td>
<td>1815–1836</td>
<td>1,462</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bombay Presidency</td>
<td>Aden</td>
<td>1841–1848</td>
<td>150</td>
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<td>Ceylon</td>
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<td>1858–1866</td>
<td>700</td>
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<td>British India inc. Burma, and Mysore and Hyderabad</td>
<td>Andaman Islands</td>
<td>1858–1939</td>
<td>83,313</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>1615–1939</td>
<td>378,783</td>
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</table>

*aEstimate.

*bAn unknown number of convicts were transfers from other Australian colonies.

*cBritish India incorporated the Bengal, Bombay and Madras presidencies; Mysore and Hyderabad were princely states.

*dThe Straits Settlements: Penang, Malacca and Singapore after 1826.

*eBurma: Arakan and the Tenasserim and Martaban Provinces.

Phillip (1844–49) and Western Australia (WA, 1850–68). In total, during the period 1788–1868, the Australian colonies received over 167,000 convict men, women and children, mainly from Britain and Ireland, but also from British colonies such as Jamaica, Mauritius, the Cape Colony, Hong Kong and Canada. Some of the latter were courts martialled European soldiers; others were of Indigenous, African or Asian descent. A smaller but still significant number of convicts from the United Kingdom, just below fourteen thousand, were shipped to the hulks of Bermuda (1824–63) and Gibraltar (1842–74). The Gibraltar hulks also incarcerated a handful of Spaniards, convicted of offences within the jurisdiction of the British garrison (Map 1).

In 1788, a year after the British Crown dispatched convicts to its first Australian settlement in Botany Bay, the governor-general in council in Bengal ordered that Indians sentenced to more than seven years’ imprisonment should serve their sentence in newly acquired Prince of Wales Island (Penang). From 1789, Brahmins convicted of murder (and whose high caste exempted them from execution) were also transported. Subsequently, and simultaneous to transportation from Britain, Ireland and the colonies to Australia, Bermuda and Gibraltar, the East India Company (EIC) sent Indian convicts to penal settlements all over

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the eastern Bay of Bengal. After Penang, the next destination was the Andaman Islands (1793–6), followed by Bencoolen (1797–1823), Amboyna (1800–1, 1810–14?), Malacca (1820–60), Singapore (1825–60) and, after the annexation of Burma, Arakan and the Tenasserim Provinces (1830–60). Convicts were also sent to the Crown colony of Mauritius (1815–36), as well as to the military outpost of Aden (1841–8).

Together the pre-1858 settlements received around twenty-three thousand convicts, mainly from the Indian presidencies of Bengal, Bombay and Madras, but also through local agreements from the princely states of Mysore and Hyderabad. Further transportation flows straddled Crown and Company territories, with convicts shipped not only from India to Mauritius, but from Ceylon to Mauritius and Malacca, and Hong Kong to Sindh, Singapore, Penang and Labuan, in the southern reaches of the South China Sea. Finally, convicts flowed in the other direction too, with over fourteen hundred Chinese, Malay and Burmese convicts from southeast Asia sent to mainland jails in the Bombay and Madras presidencies, including in Mahabaleshwar and the Nilgiri hills. The Company abandoned its first eighteenth-century Andamans settlement due to high rates of sickness. But in 1858, upon the transfer of EIC territories to the British Crown after the great revolt of 1857, the British returned to the Islands to set up a penal colony that remained operational until the Second World War.

Map 2. Convict Transportation in British Asia, 1789–1939
This map does not include the transportation of British convict soldiers to the Australian colonies.
During the period to 1939, including substantial numbers of Burmese and several hundred Indian nationalist prisoners, the Andamans (Port Blair) received just over 83,000 convicts (Map 2).

The Atlantic transportations of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are widely acknowledged as a necessary precursor to understanding the context in which Britain colonised Australia. Convict transportation from the Caribbean, Cape and other colonies to NSW and VDL, and the black convict presence in Australia, is also understood as a key feature of colonial jurisdiction, and of the making of early colonial society. Yet, the hulks of Bermuda and Gibraltar, and in particular the on-transfer of some of their convicts to VDL and WA, figure in only a limited way in imperial, criminal justice and Antipodean history. Moreover, despite its numerical scale and geographical reach, there also remains almost no appreciation of the significance of Asian transportation flows for the history of punishment, governance or coerced labour migration in the British Empire, and only limited understanding of their relationship to Australian convict flows. Indeed, it is commonly held that British imperial transportation ended not with the closure of Gibraltar to convicts in 1874, or the wartime Japanese occupation of the Andaman Islands in 1942, but in 1868, when the WA convict settlement at Swan River closed. Further, it has never been previously recognised that it was not one of the Australian colonies, but the Andaman Islands, which received the greatest number of convicts in the British Empire.

This article contends that the conceptual myopia that separates the Australian colonies from the Indian Ocean is unsustainable when for the first time the numerical scale and geographical extent of pan-imperial Asian convict flows is

brought together, to reveal a transnational imperial history of transportation within the British Empire. Quantifying convict flows and mapping convict destinations across the Empire including British India provides important insights into the trans-imperial use of transported labour, its role as a tool of managing political contingency, and its intersections with other labour flows. Here, I decentre Australia, and refocus our attention on the imperial context at large, acknowledging contemporary connections and points of distinction between transportation flows and penal settlements and colonies, as well as their relationship to other forms of punishment, unfree labour and imperial governance. In this way, pan-imperial convict history can be brought to bear on questions of criminal justice, labour management, and the repression of resistance and revolt. I argue for a transnational history of convict transportation within the British Empire in the period after the occupation of New South Wales in 1788. I seek to compare some of the features of European and Asian convict flows as a means of exploring the penal and colonising intentions of transportation across contexts, appreciating its role as a form of colonial governmentality, and understanding convict work.

I propose that convict transportation was a form of unfree labour that demands contextualisation within other forms of bonded or unfree labour, most especially Asian and African indenture and enslavement. Finally, I show that despite the separate nature of the flows (from and between metropolitan Britain, Ireland and the colonies, and across British Asia), contemporaries made important connections between them, including with respect to convict management practices.

There were sharp peaks in metropolitan and Irish convict flows, including in the years immediately after the occupation of Australia, and during the period

Figure 1. Convict transportation flows, British Empire 1787–1939.
Note: It is likely that this graph underrepresents the inter-colonial transportation of European military convicts to Australia, and pre-1857 Asian convict transportation, because there is no systematic data on either flow.
when convicts were first sent to VDL and WA. At their largest in the mid-1830s, European convict transportations declined until their abolition in 1873 (Figure 1). Transportation rates were connected to a complex knot of factors, including patterns of criminal offending and their economic and social context, rates of execution and incarceration, and legal change; as well as to the management of social and political unrest, and imperial ambitions.

Here, an example from Bermuda is insightful. British convicts were first sent to this important imperial outpost in the Atlantic Ocean in 1824 to work on the construction of the naval dockyard. Linked to Britain’s desire to replace the declining number of slaves with an alternative supply of coerced labour, in the aftermath of the abolition of the slave trade in 1807 and the run-up to the abolition of slavery in British colonies in 1834, convict numbers peaked in 1848. This was during the Great Irish Famine (1845–52), when unprecedented shipments of Irish were also transported. But the high number of convicts at this time was also related to changes in the law, notably the implementation of a three-stage system of punishment. This was first introduced in 1847 when it was enacted that a period of hard labour in Britain or Ireland would be followed by a second stage of punishment in Bermuda or Gibraltar. The law was further developed with the abolition of transportation and the introduction of penal servitude for term convicts (1853), also to be served on the hulks. At this time, convicts in Bermuda and Gibraltar were under sentence of penal servitude (not transportation), but their sentence was enforced in the colonies.

Though they never reached the numerical peaks of European transportations, Asian convict flows show a similar pattern with regard to the rises and falls in annual numbers. Moreover, the comparative data reveals not just a shared chronology in the introduction of convict transportation from British India to southeast Asia, and from Britain and Ireland to the Australian colonies, but a dramatic global reversal in the mid-1810s, and again in the mid-1850s, when European flows went into decline at the same time that Asian flows increased. Asian transportations peaked much later than European ones, in 1859, after which their annual number remained higher than during the first half of the nineteenth century, even in the years immediately preceding the end of transportation in 1939 (Figure 1). As in Britain and Ireland, in the Asian context, law, punishment, labour and imperial ambition were intertwined. However, appreciating the role of penal transportation in the management of political contingency is also of critical relevance to interpreting Asian convict flows, for they were much more closely connected to rebellion, unrest and political change than European ones. I will return to this point below.

Meantime, the Indian penal settlement in Mauritius presents an interesting case of the combination of factors that produced convict flows. In 1811, the EIC abolished sentences of transportation in the Bengal presidency, on the grounds that the regular return of convicts from the penal settlements, claiming indulgent treatment, had removed all fear of it. Unable to cope with the growing jail population, in the context of endemic peasant unrest and consequent judicial sentencing, it reinstituted it two years later. In 1815, after the Napoleonic wars,
when the British took control of Mauritius, governor R.T. Farquhar, former lieutenant-governor of Penang (at the time also a penal settlement), made an immediate request for transportation convicts from Bengal. Following the abolition of the slave trade in 1807, labour was greatly in demand for the road construction necessary for the opening up of the colony for further plantation development. The EIC took the opportunity to empty its jails, shipping almost all available convicts to Mauritius, and the majority of the total number of convicts sent to the colony, between 1815 and 1817. The relatively large number of convicts transported to Mauritius during these years was thus connected to the punishment of rebellion, the previous suspension of the sentence and the consequent accumulation of convicts in Indian jails, as well as Farquhar’s prior experience of convict labour, and planters’ desire for an alternative source of unfree labour in the aftermath of abolition.

There are further connections to be made between enslavement and convictism in EIC Asia. In 1789, shortly after the governor-general of Bengal had ordered the first convict transportations to Penang, the presidency banned slave exports. Later in 1843, the EIC ‘delegalised’ slavery (though it did not emancipate slaves). This was part of its gradual effort to position Company labour relations as more enlightened and thus humanitarian than those of the Caribbean colonies. In Bencoolen and Amboyna, at the turn of the nineteenth century convicts worked side-by-side with slaves on spice plantations, and British administrators argued for convicts as their ideal replacements. Indeed, governor-general Thomas Stamford Raffles’ emancipation of government slaves in Bencoolen in 1818 was succeeded by a four-fold increase in Indian convicts. In Mauritius, though the largest annual flow was in 1815, with the lifting of the suspension of penal transportation in Bengal, 1834 was the year when convicts were present in their largest ever numbers. In the intervening years, convicts and slaves worked together, including on sugar plantations and public works. The figures suggest that with the simultaneous abolition of Bengal slave trading and introduction of Indian convict transportation at the end of the eighteenth century, and the concentration of convict flows to Mauritius after the abolition of the slave trade, the EIC used and supplied convicts in preference to and to

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10 IOR P/136/53: J.W. Rule, superintendent of convicts Bencoolen, to Edward Presgrave, officiating secretary to government Bengal, 7 January 1825.
replace slaves, on infrastructural and other kinds of working gang labour all over southeast Asia and in Mauritius.

If there were moments of convergence between convict transportation, the slave trade and enslavement in British Asia and Mauritius, what of the relationship between Asian convicts and other kinds of migrant workers? It is evident that as territories were annexed and developed, convicts were not an alternative to free labour, but the first choice to build infrastructure and to develop agriculture, mining and other resources. In Burma, for instance, administrators preferred convicts as an apparently cheaper and more efficient, and certainly a more flexible and controllable, alternative to local or seasonal migrant labour. In 1853 the commissioner of Arakan wrote that the local Burmese were either ‘ashamed’ or ‘excessively averse to dig’. He also noted his prior experience of working convict gangs on the roads alongside ‘coolies’ who came to Burma from eastern Bengal during the dry season. Not only was it hard to prevent immigrants from deserting their work, he stated, but convicts were more accustomed to working in gangs, and their labour was far more skilled. Moreover, convicts were highly mobile, with gangs of two or three hundred ready to march out to work at any time, particularly during the rainy season: reclaiming land, making roads, cutting drains, constructing bunds and planting trees.12 More prosaically, perhaps, his assistant noted the coercive means at his disposal in controlling convicts, compared to migrant labourers:

We should not have the hold over coolies that we have over the convicts. If the convicts are idle and neglect their work, there are means to punish them … Not so with coolies. We could certainly cut their pay in cases of idleness but this would most probably be followed by a strike, and the consequence of a large body of men on whom we depend for labour refusing to work in a case of emergency would indeed be serious.13

During the first half of the century, there was not, however, a limitless supply of convicts, with Asian flows usually totalling just a few hundred per year. And so, in 1834, during the Empire-wide search for alternative forms of unfree labour following abolition, the colonies called on the EIC to recruit a much larger number of Indian and Chinese workers under contracts of indenture. Preceding their migration to key locations convicts had cleared land, built roads and pioneered plantation labour. There were multiple points of connection between the two labour flows. Both convicts and indentured labourers appeared in front of a magistrate (for trial or to sign the labour contract), travelled in gangs to their port of embarkation, were kept under restraint in holding depots, and then voyaged overseas by ship where their labour was tied to the government or their employer. Potential migrants viewed the prospect of overseas indenture not as the new system of slavery lamented by British opponents of it, but through

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12 IOR P/144/46: Henry Hopkinson, commissioner of Arakan, to Gordon Young, secretary to government Bengal, 19 August 1853.
13 IOR P/144/46: W.J. Law, second principal assistant commissioner Akyab, to Hopkinson, 5 July 1853.
the lens of what they knew about penal transportation. They confused criminal conviction and indenture, and described convict settlements and the sugar colonies in the same way; as kala pani, over the black waters, or tapu, places of no return. Indian convicts, meantime, appear to have represented their fate not in the language of enslavement, but as a form of Company or military service. Whilst the free populations of Malacca might refer to convicts as ‘humba koom-pace’, or Company slaves, Indian convicts described themselves as Company servants, or sipahis (soldiers), casting the cultural unfamiliarity of penal transportation within more familiar conditions of military recruitment or bondage, particularly for debt.14

The one hundred thousand or so Asian convicts transported around the Indian Ocean during the period 1789–1939 cannot compare numerically to the 2.2 million labourers indentured to plantation and other forms of work across the Empire from the 1830s to the 1920s. Nor are they more than a fraction of the 1.5 million kangani labourers recruited for labour in Ceylon and Malaya, or the fifteen million Indians who circulated around India, Malaya and Burma during 1891–1938.15 And yet, contemporaries recognised the importance of those convicts in developing the communications and cultural capital (including mosques, temples and shops) invaluable to later migrants. Moreover, the prior existence of penal settlements framed labour relations in ways that proved remarkably enduring. The 1875 royal commission on Mauritius, for example, praised the work of transportation convicts, and noted:

The immigrant from India … when he came to Mauritius, was not the entire stranger he was in the West Indies and Demerara, and that may in some measure account for the tenacity with which … the traditions of slavery and forced labour have been adhered to in much of the legislation of the colony.16

As late as 1939, it was claimed that in Burma the preference for Indian convicts for infrastructural work in the middle of the nineteenth century had made manual labour so undesirable that in the long term, it had caused a rise in wages.17 The legacies of convictism for later indentured labour flows mark an important point of distinction between Asian and European transportation. While European convicts succeeded European indentured labour flows to the Americas, Asian convicts forged the economic, social and cultural paths necessary for the introduction of Asian indenture in various Indian Ocean locations.


If intra-imperial penal transportation can be connected to the slave trade, slavery and indentured migration, it was also intertwined with the imperial management of subject populations, or colonial governmentality. I mentioned above that Asian convict flows were far more closely associated with political contingency than metropolitan ones. Here I would like to note that their peak during the entire period 1789–1939 was during the years 1858–9, following the 1857 Indian revolt. Indeed, over ten times the annual average of convicts previously sent to the settlements in Burma and the Straits Settlements were received in the Andamans in those years. Meantime, between 1857 and 1859 the number of convicts in the Tenasserim Provinces doubled and the Straits Settlements confined their largest ever number of convicts. We saw in the example of Mauritian flows that endemic peasant unrest in early nineteenth-century Bengal led to an increased use of transportation sentences. The post-1857 transportations were not without precedent, then. There had been other sharp rises during the Poligar wars (1799–1801), second Anglo-Maratha war (1803–5), Anglo-Sikh wars (1845–6, 1848–9), and Santal rebellion (1855).

It is also important to note that the 1857 revolt underpinned a dramatic rise in indentured labour migration to Mauritius, and precipitated the start of a long-term increase to the West Indian colonies (Table 2).18 Though some of the sharp rises and falls in later Andaman shipments are explained by changing restrictions on the transportation of term convicts, other links between transportation and the larger political context might be made. After the founding of the Indian National Congress (1885) and the Partition of Bengal (1905) convict numbers reached their nineteenth and twentieth-century peaks, with big rises in flows also after the Malabar rebellion (1921).

India was by no means exceptional in this respect. Since at least 1796, following Fédon’s Rebellion in Grenada, the British had used transportation to punish slave resistance and to remove rebellious slaves from the plantation colonies of the Caribbean (Table 3). Historically British Caribbean colonies exchanged their convicts with each other, or sold them into slavery in the Spanish colonies. However, as the latter acquired their independence, and from the 1820s abolished slavery, they refused to receive them.19 Thus the British began to transport their Caribbean convicts intra-colonially.

One later example of Britain’s use of transportation as a means of political repression was the shipment of over one hundred rebel ‘slave-convicts’ from Barbados to Sierra Leone in 1816. They had participated in what became known as Bussa’s rebellion; sparked off by slaves’ belief that following the registry bill (1815), plantation owners were illegally withholding their freedom. After a journey of almost two years, which saw attempts to land them in Honduras

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18 For aggregated figures of emigration from India that argues for an overall rise, see also David Northrup, *Indentured Labor in the Age of Imperialism, 1834–1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 66, 162 (Table A.3).

and near-shipwreck in the Bahamas, the 85 surviving members of the original party finally arrived in the west African colony of Sierra Leone. It was not at this time a penal colony, but it was a site of semi-coerced settlement and unfree labour, of ‘black loyalists’, maroons and illegally trafficked slaves, ‘liberated’ into indenture.\textsuperscript{20} Mainly, though, from the 1810s onwards, colonially convicted convicts were shipped to the Australian penal colonies. The data strongly suggests that transportation remained tied to imperial governance in the Caribbean - as well as in the Cape, and Mauritius. In the former colonies, there was a sharp increase in convict flows following the social changes heralded by slave ‘emancipation’ in 1834. The Mauritian peak came later, in 1843, with transportation a means of managing the growing population of Asian indentured labourers by then in the colony (Table 3).

Enumerating and mapping convict flows enables an articulation of the relationship between penal transportation, coerced labour, and political

\textsuperscript{20} PP 1826-27 (312) Sierra Leone. Report of the commissioners of inquiry into the state of the colony of Sierra Leone, 15; TNA CO267/91 Commission of Enquiry Sierra Leone, 1825–8.
contingency, and its especial use in the latter in the intra-imperial context. Comparative data on the transportation of convict women is also suggestive of the nature of imperial strategic desires – alternatively to create a mobile labour force or to encourage permanent settlement. It is now widely accepted that the settlement of the Australian colonies was part of an outward metropolitan expansion of Empire, against a background of imperial rivalry with the French. Thus women were always an important feature of Australian convict flows. In contrast, convicts were only sent to the Andamans in 1793 after the islands’ initial colonisation, as infrastructural workers. Their female kin did not accompany them.21 When Indian convicts were shipped to Bencoolen, the Company ordered that convicts could take ‘just one wife and a few children’, cautioning against the sending of ‘more numerous families’, and noting that women were not obliged to go.22 It also refused to allow the families of Penang convicts to accompany them. After the men’s sentences expired, they were to be returned to India at government expense, in order to prevent their obtaining the right of domicile on the island.23

From the 1820s, however, Indian penal transportation became more closely associated with colonial settlement. The percentage of convict women in the Straits Settlements and post-1858 Andamans was always lower than that of

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21 Royal Geographical Society Archives JMS/18/45 Appendix F1: Instructions from Governor Charles Cornwallis, Bengal presidency, to Major Alexander Kyd, 18 February 1793.
22 IOR P/129/32: Extract from a letter from the resident at Bencoolen to the board of trade, 15 August 1806; IOR P/129/33: Board of trade to S.T. Goad, registrar judicial department, n.d.
23 IOR P/138/17: J. Anderson, secretary to government Penang, to H. Shakespear, secretary to government Bengal, 5 March 1827; Shakespear to Anderson, 29 March 1827.
NSW (15 per cent) and VDL (18 per cent). This was largely due to the very small number of transportation sentences passed on Indian women: just 127 between 1848 and 1855.24 However, in the 1870s and 1880s, Indian women constituted just over 10 per cent of the total convict population. In this regard, it is interesting to note the gradual increase in the proportion of women in the Straits Settlements (especially Penang and Singapore) after 1850, and their gradual decrease in the Andamans from their 1875 height (Table 4). This was related to the desire to establish a stable labour force via family formation after initial land clearance and infrastructural work in the former, and to colonise and to populate Indigenous lands (represented as terra nullius) in the latter. The government’s promotion of convict family emigration schemes in the Andamans, from the very first year of colonisation, though ultimately unsuccessful, was also important.25

The transportation of women was also connected to the desire to counter potential anti-transportation sentiments, and in this respect Indian administrators invoked frequent comparisons with the Australian colonies. An 1859 report on the Andamans, for instance, noted,

If the settlement is to be made permanent, the convicts’ families must join them. The frightful revelations which some years since shocked the public mind in England, respecting the moral condition of the rebanished felons’ population on Norfolk Island, will be revived in regard

Table 4. Percentage of convict women in the Straits Settlements and Andaman Islands, 1824–1940.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Year</th>
<th>Straits Settlements % of women</th>
<th>Andaman Islands Year and % of women</th>
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<td>1824</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>1858 0 1880 9.6 1905 5.1 1930 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1847</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>1860 4.5 1885 10.3 1910 5.1 1935 1.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>1850</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>1865 6.3 1890 7.4 1915 4.7 1940 0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1854</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>1870 8.4 1895 7 1920 3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1860</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>1875 11.4 1900 6.1 1925 2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1866</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

aStraits Settlements stock data are not available in systematic form, and these figures are drawn from different months.
bBefore 1876, the percentages are for 31 December; from 1876, they are for 31 March. Figures have been entered for the first of each pair of years (i.e. a figure for 1889–90 has been entered as 1890 etc.). Sources: IOR P (judicial proceedings) series; IOR V series: Annual Reports Straits Settlements, 1859–66; IOR V series: Annual Reports Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

24 IOR P/145/22: Transportation of Convict Women from the Bengal Presidency, 1848 – [July] 1855. This rare document does not include figures for Madras and Bombay.
to the Andamans; and an unreasoning outcry will be again raised against all penal colonies.  

Another counselled,

It is … painful, and … fearful, to regard a Penal Settlement like that of Port Blair without women of any kind. The revelations of Norfolk Island shew that such a system produces a pack of fiends in human form, introduces the most hideous vices, and is utterly inefficacious in reclaiming hardened Criminals.

As late as 1920, in recommending the abolition of transportation to the Andamans on financial grounds, the Indian jails committee drew upon the findings of the 1838 royal commission chaired by William Molesworth, which had presented a picture of a convict Australia replete with sexual immorality and unnatural vice.

Despite the racially distinct character of the convict flows, the rhetorical deployment of the Australian colonies in British Asian settlements came in the context of their earlier influence on penal organisation in southeast Asia. Changes to the convict establishment in Bencoolen, instigated by Raffles in 1821 in an attempt to promote agricultural development, for example, were based on the system of Australian convict assignment. Commissioner John Thomas Bigge’s critical 1823 reports, influential in directing metropolitan policy towards the promotion of transportation as ‘an object of real terror’, were sent to Penang, and amalgamated with various other Australian acts and regulations to underpin important convict reforms in 1824. These included the introduction of tickets-of-leave and pardons for good conduct, and a system of penal classes. Subsequently, and after convicts were first sent to Singapore in 1825, again the system of convict classes was, to quote the chief resident, ‘borrowed from the rules adopted in regard to convicts in New South Wales’.

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27 IOR P/146/25: F.J. Mouat, inspector general of prisons, to Rivers Thompson, junior secretary to government Bengal, 7 March 1860.
29 IOR P/134/60: Governor-general Thomas Stamford Raffles, Bencoolen, to W.G. Bayley, secretary to government Bengal, 12 June 1821.
32 IOR P/137/37: J. Crawford, chief resident Singapore, to Bayley, 20 April 1825. In 1856, as antipathy to transportation was growing in Singapore, the governor of the Straits Settlements proposed (unsuccessfully) the implementation of Australian convict accounting practices, so that the
the management of Indian transportation convicts was Alexander Maconochie, superintendent of Norfolk Island.\(^3\) Maconochie's innovative 'mark system' was widely admired, and penal reformers all over the world lauded its replacement of fixed with indeterminate sentences, where privileges ('marks') and the prospect of release gained or lost on the basis of the completion of tasks and good conduct was earned, rather than awarded after time served.\(^4\) Within the British Empire, the mark system was trialled in the convict hulks of Bermuda in the 1840s, and introduced in Labuan in 1864.\(^5\) It was most systematically and extensively used in the Andamans, where in 1860 cardboard tokens were first issued as incentives to good conduct. In 1861, as forgers took advantage of their easy reproduction, they were replaced with copper coins minted in Calcutta. By 1866 there were over 40,000 such tokens in circulation in the Islands.\(^6\)

In analysing convict flows in the British imperial world during the period after the founding of the first British penal colony in New South Wales, and the first EIC convict settlement in Penang, it is difficult to disentangle the penal role of transportation from its function as a means of labour supply, colonial governmentality and permanent settlement. By focusing on the intra-imperial character of transportation in an Empire wide framework, and in particular by placing data on trans-imperial convict flows in dialogue with archives of enslavement, indenture, rebellion and resistance, we transform our understanding of its estimated value of their labour was credited to local advantage, rather than offset against the sum charged to the Indian presidencies for their maintenance. See IOR P/145/47: Resolution of the government of India, judicial department, 11 September 1856.


\(^{35}\) TNA CO37/113: Governor William Reid, Bermuda, to Lord Gladstone, secretary of state for war and the colonies, 24 February 1846; TNA CO37/114: Reid to the Earl Grey, secretary of state for war and the colonies, 17 September 1846; TNA CO144/23: Governor J.F. Callaghan, Labuan, to Edward Cardwell, secretary of state for the colonies, 5 December 1864.

historical importance as both a means of population management and a form of forced labour that had a close relationship to other types of unfree labour. We see that transportation was not solely a means for outward metropolitan expansion, but a way of managing Empire and occupying and developing new lands, thus consolidating and pushing back imperial borders. The new cartography of transportation proposed here enables us to move beyond accepted understandings of its importance as a means of occupying Australia, and towards an appreciation of its concurrent role in punishment, labour extraction and governance within the larger British imperial world. That transportation within British Asia to the Andaman Islands was so much more enduring than transportation from metropolitan Britain and Ireland to the Australian colonies suggests both its fundamentally repressive imperial character and its importance in these respects.

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