Introduction
Between 1789 and 1939 the British transported at least 108,000 Indian, Burmese, Malay and Chinese convicts to penal settlements around the Bay of Bengal and Indian Ocean, and to prisons in the south and west of mainland India. The large majority of these convicts were men; and most had been convicted of serious crimes, including murder, gang robbery, rebellion and violent offences against property. In each location, convicts constituted a highly mobile workforce that was vital to British imperial ambitions. The British exploited their labour in land clearance, infrastructural development, mining, agriculture and cultivation. They also used them to establish villages and to settle land. Asian convicts responded to their transportation in remarkable ways. They resisted their forced removal from home, led violent uprisings and refused to work. They struck up social and economic relationships with each other, and with people outside the penal settlements. They joined cosmopolitan communities or helped to forge new syncretic societies. If ‘creolization’ and ‘coolitude’ capture conceptually the interactions and culture and identity outcomes of enslaved and indentured people in the Indian Ocean world, ‘convitude’ might do the same work for the experiences of transported Asian convicts.

This chapter begins with an examination of East India Company (EIC) law at the end of the eighteenth century, tracing the origins of penal transportation to the prohibition of slave exports from Bengal. It goes on to quantify the volume of and map convict flows, and to consider some of the features of penal journeys, both under Company and British Crown governance. The chapter conceptualises penal transportation as both an important feature of British punishment, and a means to manage resistance against imperial occupation or policy. It also argues that transportation mobilised forced labour, and played a vital role in the extension of British power. In these respects, the chapter lays stress on the multi-directionality of transportation, and its relationship to frontier expansion and political economy. It also foregrounds its gendered dynamics, and explores its carceral character, connections to other kinds of labour, and relationship to indigenous destruction and confinement. Finally, the chapter argues that the presence of convicts in multiple locations around the Bay of Bengal and Indian Ocean has left important legacies in the world today. In some places, these are manifested in labour practices, and in others in the politics of community formation and the representation of the colonial past.

Law, Punishment and Slavery in South Asia
The British first debated the introduction of convict transportation in South Asia in 1773, in the context of more than a century long history of metropolitan penal transportation, and the selling of convicts into contracts of indenture in the American colonies (see Hamish Maxwell-Stewart, in this volume). The EIC then ordered that all life convicts should serve their sentences in Bencoolen, though it

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1 The EIC was a British trading company that governed parts of the Indian subcontinent in the period before the 1857 revolt. In 1858, the territories formerly under EIC control were transferred to the British Crown.
is not clear whether any were actually sent. Fifteen years later in 1788, Governor-General of India Charles Cornwallis prohibited the export of slaves from the Bengal Presidency. Though the EIC continued to own so-called ‘government slaves’, from then on it no longer bought or sold them. It was in this context that, the very next year, 1789, the Company gave permission to a free trader to transport twenty life prisoner dacoits (gang robbers) to the island of Penang for a period of three years. It directed that their labour would be to his own profit - on condition that he paid the cost of the passage, issued rations, prevented escapes, and did ‘not in any respect maltreat them either by the infliction of severe corporal punishment or obliging them to undergo excessive hard labour or by compelling them to eat any food, or perform offices which may be repugnant to the rules and customs of their cast[e] or tribe’. The EIC itself first transported convicts in 1790, when it sent seven men from Bengal to Penang. There then appears to have been a hiatus (for no records of further transportations exist) until 1793-6, when the Company transported Bengal convicts to the Andamans. After it abandoned the Islands in 1796, it transferred the convicts to Penang. From 1797, Bengal shipped convicts to Amboyna and Bencoolen, and by 1798-9 Madras and Bombay began the transportation of convicts to these settlements.

The EIC argued that the punishment of penal transportation was peculiarly apt in the South Asian context. It described transportation as an especially useful punishment for Brahmins, high-caste Hindus who could not without risk of cultural and social outcry face judicial execution, and so previously had been banished without hope of return from their home localities. There was at this time a belief among some administrators that culturally Indians were at risk of caste pollution if they crossed the sea, or kala pani (black waters), and so it was said that they especially dreaded transportation. This made it an ideal deterrent against crime. But convicts were rarely sentenced to simple transportation; their penalties almost always specified or included hard labour. Thus, British understandings of Indian culture and society, and the need for workers in the context of a local move against slave trading came together in the development of a radically new kind of punishment in the subcontinent. The Company shipped convicts to territories as it expanded outwards from continental South Asia. They provided a vital work force for infrastructural and other kinds of development, particularly during the early years of settlement, in the context where alternatives sources of bonded labour were in short supply.

The Company did not pass laws on transportation until a few years after its inception. It then, in effect, codified and further extended already established practice. Regulation IV (1797) directed that all sentences of imprisonment for

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2 The EIC renamed Penang Prince of Wales Island in 1786, though officials routinely referred to it by both names.
4 IOR G/34/4 (30 June 1790): John White, register foujdarry adawlat (criminal court), to Light, 14 March 1790.
seven years or more would be commuted to transportation. Regulation II (1799) extended the punishment to escaped prisoners. In 1803, Regulation LIII commuted the punishment of mutilation to imprisonment or transportation.\(^6\) Regulation VIII (1808) ordered life transportation for the crime of attempted murder, and for all dacoits (gang robbers) not sentenced to death. Regulation IX (1808) ordered life transportation for ‘notorious suspects’ who refused to surrender themselves to the authorities.\(^7\)

By the end of the first decade of the nineteenth century, over three thousand Indian convicts had been transported to the first penal sites: Bencoolen, Amboyna and the Andaman Islands, as well as Penang (Map 1, Table 1).

### Map 1. Convict Flows in British Asia, 1789-1939

[Insert]

Note: ‘India’ denotes either flows from all three presidencies, or from unknown locations in the subcontinent.

### Table 1. Convict Transportation in British Asia, 1789-1939

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transported From</th>
<th>Transported To</th>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Number of convicts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bengal, Bombay and (^\text{Madras}^\text{Presidencies})</td>
<td>Penang</td>
<td>1789-1860</td>
<td>5,459</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bengal Presidency</td>
<td>Andaman Islands</td>
<td>1793–96</td>
<td>265</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bengal and (^\text{Madras}^\text{Presidencies})</td>
<td>+ Amboyna and Bencoolen</td>
<td>1797–1823</td>
<td>2,823</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(^\text{Madras}^\text{Presidency})</td>
<td>Bengal Presidency</td>
<td>1800</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bengal, Bombay and (^\text{Madras}^\text{Presidencies})</td>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>1826-59</td>
<td>4,882</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bengal, Bombay and (^\text{Madras}^\text{Presidencies})</td>
<td>Malacca</td>
<td>1826-31, 1854-66</td>
<td>1,196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(^\text{Madras}^\text{Presidency})</td>
<td>± Straits Settlements (unspecified location)</td>
<td>1829-40</td>
<td>444</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bengal Presidency</td>
<td>± Straits Settlements (unspecified location)</td>
<td>1855-56</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


\(^7\) A legal loophole in this regulation was addressed in 1822. British parliamentary papers (PP) 1824 (23): regulation V (Bengal) 1808: A regulation for amending certain provisions of Regulation IX, 13 June 1822.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bengal Presidency</th>
<th>§ Burma</th>
<th>1830-58</th>
<th>5,920</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>^Madras Presidency</td>
<td>§ Burma</td>
<td>1836–60</td>
<td>878</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Straits Settlements and Burma</td>
<td>Bombay and Madras Presidencies</td>
<td>1836–64</td>
<td>*1,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>Van Diemen’s Land</td>
<td>1844</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>Singapore and Penang</td>
<td>1846–56</td>
<td>404</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>Labuan</td>
<td>1851–58</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bengal Presidency</td>
<td>Mauritius</td>
<td>1815–18, 1827</td>
<td>908</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bombay Presidency</td>
<td>Mauritius</td>
<td>1826–37</td>
<td>453</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bombay Presidency</td>
<td>Aden</td>
<td>1841–50</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ceylon</td>
<td>Mauritius</td>
<td>1819-23</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ceylon</td>
<td>Malacca</td>
<td>1858-66</td>
<td>587</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ceylon</td>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>1859-65</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British India inc. Burma, and Mysore and Hyderabad</td>
<td>Andaman Islands</td>
<td>1858–1939</td>
<td>83,313</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total** | | | **108,419**

* May include convicts from the princely states of Hyderabad and Mysore.
+ The destination is not always specified, though note that the British only held Amboyna 1796-1802 and 1810-14. In 1825, Bencoolen was ceded to the Netherlands under the Anglo-Dutch Treaty of that year.
± The Straits Settlements: Penang, Malacca and Singapore after 1826.
§ Burma: Arakan and the Tenasserim and Martaban Provinces.
* Estimate.

**Notes:** There are no systematic figures on Indian convict flows before 1858. The numbers presented here are gleaned from scattered references located across hundreds of IOR volumes. Though the pre-1858 figures include all recorded instances of transportation, it is likely that they underestimate the scale of the flows, perhaps by as much as 20%. This allows for gaps in the records, as well as the inclusion of convicts from the princely states (Hyderabad and Mysore), and Supreme Court convicts, whose shipments were not always recorded. There are few archives of the flow of convicts from S.E. Asia to Bombay and Madras. The estimate presented here is extracted from periodic returns, which largely date from the later 1850s, and is almost certainly too low.

Note also that the table details the date ranges of convict flows. In some cases, the penal settlements remained operational after actual transportations ceased. The penal settlement in Mauritius remained open until 1853, Burma until 1862, and the Straits Settlements until 1868, after their general administration was transferred from the India Office to the Colonial Office.

**Sources:** IOR P (judicial and public proceedings) series (Bengal, Madras and Bombay presidencies), 1789–1860; IOR V/10 Andaman Islands, Straits Settlements and Burma annual reports, 1858 ;-; Christopher Munn, ‘The Transportation of Chinese Convicts from Hong Kong, 1844-1858’, *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association / Revue de la Société historique du Canada*, 8, 1 (1997), 113-45.

Despite the regulations, there were often delays in implementing sentences. Moreover, some convicts escaped, and others returned home after serving their time, both taking with them information about transportation and so reducing its
At the same time, the EIC opened a large new jail in Alipore, just outside Calcutta. Subsequently in 1811 the Company repealed all the transportation regulations and ordered that lifers be imprisoned there. The jail soon became overcrowded, though, and faced with growing expense in 1813 the Company reintroduced transportation. The next penal site was Mauritius, approved by Regulation XV in 1816, which also allowed for the employment or transfer of convicts to other destinations. At the time, Mauritius was not a Company settlement, but following the Napoleonic Wars it had been acquired by the British Crown. Its first governor, Robert Townsend Farquhar, was formerly the lieutenant governor of Penang, and so he was well acquainted with the usefulness of Indian convicts. Regulation XVII (1817) added burglary, theft and robbery accompanied by violence, wounding or maiming to the list of transportation offences; and made the escape of life convicts a capital crime, and the escape of term convicts liable to re-transportation. In 1819, transportation offences grew to include arson, robbery by open violence, attempted or actual burglary or theft, and robbery accompanied by attempted murder or serious injury. The next destinations were Singapore and Malacca (1826), the Burmese provinces of Arakan and Tenasserim (1830), and Aden (1841).

With a few small variations, the regulation of transportation in the Bombay and Madras presidencies largely followed Bengal practice. All three regions sent convicts condemned to sentences of life and a term of years. At the turn of the nineteenth century, before it began overseas shipments, note also that Madras sent a few convicts around the coast to Bengal. Meantime, Straits Settlements and Burmese convicts moved in the other direction, journeying outward from the eastern edges of the Bay of Bengal to mainland jail sites in the south and west of the subcontinent, in the Madras and Bombay presidencies. Finally, convicts were shipped from the Crown colony of Ceylon to both Mauritius and the Company territories of the Straits Settlements. The British Asian colonies of Hong Kong and Labuan also participated in this network of regional convict flows (Map 1, Table 1).

Figure 1. Indian Convict Transportation Flows, 1789-1939
[Insert]

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10 Clause Third, Section II, Regulation IX, 1813, cited in Fisch, *Cheap Lives*, 78.
11 PP 1819 (13): Papers relating to East India affairs: viz. regulations passed by the governments of Bengal, Fort St. George [Madras] and Bombay, in the Year 1816: Regulation XV, 18 May 1816.
12 PP 1819 (13): Regulation XVII (Bengal) 1817: A regulation to provide for the more effectual administration of criminal justice in certain cases, 16 September 1817. See also Fisch, *Cheap Lives*, 73, 95.
13 IOR P/401/32: memorandum, J.P. Willoughby, secretary to government Bengal, 10 August 1836.
14 Penang, Malacca and Singapore were collectively known as the Straits Settlements after 1826.
The next key change in the history of penal transportation came in 1858, when in the aftermath of the Indian revolt (or ‘mutiny’) of 1857, the British Crown took direct control of Company territories in South Asia, including Burma and the Straits Settlements. During the rebellion, mutineers and rebels had attacked and broken open jails across the north of the subcontinent, leaving the Company with an unprecedented penal crisis. At the same time, fearing the spread of rebellion, the British authorities in the Straits Settlements and Burma objected to the transportation of convicts sentenced for rebellion or mutiny. The former were concerned about the prospect of an uprising in the Indian garrison, the latter believed the convicts might combine in revolt with the jail peons, police and free Muslims. 15

Though they had abandoned their first settlement in the Andamans in 1796, due to high rates of sickness, the British remained interested in the Islands. This was because they lay at the centre of the China trade routes, but were inhabited by hunter-gatherer peoples who displayed hostility to passing or shipwrecked vessels. And so in March 1858, the British sent the first batch of convicts, sentenced in the aftermath of the 1857 rebellion, to the Andamans.16

Transportation continued, until in the context of discussions about their penal efficacy and their expense, plans were drawn up to abandon the penal colony in 1921. Subsequently the British tried to encourage other settlers. However, their efforts failed, and due to ongoing labour shortages convict transportation continued until 1939. The islands received more convicts (over 83,000) in total than anywhere else in the British Empire. They were not only much larger than the Asian settlements, but they superseded the numbers sent to any single Australian penal colony (New South Wales and Van Diemen’s Land received approximately 79,000 and 68,000 convicts respectively, not including an estimated 5,000 inter-colonial shipments). Over the long period of the Andamans penal colony, the Indian authorities ordered (and then suspended) the transportation of term convicts, unlike during the first half of the nineteenth century when both life and short sentenced convicts were transported. They also introduced volunteer settlement schemes for prisoners from mainland jails (1926-). Just as the dramatic increase in penal transportation during 1858-9 can be attributed to the repression of the 1857 uprising, the prohibition against term convicts during 1869-75, and again between 1906-11, helps to explain some of the troughs and peaks in transportation flows (Figure 1).

Convict Journeys

15 IOR P/146/12D: A. Fytche, officiating commissioner Tenasserim and Martaban Provinces, to E. Lushington, officiating assistant secretary to government Bengal, 22 July 1857.
Indian convicts began their journey into transportation at the moment of their conviction. They would already have spent some days or weeks in a district lock-up or jail before their appearance in front of British magistrates and judges. If found guilty, and until the abolition of the practice in 1849, Bengal and Madras convicts were then tattooed on the forehead with godna, a permanent ink mark of their name, crime and date of sentence. All convicts were transferred to a holding jail in preparation for their shipment overseas: Alipore in Bengal, Chingleput in Madras or Tannah in Bombay. They travelled there on foot, boat and/or train, in groups known as challan. This initial penal transfer could necessitate the traversing of vast distances and diverse landscapes, as convicts voyaged across plains and forests, villages and towns, and along rivers and coasts, for hundreds and in some cases for over a thousand miles. Convicts sentenced in Southeast Asia journeyed over relatively shorter distances, but also by various means including river steamer (Photo 1).

**Figure 2.** A gang of Dacoits being conveyed down the river from Mandalay to Rangoon [Burma] on board one of the Irrawaddy Flotilla Company’s steamers. These men ... were sentenced to transportation for various terms. As shewn in the picture, they are about to receive their morning meal.

[W.W. Hooper, 1886. The British Library, India Office Records, Photo 312/(76).]

The end point of this first stage of their voyage was a carceral institution that held convicts from all over the subcontinent, and therefore from diverse social, cultural, linguistic and religious backgrounds. It was in these confined spaces that some convicts began to forge the ties of brotherhood that would, as we will see, become so important as they continued onwards to their transportation destination. And they did this through further travel on a river vessel, which took them out for their embarkation at the mouth of rivers near the sea. Ships departing from Calcutta sometimes sailed down the coast, and picked up more convicts in Madras, before going eastwards across the Bay of Bengal.

During the first fifty years of transportation, most convicts were shipped to the penal settlements on one of the Company’s China fleet. The Company had a monopoly over long distance trade routes until 1834, and following the signing of formal agreements with ships’ captains, convicts were sent into transportation on trading voyages. Unless they were carrying especially notorious convicts, vessels were not specially fitted out for them, and they spent the journey between decks, travelling alongside cargos of cotton, silk, betel, opium and dates, and constrained by fetters. The number of convicts on board varied widely, from a small handful of two or three individuals to over two hundred. If convicts travelled alongside large quantities of goods, and though they were supposed to receive the same space allocation as lascars (sailors) and, later, indentured labourers (men and women contractually bound to employers overseas), vessels

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could become very overcrowded. If there were no China fleet ships available or willing to carry convicts, the Company administration tendered for private trading vessels, for they were permitted by the terms of its charter to work short distance routes. The use of private contractors bears comparison with earlier British Atlantic practices. In 1834, the Company lost its monopoly on long distance trade routes and subsequently all convict voyages to the Southeast Asian settlements, Aden and Mauritius were tendered to such private carriers.

In both cases, ships were procured after the jail superintendent in one of the presidencies signalled the presence of transportation convicts to the authorities. In Bengal, the secretary to the judicial department then requested that the superintendent of the marine department procure a passage. After a Company vessel was found (or a private one was tendered), he inspected and reported on it. The jail superintendent was informed that the ship was ready, and instructed to have the convicts ready for embarkation on a particular day and at a particular time. The military board supplied the ship provisions for the convicts, which it did through the commissariat department. It also provided a guard. In Bombay, the superintendent of the Indian navy made the arrangements directly with the session judge in charge of Tannah jail. He was also responsible for checking that the vessels were seaworthy and that convicts could be adequately lodged and secured. It was the master of the ship’s responsibility to apply for a guard if he thought one was necessary. As ships sailed, captains were given lists of the convicts and other related paperwork, and ordered to hand the documents over to the authorities when they arrived. Medical attendants were not routinely sent on board, for the primary purpose of these voyages was not convict transportation but trade. Therefore, ships did not disembark Indian convicts in Southeast Asia and then embark Southeast Asian convicts and take them back to the mainland. Rather, they deposited Indian convicts before voyaging on to the China routes. They embarked Southeast Asian convicts on their way back to the presidencies.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, the cost of transportation varied according to the availability of ships and the number of days they spent at sea. From Bengal and Madras, it cost around 60 rupees per convict for the voyage to Bencoolen, 35 to 40 rupees to the Straits Settlements, 30 rupees to Burma, and 60-75 rupees to Mauritius. Shipping links from Bombay were less regular, and most transportation journeys comparatively long. Transportation to Burma and the Straits cost about 75 to 80 rupees per convict, and Mauritius varied between 50 and 100 rupees. The captain of the vessel was charged with provisioning the convicts. Those who ate cooked food (largely Muslims) received lascar rations of rice, dhal (lentils), fish, tobacco, betel nut, salt, ghee (clarified butter), tamarind, chillies, pepper, garlic and onions. Those who did not cook (caste Hindus) were issued with the same, except that they were given sugar, poha (flaked rice) and parched gram in lieu of rice, dhal and fish. There was a bottle of wine and a

18 IOR P/142/60: note by under-secretary to government Bengal, A.R. Young, 29 December 1846.
20 IOR P/403/24: J. Burrows, superintendent of convicts Bombay, to Willoughby, 29 November 1843.
bottle of lime juice for every two and a half convicts. Despite the apparent attention to religious and caste strictures in the regulations, convicts complained on a number of occasions that rations and water were in short supply.

It is perhaps surprising that in the period to the 1840s shipboard death rates were extremely low; less than one per cent (25 deaths out of 2,676 transportations) for Bengal ships sailing between 1793 and 1848, for example. This can perhaps be explained by the decease of sick, elderly or vulnerable prisoners during often long distance journeys to their port of embarkation, or while awaiting transportation in jail. Indeed, during the first half of the nineteenth century prison death rates sometimes hit 25 per cent. Nevertheless, for convicts, conditions on board could be grim. The below decks temperature could be unbearably hot, convicts became ill with seasickness, and there were outbreaks of dysentery. Incidents of suicide, though infrequent, and sometimes indistinguishable from the ‘accidental drownings’ recorded in the colonial archives, were rare but not unknown. In the 1850s, however, five single ships crossing the Bay of Bengal experienced devastating convict mortality - of up to 20 per cent. This seems to have been the result of a combination of factors, which included overcrowding, but also short rations and the generally debilitated state of those transported following the great uprising of 1857. With respect to the latter it is worthy of note that during this period migrant labourers indentured to the sugar colonies in Mauritius and the Caribbean suffered even higher death rates at sea. Their incidence on particular convict ships during this period was perhaps also related to the imposition of restrictions on convicts’ shipboard mobility in the aftermath of several violent mutinies, which produced great hardship amongst those on board. Indeed, once at sea, the captain’s authority was paramount; and convict ships could be violent and brutal places.

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21 IOR P/402/37: J. Glen, secretary medical board Bombay, to L.R. Reid, acting chief secretary to government Bombay, 12 August 1839.
22 IOR P/145/18: deposition of Boor Singh son of Humeer Singh no. 115, 6 July 1854 (Clarissa).
24 IOR P/144/55: F. Church, resident councillor Singapore, to E.A. Samuells, superintendent Alipur jail, 30 September 1830, enc. list of provisions distributed to the Bengal convicts on board the Margaret Skelly as stated by the Hindu convicts, n.d.; IOR P/402/30: depositions of Captain F.N. Pendygrass, 12 January 1839, 19 January 1839.
26 IOR P/188/57: Reports by Dr Mouat on the mortality of emigrants from Calcutta to the West Indies 1857-8.
27 Detailed accounts of convict ship mutinies are: Clare Anderson, “‘The Ferringees are Flying - the ship is ours!’: the convict middle passage in colonial South and Southeast Asia, 1790-1860, Indian Economic and Social History Review 41, no. 3 (2005): 143-86; Clare Anderson, ‘Convict Passages in the Indian Ocean, c. 1790-1860’, in Other Middle Passages ed. Marcus Rediker, Cassandra Pybus and Emma Christopher (Berkeley: University of California Press), 129-49.
In the years after 1834 when journeys were tendered to private ships, there were twelve violent outbreaks on convict vessels. These included in 1854 the *Clarissa* mutiny, which involved so many convicts that their cases had to be heard in Calcutta's Town Hall, for they could not fit in the city's court room. In some cases, convicts had formed tight bonds with each other as they awaited their transportation; and they took their grievances against the Company and their punishment onto the seas. Some travelled prepared, discussing plans in jail, and sewing files, nails and emery boards into the folds and ends of their bedding. Others were skilled sailors, including in the 1838 case of the *Catherine* convicted pirates under sentences of transportation from the Straits Settlements to Bombay, and had the capacity to take and then navigate a ship. But convicts were also given the opportunity to escape because they were incorporated into shipboard routines; they worked as sweepers, cooks and overseers, and were engaged in the loading and unloading of provisions and cargo. We know almost nothing of convict women's experiences on transportation vessels, except that they were lodged separately from men and were sometimes allowed to remain on deck. But we do know that convicts – sometimes assisted by the knowledge such women accrued - were able to exploit inadequacies in their guard, including the safe storage of weaponry, and seize a momentum that enabled them to attack ships' captains and crew, and in some instances to kill their masters, take control of vessels and flee.

There was an intensely subversive element to their actions, for sometimes convicts struck off their chains and fettered the captain. They dressed up in the crew's clothing, feasted at the captain's table, and threw overboard the ship's papers. Following a mutiny on the *Virginia*, off the coast of Bombay in 1839, the authorities laid down a lengthy set of instructions. They ordered that convicts be embarked in future by the superintendent of police, not the navy as was established practice, and regulated the convict guard and its weaponry as well as movement around the ship, rationing, chaining, punishment and the issue of medicine. Still, mutinies continued during the period to 1858. Though there is no firm evidence that any such unrest broke out on Andaman-bound ships in the period after that date, in 1890 the Indian government introduced the *SS Maharaja* as the sole vessel for the shipment of convicts to the penal colony. Unlike the earlier vessels, it was properly fitted out for their secure transport, its

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29 IOR P/403/24: S. Garling, resident councillor Singapore, to Willoughby, 14 September 1843.
30 See for example the following EIC ships' logs: IOR L/MAR/B/210A *Lord Duncan* (1799); IOR L/MAR/B/232B *Dover Castle* (1801); IOR L/MAR/B/3C *Castle Huntly* (1814).
31 IOR P/402/30: information of Captain F.N. Pendygrass (*Catherine*), 19 January 1839; IOR P/405/34: E. Baynes, superintendent of convicts Bombay, to H.E. Goldsmid, secretary to government Bombay, 12 December 1851.
32 IOR P/403/5: J.W. Salmond, resident councillor Penang, to Willoughby, 15 July 1841; IOR P/403/6: deposition of Michael Anthony, 7 June 1841.
33 IOR P/403/2: 'Instructions to the officers of convict ships', n.d.
only other cargo being Andaman personnel, troops, subsistence imports, and goods for sale.

**Imperial Expansion, Convict Labour and Penal Management**

Before the British occupation of the Andaman Islands in 1858, with few exceptions, in all three presidencies most convicts were sentenced to transportation generally and not to shipment to a particular place. The site of their relocation was then decided according to the availability of ships, the capacity of the settlements, and the presidencies’ view of the most pressing labour demands. As a result EIC officials in Southeast Asia alternatively objected to the sending and receiving of convicts and/or competed for convict supply. The Company viewed convicts as particularly valuable in newly acquired territories, and there is a clear association between the chronology of EIC expansion and the corresponding direction of transportation flows. Convicts were shipped to Penang (est. 1786) and the Andamans (est. 1789), for instance, soon after Company occupation. They were sent to Bencoolen, which had been under EIC control since the seventeenth century, following the start of a programme of public works at Fort Marlborough. At this time, the Bencoolen administration was not wholly enthusiastic about receiving them. The local distaste for convicts was perhaps related to the ‘spirit of mutiny’ that they reported in some high-caste men who they swiftly returned to Bengal. But it was also connected to the stigma of convict settlement. Bencoolen Resident Walter Ewer wrote in 1800 that his predecessors ‘felt their dignity hurt by being turned into a Botany Bay.’ Resident Ewer in contrast was unfailingly enthusiastic about convicts. Bencoolen was thinly populated, and a deadly smallpox epidemic had recently killed many Malay workers. He put some convicts to public works, and hired others as servants to free settlers. ‘The convicts,’ he wrote in 1800 ‘are the most useful inhabitants in the settlement.’ There was a similar connection between the decimation of free populations by disease and the instigation of convict transportation to Amboyna in the Moluccas. In 1801, the British Resident there wrote that recently so many people had died from ‘a violent epidemic’ (presumably smallpox), that there were not enough labourers for the nutmeg plantations. Calling for convicts, he noted that as trees were left uncultivated, and fruit unpicked, Company revenue was suffering.

After the abandonment of the Andamans in 1796, due to high rates of sickness and death, the 270 surviving convicts were transferred to Penang, which continued to receive convicts until 1860. At the turn of the century, some convicts in Penang were employed in brick and lime manufacture, their importation enabling the cancellation of free labour contracts on these works. Others were put to work in agriculture, and allowed to keep a share of their

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34 IOR Z/P/569: Broff, Crisp and Coles, to Richard Earl of Mornington, governor-general in Council, 16 January 1799.
35 IOR P/5/13: Walter Ewer, commissioner Fort Marlborough [Bencoolen], to H. Tucker, secretary to government Bengal, 19 April 1800. Botany Bay was the first site of British settlement in New South Wales, in 1788.
36 IOR P/5/25: extract foreign department, 9 September 1801 - extract from a letter from the Resident at the Molucca Islands, 11 July 1801.
As EIC officials in Bengal put it, this would 'encourage industry'. Road building was another especially important convict occupation, because during this period of early settlement better communications were necessary to open up Penang for cultivation, but the island lacked a sufficient population to tax in order to pay for them.

As they came under British control in 1815, 1824, 1828 and 1839 respectively, Mauritius, Singapore and Malacca, Burma and Aden were also sent convicts. Mauritius first took them in 1815, Singapore and Malacca in 1826, Burma in 1830 and Aden in 1841. In all these locations, again there was a close association between convict labour and infrastructural and other kinds of agricultural and commercial development. Despite their dispersal over the Bay of Bengal, and beyond, convicts were organised and worked in remarkably similar ways, and the EIC gave clear orders about the work convicts should do and their penal organisation and discipline. Convicts in the settlements were engaged in land clearance, plantation labour, cultivation, road and bridge construction, and building work. They cut and sawed timber, made pots, cloth, bricks and tiles. They rowed boats, drove carts and cut grass. They worked as gardeners, watchmen and herdsmen. A few dozen Eurasian convicts were sent to Indian penal settlements too, including the Andaman Islands after 1858. In a clear drawing of lines of racial distinction in the settlements, they were not put to hard labour. Rather, they were employed as servants to Europeans, or worked as clerks or overseers in the settlements. In this way they became penal intermediaries, working between the white administration and its Asian convict labour force.

In many places, including Bencoolen, convicts were allotted small plots of land, and allowed to grow their own food, and to keep goats and poultry. Here, there was a desire to reduce the overall cost of the penal settlements. The sale of vegetables, eggs and livestock also brought convicts into local markets and trade. Some convicts were even used in diplomatic missions and military engagements. For instance, two-dozen or so were hired out to the army in Bencoolen, including during its 1800 dispatch to Labuan in the South China Sea. A handful of men were transferred from Mauritius to Madagascar when Britain undertook negotiations in the region in the 1820s. Others were employed as soldier-bearers during the Naning War in Malacca (1831-2).

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37 IOR P/5/12: Bengal public proceedings, 22 May 1800 no. 6 para. 14.
38 IOR P/5/13: Lieutenant Governor George Leith, Penang, to G.H. Barlow, secretary to government Bengal, 31 May 1800.
40 Anderson, Legible Bodies, 119-22. Eurasians were later known as Anglo-Indians.
41 IOR P/5/12: Ewer to governor-general in council, 7 February 1800.
42 IOR P/5/19: Ewer to Governor-General of India First Marquis Wellesley, 18 December 1800, enc. statement of convicts hired by individuals from primo May to uto October 1800.
One of the key features of the penal settlements, as in the presidios of the early modern Iberian empires and in the Dutch East India Company settlements, was their relative openness (see Timothy Coates, Christian De Vito and Matthias van Rossum, in this volume). Convicts lived in jails, barracks, huts and camps that were not necessarily locked or separated from surrounding indigenous, migrant or settler communities. The nature of convict employment meant that most worked outdoors. Below we will discuss the implications of this particular form of carceral confinement and spatiality for labour management and convict experience. Meantime, note that another feature of the penal settlements was the incorporation of convicts into the penal system. They routinely worked not just as sweepers (mehtars), washermen (dhobis) and cooks (as in jails), but as overseers (tindals) over other convicts, as well as clerks. Soldier convicts transported to the Straits Settlements and Burma in the aftermath of the Anglo-Sikh wars in the 1840s were employed as prison guards in places like Moulmein (Burma). The continued employment of Indians in Singapore into the 1970s seems connected to their historic presence as convict warders.

Convicts also worked as servants and grooms to British officials. Most Company officials began their careers in mainland India, and their employment of Hindustani (or other vernacular) speaking convicts over local workers who conversed for example in Burmese or Malay meant that they did not have to learn another new language. Paralleling early-modern British practices in the Atlantic world (see Hamish Maxwell-Stewart in this volume) there were instances when convicts were hired out to private employment too, particularly in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This did not always meet with the approval of the mainland authorities, who were keen to ensure all convict labour was turned to the Company’s account. Their approbation was also in part connected to the belief that such work was not the ‘hard labour’ to which convicts had been sentenced. Indeed, on these grounds in 1837 the Madras Presidency threatened to remove its convicts from the Straits Settlements and send them to what it perceived of as the harsher environment of the Tenasserim Provinces (Burma). The critique of the hiring out of convicts was also related to the contemporary desire to distance convict labour from

45 For a nineteenth-century account of the convict system in Bencoolen and the Straits Settlements, see J.F.A. McNair, Prisoners Their Own Warders: A Record of the Convict Prison at Singapore in the Straits Settlements established 1825, Discontinued 1873, together with a Cursory History of the Convict Establishments at Bencoolen, Penang and Malacca from the Year 1797 (Westminster: Archibald Constable and Co., 1899).
48 IOR P/140/52: J.J. Harvey, assistant commissioner Arakan, to C. Macsween, secretary to government Bengal, 1 September 1834; Macsween to F. Dickinson, superintendent Arakan, 22 September 1834.
49 IOR P/141/1: C.E. Trevelyan, officiating secretary prison discipline committee, to R.D. Mangles, secretary to government Bengal, 30 June 1836.
50 Tamil Nadu State Archives (TNSA) judicial proceedings (JP) vol. 326B: S.G. Bonham, governor of Penang, to H. Chamier, chief secretary to government Madras, 21 April 1837.
slave labour, and the EIC was keen that private individuals did not control the transported penal workforce.

With respect to convict management, during the first half of the nineteenth century, penal class systems developed across each of the settlements. That these were developed locally reveals the extent of the decentralisation of the EIC’s system. Moreover, penal practices circulated around the region, including from the Australian colonies. The first penal class system was introduced in Bencoolen in 1800, and it was further refined in 1820. It divided convicts into three classes, according to their sentence and conduct. Well-behaved and long serving convicts were not subject to hard labour, but were employed in paid work, including as artificers.51 These rules were modelled on those then in force in the penal settlement of New South Wales, and were subsequently applied in Penang and Singapore.52 In 1845, they were developed further, both in the Straits Settlements and Burma. Sixth class ‘incorrigibles’ worked on the chain gang, and first class convicts became overseers. Following further good service and conduct, convicts were issued with tickets-of-leave, which constituted a form of probation. Though they were not entirely free, they were allowed to live outside the penal settlement and engage in paid employment, as long as they did not misconduct themselves, in which case they could be recalled to convict service.53

After 1858, the Southeast Asian system was extended to the Andaman Islands, though by then under Crown rather than Company control, and ticket-of-leave convicts became known as self-supporters. At the end of the nineteenth century, there were efforts to separate them from under sentence convicts, and to settle them in different villages. The nature and extent of their socio-economic connections meant that this proved impractical, and the trial was abandoned. The completion of the radiating cellular jail in 1906 gave the penal class system in the Andamans a different character to that of the earlier settlements. All convicts served an initially harsh stage in the prison, and were then sent out to the districts to work. The small number of elite nationalists who were imprisoned in the Islands at the start of the twentieth century spent their entire sentence in the cellular jail, and they were not put to productive labour. Further, it is important to appreciate that before colonial occupation, indigenous hunter-gatherer peoples inhabited the Andamans, and there were no free settlers. This rendered the islands economically, culturally and socially distinct from the earlier penal settlements of India, which were otherwise situated in places that were populated by local and migrant peoples, including slaves as well as

51 IOR P/129/32: rules for the management of convicts in Bencoolen, 18 June 1800; a regulation for the management of the convicts transported from Bengal to Fort Marlborough, 5 August 1806; IOR P/134/48: Bencoolen regulation for the better management of the Bengal convicts, 5 October 1820.
53 IOR P/142/37: W.J. Butterworth, governor of Singapore, to A. Turnbull, under secretary to government Bengal, 26 February 1845.
seasonal labourers. We will explore this point of difference, and the impact of the penal colony on the Islands’ indigenous hunter-gatherer peoples, later on.

Returning to convict management, alongside the use of incentives to encourage good conduct, the settlements’ officials retained an armoury of corporal punishments in order to manage resistance and rebellion. Convicts pretended that they were too ill to work, rubbed and opened up sores, and deserted their labour.\textsuperscript{54} As well as organising and participating in shipboard mutinies such as those discussed earlier, convicts engaged in other forms of collective action. For example, in 1818, 75 convicts hired out to the Bel Ombre sugar plantation in Mauritius deserted their work. They claimed that there had been a deterioration in their working conditions, for Hindus of all castes were forced to cook and eat with slaves. There was a violent confrontation between the convicts and their guards, and their rebellion culminated in the largest criminal trial of the entire British period in Mauritius.\textsuperscript{55} Convicts by necessity worked with tools including hammers, crowbars and pick axes, and they could turn them into weapons against their guards. In 1847, for instance, 120 Indian convicts at work in the Burmese port of Moulmein did exactly that, drawing out their working implements to fight their overseers.\textsuperscript{56}

As well as mobility down the penal classes, convicts found guilty of such breaches of discipline could be flogged, fettered, put to severe forms of labour like stone breaking or transferred to remote sites of further punishment. These included, during some periods of settlement, Viper Island in the Andamans. Floggings were inflicted in front of all convicts, and formed a dramatic spectacle, deterring others against misconduct. Floggings were severe, the strokes inflicted with a rattan cane, and it was not unheard of for convicts to die from their wounds.\textsuperscript{57} Convicts could also be brought before the courts and made subject to further sentences of transportation, in punishment for misdemeanours. For example, a few of the Indian convicts transported to Mauritius faced reconviction and were sent to Robben Island in the Cape and to the Australian penal colony of

Van Diemen’s Land.58 In these ways, the convict settlements of the British empire were deeply connected to each other and to other forms of punishment.59

These penal class systems and modes of punishment and reward underpinned claims that transportation rehabilitated convicts. In this respect, the management of the penal settlements in British Asia – including as noted above through the incorporation of regulations from the penal colony of New South Wales - included elements of metropolitan and imperial discourse on the appropriate treatment of prisoners and convicts. However, the violence of convict forced labour and penal settlements’ attachment to corporeal sanctions differentiated them from the cellular confinement and non-productive labour that grew in favour in metropolitan penitentiaries over the course of the nineteenth century. A further point of distinction between British, Australian and South Asian practices is that Indians were never made subject to the supposedly ‘moralising’ influence of Christian instruction. Nervous of inciting anti-British sentiment, particularly in the aftermath of claims that the 1857 revolt was a response to fears of forced conversion, missionaries were prohibited from jails and penal settlements.

Nineteenth-century contemporaries certainly drew attention to the peculiarity of the Indian settlements, compared to British prisons. They remarked on the persistence of hard labour and the need for a system of privilege and reward to encourage good conduct in what were relatively open carceral spaces.60 One of the key areas of innovation in metropolitan incarceration was the removal of prisoners from public works labour, and their employment inside the walls of jails. In British colonies, however, prison administrators tenaciously held on to them as an importance source of labour. They consistently refused to abandon the use of prisoners on outdoor works, arguing for it as an important means of reform. The great contemporary advocate of penal labour at the time, Bengal’s inspector-general of prisons F.J. Mouat, visited the Straits Settlements in 1851. He later wrote: ‘there exists in no other country a more remarkable example of the successful industrial training of convicts’. He described St Andrew’s cathedral in Singapore, designed and built by convicts, as ‘one of the finest specimens of ecclesiastical architecture which I had seen in the East.’ Convicts in Singapore also built the Horsburgh lighthouse and government house (now the national museum).61

Indian convicts were over and again employed in the building of urban infrastructures and means of communication. It was Indian convict labour that laid the foundation for the connection of port cities and their littorals to each other and to inland frontiers. This included through the building of bunds,

59 During the early nineteenth century convict (and slave) lepers in Mauritius were also subject to transfer to Ile Curieuse (Seychelles) and Diego Garcia. Anderson, Convicts in the Indian Ocean, 42.
60 IOR P/141/1: H.G. Bonham, resident councillor Singapore, to J.P. Grant, secretary prison discipline committee, 5 April 1836; Mangles to Trevelyan, 13 September 1836.
harbours, and dockyards. In the first half of the nineteenth century, for example, Indian convicts in Mauritius laboured on the citadel in the capital Port Louis, and expanded the island’s network of roads to connect the city to its sugar plantations. They worked side by side with privately owned and government slaves, Liberated Africans (the illegally enslaved and trafficked men, women and children apprenticed into government service after the abolition of the slave trade in 1807), locally raised corvée (obligatory) labour, and locally convicted prisoners. The latter included ex-slave apprentices and Indian indentured labourers who found themselves in breach of contract after their introduction into the island from 1834.

Convict work was connected not just to the first years of imperial settlement, but also to the expansion of trade, commerce and imperial power. Convicts were used to open up or to expand the establishment of new commodities for export. The Mauritius government specifically requested convicts experienced in the manufacture of silk, to augment the convict-run sericulture established in the 1810s. Two decades later, Ceylon convicts were imported into Malacca with the intention of augmenting the labour supply on cinnamon plantations. Coal was first discovered in Burma in 1838, inland in the Tenasserim Provinces, and the first parties of convicts were sent to the mines in 1840. They were also employed in tin mining, though it was not long before skilled Chinese workers arrived and, willing to take low ‘coolie’ wages, ultimately, they displaced the convicts.62 The stationing of the Indian convicts in Burma at some distance from convict headquarters in Moulmein brings us to the issue of the mobility of Indian convict labour. Convict gangs circulated both within and without regions; they were marched out to work in places of need, and transferred across and between settlements when they closed or when particular labour desires arose elsewhere. In Mauritius, for example, though their headquarters were on the coast at Grande Rivière, convicts lived in temporary ‘flying camps’ as they worked all over the island on the roads. Convicts were transferred from Bencoolen to Penang, following the cessation of the former to the Dutch in 1825. They were moved around the Straits Settlements. After the Burmese penal settlements closed in 1868, they were transferred to the Andamans.

Accompanying the mobility of convict labourers, there was an element of circularity to convict transportation in the Indian Ocean, too. In this regard, it is interesting to note the simultaneous flow of convicts outwards and inwards from and to India (Map, Table 1). The first destination for the Straits and Burmese convicts sent to the mainland was Bombay’s Mahableshwar jail. There, they were employed in jail manufacture, including of rattan furniture. Later on, they were allocated to other presidency prisons and worked as skilled labourers, gardeners, and on public works. Following this precedent, from the 1860s, Burmese, Chinese and convicts were sent to the Nilgiri hills of the Madras presidency, to work in cinchona cultivation. They also worked on the construction of Lawrence Asylum, a school for the children of deceased officers.

of the British army. Convicts led at least one mass escape.63 Near Lovedale, Lawrence School remains open today as a place for the education of the children of Indian elites.

As mentioned above, the British were keen to re-colonize the Andamans in 1858 because they were strategically situated on British trading routes. The convicts shipped to the Islands in 1858 built the entire penal settlement and its associated infrastructure. The only other workers during this early period were drawn from the Indian army and navy; there were no free settlers. In both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as the population swelled with ex-convicts and convict descendants, the British experimented with various schemes to render the Islands economically self-sufficient. Logging was important during the whole period. By 1870, government had established an experimental garden at Haddo.64 By the 1910s, it had set up mustard oil, cane and rope factories; tea and yam gardens; hemp, rubber, coffee and coconut plantations; and lime tree groves.65 By the 1920s, the cultivation of cotton, bananas, pulses, mangoes and grapes were all under trial; and government was supporting ex-convicts in setting up co-operative societies to procure supplies of and set prices for rice and coconuts.66 Over the near century long history of the penal colony, there were also various schemes through which self-supporters were granted or leased land, to cultivate to their own advantage. Note also that after British settlement of the Nicobar Islands in 1869, some Andaman convicts were transferred to work at Nancowry, which was the site of a satellite penal settlement until its closure in 1888.67

Enslavement, Indenture, Migrant Labour and Indigenous Confinement

Overall, the penal intentions of transportation in British Asia – convict reform, rehabilitation and progression through classes of punishment – were inseparable from the rapacious labour needs of expanding Empire.68 And, as such, convict transportation was also intertwined with other kinds of free and coerced labour and migration. There is an argument that in the context of growing abolitionist sentiment towards the slave trade in Britain, which was critical of the plantation economies of the Atlantic world, the EIC abolished slave exports in order to position itself as the instigator of more enlightened labour

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63 TNSA JP 12 November 1867, 139-40: superintendent of police Coimbatore to magistrate of Coimbatore, 24 October 1867; TNSA JP, 20 November 1867, 244-6: W.J. Wilson, inspector-general of jails Madras, to chief secretary to government Madras, 7 November 1867. The bark of the cinchona plant has properties used to manufacture the anti-malarial drug quinine.


relations as it expanded its influence across the Bay of Bengal. But what has not been previously well or sufficiently understood and appreciated is that the Company often favoured convicts as their replacement supply, rather than the use of other kinds of seasonal or migrant labour. In the context of the EIC’s abolition of slave exports from Bengal in 1788, for example, the British Resident at the Moluccas Islands drew an unambiguous connection between the first shipments of convicts and the decline in slave imports following the transfer of the settlement from the Dutch. The shortage of slaves, he claimed ‘never occasioned such universal distress as at present.’ The British liberated ‘government slaves’ in Bencoolen in 1818, and there was an immediate four-fold increase in Indian convict numbers. Convicts were sent to the Crown colony of Mauritius, too, in the aftermath of the abolition of the slave trade in 1807, as soon as the British took control of the island from the French in 1815. The number of convicts in Mauritius peaked in 1834, the year of slave emancipation.

Despite the constant threat of escape, and the ever-present threat of violence, it is notable that during the early years of settlement in new locations, Company officials remained steadfast in their desire for Indian convicts. This can be explained by the lack or high cost of local labour, the seasonality that typified alternative migrant labour sources, and/or the remarkable degree of coercion that was available to the administration in controlling the convict workforce. For example, the EIC initially established a labour force in Penang after 1787 by employing lascars, sepoys and artificers from Bengal, importing slaves from Bencoolen, and calling upon merchants in Canton to induce Chinese workers to migrate. It also imported a few dozen Bengal convicts. By 1795 it had become concerned about the availability and cost of free labour. The Malays would not engage in public works labour, it claimed, and both Chinese and mainland sojourner labourers from the Coromandel coast demanded high wages. Not long afterwards, Penang received convicts transferred from the abandoned Andamans settlement, and by 1798 convict transportation direct to the island had restarted. The experience of Penang was not unique. In 1804, the Bencoolen Resident also claimed that convicts were fitter for plantation and public works labour than ‘Malay coolies’, and cost half as much.

Issues around labour supply, seasonality and suitability coalesced with the desire for coercion to produce a strong and tenacious desire for convict importations in British Burma. Indeed, in 1845 the commissioner of Arakan lamented that it was almost impossible to hire day labour in the port. This was because most of the locals owned land, and so were unwilling to hire themselves out - except for very high wages. Migrant workers, he wrote, largely from Bengal,

70 IOR P/5/25: extract foreign department, 9 September 1801 – extract from a letter from the Resident at the Molucca Islands, 11 July 1801.
71 IOR P/136/53: J.W. Rule, superintendent of convicts Bencoolen, to Edward Presgrave, officiating secretary to government Bengal, 7 January 1825.
72 IOR G/34/2: Cornwallis &c to Captain Francis Light, 22 January 1787.
73 IOR G/34/1 Major Kyd’s second report relative to Penang and the Andamans, 2 August 1795.
74 IOR P/4/40: Governor General’s second note, 7 March 1796.
75 IOR P/6/2: Ewer to Wellesley, 22 June 1804.
came to work the rice harvest, but returned home before the southwest monsoon began in April. During the rains, it was impossible to procure labourers.\textsuperscript{76}

Moreover, administrators in Burma preferred convicts as a more malleable alternative to free workers. In 1853, the assistant commissioner detailed his difficulty in preventing migrant labourers from deserting their work; and stressed the utility of convicts accustomed to working in gangs. Convict labour, he stated, was far more skilled, and gangs of two or three hundred could be made ready to march out to work at any time, even during the rainy season. They worked in land reclamation, road building, drain cutting, and in the construction of bunds and the planting of trees. The local Burmese, he claimed, were either ‘ashamed’ or ‘excessively averse to dig’. Moreover, he was able to control the convict workforce in ways that would have been unpalatable to local or migrant labour. ‘We should not have the hold over coolies that we have over the convicts,’ he wrote, detailing the means available to punish them. These included: cutting their money ration, placing them in irons, or enforcing task work. ‘Not so with coolies,’ he added, noting any attempt to cut their pay would likely prompt a labour strike.\textsuperscript{77}

As such, convict transportation in the Bay of Bengal and Indian Ocean was always linked to other forms of coerced and free labour and migration. The preference for convicts across contexts can be illustrated via contemporary calculations of the value of convict work, which was heavily dependent on the local context, and especially the availability of free labour, and its willingness to stay in employment. The general view during the early years of transportation to any given place was that a convict workforce was far cheaper than hired free labour. In Arakan and Tenasserim, for instance, claims about the prohibitive cost of local labour underpinned the first request for Indian convicts following annexation in 1828.\textsuperscript{78} British military engineers in far distant Aden in the 1840s calculated that convicts could be compelled to do more work than free labourers, making them better value for money.\textsuperscript{79}

Complicating the issue of labour value, however, was the fact that in many instances convicts performed work that would not otherwise have been done. In 1847, Governor W.J. Butterworth of the Straits Settlements noted that for this reason it was impossible to calculate the real worth of convict labour. Because they worked on projects that were otherwise not resourced, their value would always, he claimed, be far greater than crude comparisons with the cost of free labour implied.\textsuperscript{80} Nevertheless, as the Straits Settlements began to flourish, doubts started to emerge about the desirability of the convict presence. This was

\textsuperscript{76} IOR P/142/46: A.P. Phayre, principal assistant commissioner, Arakan, to Major D. Williams, in charge current duties, commissioner’s office Kyouk Phyoo, 10 December 1845.
\textsuperscript{77} IOR P/144/46: W.J. Law, second principal assistant commissioner Akyab, to H. Hopkinson, commissioner of Arakan, 5 July 1853.
\textsuperscript{78} IOR P/138/56: extract of a letter from the civil commissioner in the Tenasserim Provinces, 14 December 1827.
\textsuperscript{79} IOR P/403/9: J.B Haynes, political agent Aden, to L.R. Reid, chief secretary to government Bombay, 11 April 1842.
\textsuperscript{80} IOR P/142/60: Butterworth to Young, 9 December 1846.
in part because there were never enough convicts to satisfy the need for labour, and so other sources had to be located. But it was also connected to worries that the presence of convicts would put off investors, impede the development of trade, and thus work against free migration. Indeed, from the 1840s merchant interests in the Straits Settlements started to express their doubts about the long-term feasibility of the penal settlement. Convicts were highly visible, because they worked outdoors in gangs. This strong public presence was not wholly compatible with the orderly image of Empire that European residents wished to project. Moreover, through their accommodation and rations convicts appeared to enjoy better conditions than some free workers. The first calls for the abolition of transportation to the Straits emerged in the early 1850s, when the local press lamented that the Settlements had become ‘a common sewer’; a place of transportation for ‘the very dregs of the population’ of India. In other locations, it was not so much the convict stain as the inadequacy of convict numbers that underpinned the demise of penal transportation. Mauritius, for example, started encouraging indentured Indian immigration in 1834, and this was to prove the long-term solution to labour shortages in the aftermath of the abolition of slavery in that decade. Ultimately, however, it was the Indian uprising of 1857 that dealt the final blow to penal transportation in the surviving penal settlements (the Straits and Burma), for as noted above it was feared that convicts would fan the flames of rebellion. At this time, in Singapore the dispensability of Indian ‘offscourings’ was noted. ‘We are no longer an infant colony,’ merchant traders petitioned, a discourse of anti-transportation similar to that seen earlier in Britain’s American and early Australian colonies.

As penal transportation to the Andamans got underway in the second half of the nineteenth century, it became further interconnected to indenture in South Asia and the Indian Ocean. This was in part because of similarities in the process of sentencing (convicts) and contracting (indentured labourers), for both were legal processes. A further meeting point between the labour systems was that convicts and indentured labourers travelled to ports of embarkation in gangs (similarly called challan), either on foot, river steamer or train; stayed in jails or depots before embarkation; went on to their destination by sea; and ultimately were put to bonded forms of work with associated restrictions on freedom of movement. These similarities were not lost on ordinary Indians. In 1882 investigation in the north of the subcontinent found that potential migrants viewed the prospect of overseas indenture as a form of penal transportation. They asked what crime they had committed to be indented, and described both penal settlements and plantations as kala pani. In some cases, they also confused returned migrants with released Andaman convicts who had made their way home.

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81 IOR P/142/42: Butterworth to Turnbull, 24 September 1845; Turnbull to Butterworth, 7 January 1846.
83 IOR P/188/47: ‘The Panic’ [Singapore], n.d.
84 IOR P/2057: Major Pitcher’s report on the result of his inquiry into the system of recruiting labourers for the colonies &c: D.G. Pitcher, judge small cause court Lucknow, on special duty, to secretary to government North West Provinces and Oudh, 17 June 1882. For a detailed investigation of the parallels between penal transportation and indentured labour, see Clare
Despite the cessation of transportation to those settlements established prior to the 1857 uprising, during the 1850s and 1860s (Table 1), and the relatively small number of convicts compared to the hundreds of thousands of indentured, seasonal and kangani (personally recruited) workers by then circulating in the Bay of Bengal and Indian Ocean, the early convict presence had enduring consequences for labour relations. Two decades after its abolition in Mauritius in 1853, for instance, an 1875 royal commission noted that the earlier penal settlement perhaps explained ‘the tenacity with which ... the traditions of slavery and forced labour have been adhered to in much of the legislation of the colony.’

In the middle of the twentieth century former assistant commissioner of Burma John Furnivall claimed that though the importation of convicts was a ‘common sense policy’, penal transportation was a ‘bad guide for empire builders’. This was partly because convicts drove out or discouraged the migration of free labour, which was unable to compete with it. It was also because the work performed by convicts became stigmatised. In these ways, in the longer term, the presence of convicts both diminished the supply of free workers and raised the rate of wages. Moreover, outdoor labour became stigmatized. Furnivall claimed that in these ways the existence of the penal settlement had created a barrier between the British and the Burmese. Although the penal settlement was abolished in 1862, this division endured until 1939.

The Andaman Islands continued to receive convicts up to the Second World War. Though, as we have seen, post-1858 it drew on practices of convict management developed earlier in other penal settlements, in important ways the Islands diverged from them. Indigenous hunter-gatherers, who engaged neither in settled cultivation nor trade, inhabited the Andamans. Paralleling Australia, Britain’s intention from the moment that the first convict ship arrived was to colonize and populate territory that was perceived as lacking sovereign owners, and thus as terra nullius. British Crown policy veered between total non-contact with indigenous islanders, and contact and containment. Though in 1858 government ordered administrators and convict settlers to avoid conflict, there followed sexual attacks on Island women by naval brigadesmen, as well as the kidnap and confinement of women, men and children intended to broker the formation of cultural intermediaries. Indigenous people resisted British occupation of their Islands. In the early years, they fired upon convict working parties, and killed convict escapees. In later years, they targeted convict overseers (who wore distinct uniforms) but left other convicts alone. Extraordinary levels of violence against indigenous people - sexual assaults, warfare, and arson - underpinned colonization. Previously unknown diseases further decimated indigenous populations.

During the nineteenth century and into the turn of the twentieth, the non-indigenous, non-convict population in the Islands grew and diversified. To some extent this was through the importation of convicts’ families from the mainland, but during the early years it was mainly due to convict releases and the birth of (free) children – and eventually their grandchildren and great grandchildren. Over time, and with indigenous islanders declining in number and increasingly forced to dwell sedentarily on reserved land, it became clear that the population of convicts, self-supporters and convict descendants would never be large enough to develop the Islands economically. Moreover, the cost, penal intentions and reformatory outcomes of the colony were increasingly subject to mainland critique. Thus, the Indian Jails Commission recommended in 1919-20 that the penal colony be abolished. After then, the Andamans attempted to transition to a free colony, for instance by offering interest free loans on land grants, and encouraging free mainland settlers.88 Between 1923-6, a few dozen Burmese Karenni families migrated to Middle Andaman, assisted by a Baptist missionary. Their descendants still live in the village of Webi today. A dozen Anglo-Indian settlers were waved off from Calcutta in 1923, though in contrast to the Karenni their efforts at settlement ended in disaster. They were city people, with no prior agricultural experience. They were allocated poor quality land in an isolated part of South Andaman. The promised equipment did not materialise, and they received no support or guidance. Twelve months later, just two men were left.89 During the 1920s, the Andamans received other coerced settlers too: a few hundred members of the Bhantu ‘criminal tribe’, and a few thousand Moplah rebels convicted in the aftermath of the Malabar Rebellion of 1921. The descendants of both communities still live in the Islands to this day. However, a concurrent volunteer transportation scheme for Indian prisoners failed to produce the volume of migrants required. The much-desired free population did not materialise, likely because the stigma associated with the penal colony put them off. And so, despite the British desire to abolish transportation, and to introduce free workers, convict shipments continued until 1939.90

Women, Gender and Sexuality
The large majority of convicts transported from India to locations around the Bay of Bengal and Indian Ocean during the period 1789-1939 were men.91 However, women were a minority of many of the flows, and a close examination of gendered patterns of transportation enables us to explore further the relationship between penal settlements and imperial ambition. Before the 1820s the EIC transported few convict women. This was in part likely because women

91 All of the Southeast Asian convicts transported to mainland India who I have located in fragmentary surviving records were also male.
were sentenced to transportation in such limited numbers.\(^92\) It was also because in the very early years of transportation, with the exception of the Andaman Islands to locations with established agriculturalist and/or trading populations, convicts were used not as settlers per se, but as a means to clear land and to build and develop infrastructure. Their mobility as a labour force was paramount. Therefore, at least initially, convict women were not sent to the early settlements in Bencoolen or Penang. In what was a mirroring of the practice of allowing women to follow the mobile camps of sepoys (soldiers), however, the British encouraged convicts’ wives and female relatives to accompany them. As early as 1800, it was said that ‘a due proportion of women will tend most effectually to preserve good order and improve the morals of the convicts’.\(^93\) The idea that women had a moralising influence on male convicts was repeatedly expressed over ensuing decades.

Convict women were only sent to EIC outposts after initial land clearance and infrastructural labour was complete. They were viewed as a means of encouraging ex-convicts to stay permanently in the settlements – as were convicts’ free wives. And so, in 1806 for instance, Bencoolen ticket-of-leave convicts were granted land, seeds and livestock, and their families were given the right of inheritance.\(^94\) As Bengal inspector-general of prisons F.J. Mouat wrote later in the 1850s, one of the early goals of transportation had been to provide settlers for ‘unoccupied’ lands.\(^95\) There is scant data on the transportation of convict women or the migration of convicts’ families, in part perhaps because both were so limited. Just six women were transported to Mauritius, for instance, and around 50 to Burma. Until the 1840s, Bombay, for unknown reasons, seems to have transported most of the women sent into transportation. From then on, Bengal and Madras started to send female convicts overseas in larger numbers, usually for crimes of infanticide or the murder of spouses or other men known to them.

There exist fragmented yet quite detailed records of the number of convict women in Penang, Singapore and Malacca, and they present an interesting picture of the gendering of transportation and transportation locations (Table 2). Three things are clear. First, women were transported initially in only tiny numbers. Even by 1847, they made up just 1.9% of total convict stock. Second, women were not sent in equal portions to the three settlements. Indeed, Malacca only rarely received female convicts during this period. Third, the proportion of convict women increased over time, particularly during the 1840s and 1850s. Excluding Malacca (which held only one or two female convicts in the 1860s) we

\(^{92}\) We do not have data for this period, but we know that for a later six and a half year period, just 127 Bengal women were sentenced to transportation: IOR P/145/22: transportation of convict women from the Bengal presidency, 1848–[July] 1855.
\(^{93}\) IOR P/5/12: 22 May no. 6 para. 71; IOR P/129/32: resident Bencoolen to the board of trade, 15 August 1806; 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.
\(^{94}\) IOR P/129/32: A regulation for the management of the convicts transported from Bengal to Fort Marlborough, 5 August 1806.
see that whilst in 1847 just 2% of convicts in Penang and Singapore were female, by 1854 this figure had risen to 5%, by 1858 to 6%, and by 1866 to 7%. This was almost certainly because the local administration wished to encourage the permanent settlement of former convicts in the region.

Table 2. Total Number of Convicts (and Number of Convict Women where specified) in Penang, Malacca and Singapore, selected years, 1812-66

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Penang</th>
<th>Malacca</th>
<th>Singapore</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1812</td>
<td>^119(5)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1816</td>
<td>752 inc. ^151(8)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1820</td>
<td>^165(6)</td>
<td></td>
<td>216</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1824</td>
<td>1469(24)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1831</td>
<td>^89(4)</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>704</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1834</td>
<td>^97(5)</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>855</td>
<td>1705</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1838</td>
<td>566</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1842</td>
<td>721</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1847</td>
<td>601(26)</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>1409</td>
<td>2209(42)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1851</td>
<td>823</td>
<td>317(0)</td>
<td>1379(49)</td>
<td>2519(49)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1854</td>
<td>1080(69)</td>
<td>596(0)</td>
<td>1803(80)</td>
<td>3479(149)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1858</td>
<td>1413(106)</td>
<td>534</td>
<td>2139(119)</td>
<td>4086(225)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1860</td>
<td>1256(93)</td>
<td>532</td>
<td>2275(124)</td>
<td>4063(217)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1862</td>
<td>1089(89)</td>
<td>514</td>
<td>2055(120)</td>
<td>3658(209)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1866</td>
<td>801(73)</td>
<td>745(2)</td>
<td>1681(112)</td>
<td>3227(187)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: This table includes figures for years where data is available. Convict numbers are usually recorded by presidency, and due to gaps in the records the figures are often incomplete. Due to the scattered nature of the records, this data above represents convict numbers in a wide range of months. Further, it is not always possible to discern the number of women in the settlements. Where no such figures are recorded, the extent of their presence is unknown.

^ Figures for Bombay convicts only.
< Figures for Bengal convicts only.
* Figures for Madras convicts only.


Antipathy towards the sending of female convicts in Malacca must have been connected to the nature of labour there, for convicts were largely sent out into the jungles in working parties to build roads. Moreover, the number of male
convicts was the smallest in the Straits, and by the late 1840s the majority of convicts were said to be either in hospital or infirm. The relatively large increase in convict numbers overall during the 1850s was the result of the opening up of Malacca as a destination for transportation convicts from Ceylon. They were only transported for what the Queen’s Advocate described as ‘very aggravated’ or repeat serious offences, and so were mainly men.

As noted above, the Andamans were colonized using convicts, and in 1858 there were no local or migrant settled cultivators on the Islands. From the very first shipments, the British thus routinely transported convict women. Though in 1860 the Islands held a smaller proportion of convict women than the Straits Settlements, their numbers quickly rose and by 1870 the Andamans overtook the earlier settlements of Penang and Singapore (Table 3). At various points over its near century long history it also actively encouraged convicts’ families to migrate, often though without success.

In all the settlements, including the Andamans, convict women were largely kept at domestic forms of labour, notably cleaning, grinding grain and sewing. These were traditionally low-caste forms of employment, and suggest a de-casting of convict women in transportation. This was a contrast to the management of men, which was to a limited degree sensitive to their former caste occupations. Until the 1840s, convict men and women were not kept separately from each other, and often cohabited together. Even when the authorities made moves to accommodate them apart, as in the Straits Settlements, in practice they continued to live together. Andaman self-supporters routinely had families and lived in villages outside the capital, Port Blair.

Table 3: Percentage of Convict Women in the Andaman Islands, 1858–1940

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Convict Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1858</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1860</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1865</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1870</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1875</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1885</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1895</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1905</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1915</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: There is full data for this period; this table shows figures for every five years after 1860. Before 1876, the percentages are for 31 December; from 1876, they are for 31 March. Figures

96 IOR P/143/16: Butterworth to Young, 12 November 1847.
97 The National Archives, Kew CO54/322: H.C. Selby, queen’s advocate, to Governor H.G. Ward, 17 May 1856.
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: India Office Records (IOR) P (judicial proceedings) series; IOR V series: Annual Reports Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

Still, the sex ratio in all the Indian penal settlements was grossly imbalanced. This led to the emergence of administrative concern about fights over women, prostitution, and homosexual relations. In 1856, for example, it was said that convict women in Burma were having sexual relationships with jail guards, paid for in gold jewellery.100 ‘Immorality’ was from time to time discussed by the Andaman administration, including with respect to women’s promiscuity and sex between locally born (i.e. convict descended) boys.101 In 1911, Census Commissioner R.F. Lowis went as far as to claim that self-supporting convicts in the Andamans prostituted their female children, for they were ‘a source of revenue to unscrupulous parents; a valuable asset, not to be lightly parted with’.102 In 1919-20 the abolitionist Indian Jails Committee drew attention to earlier claims that ‘unnatural vice’ was widespread in certain districts of the Islands.103

Given their relative mobility, it is also the case that male convicts were able to establish intimate relationships with free populations. In Mauritius, for example, after they began to arrive in large numbers in the late 1830s, some convicts married indentured women. Given that overall men predominated in the sex ratios of indenture, this suggests that the convicts had been able to accrue the relative wealth necessary to make them attractive partners.104 In the Andaman archives too, there are textual remnants of escaped convicts having sex or children with Indigenous women – and likely there were many more such liaisons of which no paper records survive.105

Transportation, political contingency and convict solidarities

As figure 1 shows, there were sharp peaks in convict flows during the period under consideration. It is possible to connect some of these to specific years when the East India Company and later the British Crown were invoking penal transportation as a means of suppressing rebellion, and exporting rebels. The

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100 F.J. Mouat, Reports on Jails Visited and Inspected in Bengal, Bihar and Arracan (Calcutta: F. Carbery, Military Orphan Press, 1856), 188-9; IOR P/145/22: F.J. Mouat, inspector-general of Jails Bengal, to C.J. Buckland, secretary to government Bengal, 24 May 1856.
101 IOR P/4755 Home (Port Blair) July 1895, 79-81: measures for the prevention of immorality among free persons at Port Blair; IOR P/9716 Home (Port Blair) July 1915, 1: suspension for the present of the grant of permission to released convicts to remain in the settlement.
104 Anderson, Convicts In the Indian Ocean, 86-91.
105 IOR P/206/61: statement of convict no. 276 Dooodnath Tewarry, 26 May 1859; London Metropolitan Archives H01/ST/NC/17/9: statement of convict no. 2467 named Sham son of Sarung, Moosulman ... escaped from the settlement ... on the 2nd July 1859, and ... captured by his voluntary return ... on the 2nd August 1859.
use of transportation as a means of quashing forms of anti-colonial solidarity – as a strategy of colonial governmentality - stretched back to the turn of the eighteenth century. Then, after the wars of 1799-1805, Polygar chiefs were shipped out of the former Tirunelveli kingdom of south India - to Bengal and to Penang. The Second Maratha Wars of 1803-5 also contributed to the sharp rise in transportation at this time. During the Third Maratha War of 1816-19 the overall number of convict transportations stayed relatively high. In the 1810s and again in the 1820s, Kandyan nobles were exiled from Ceylon to Mauritius. They were kept quite apart from the ordinary Indian convicts, the latter on occasion being allocated to them as servants. Transportation was also used increasingly in the 1840s, as a means of getting rid of soldiers who had fought the British during the Anglo-Sikh wars (1845-6, 1848-9). The most dramatic sudden rises of all, though, came in the aftermath of the Santal rebellion of 1855 and the 1857 revolt, when rebels were sent in the former case to the penal settlements of Southeast Asia and in the latter to the Andamans. The exile of the Manipuri royal family in the Andamans followed in the 1870s, after the Anglo-Manipur War of Assam. In 1877, the British also exiled the deposed Sultan of Perak, Abdullah Jaffar Moratham, to the Seychelles.106

Disguised within these figures are the subaltern peasant rebels of Empire, who were almost continuously transported overseas during this period. Many of the first convicts shipped to Mauritius in 1815 for instance were from peasant and tribal groups, convicted in regions of the Bengal Presidency in near-permanent revolt against Company appropriation (of land) and extortion (or tax collection.) Some of the convicts sent to Aden in the 1840s were transported in the aftermath of the rebellion in Kolhapur, which protested against EIC annexation.

It is possible to trace the transmission of anti-British sentiments over long distances, via the transportation of convicts. For instance, in the 1840s and 1850s there were several violent outbreaks amongst convicts transported after the Anglo-Sikh wars and consequent EIC annexation of the Punjab. In the aftermath of the conflict, the British transported dozens if not hundreds of former soldiers to Southeast Asian locations, including Singapore and Moulmein. One convict, Bhai Maharaj Singh, transported to Singapore, was described as a ‘saint-soldier’. He had led anti-British forces during the Second Anglo-Sikh War, and according to the British deputy commissioner at the time: ‘He is to the Natives what Jesus Christ is to the most zealous of Christians ... This man who was a God, is in our hands.’107 The British attempted to keep him away from the bulk of Indian transportation convicts, confining him in the civil jail on Pearl’s Hill. Bhai Maharaj Singh wrote of his experiences in letters to India, in which he expressed a strong desire to go home, but he died in Singapore 1856. His shrine

is now the centrepiece of the Silat Road Gurdwara (temple), where Sikh worshippers remember him today as a nationalist hero.108

Another hundred or so convicts in Burma were thugs from the Upper Provinces of Bengal. At the time, the British were making concerted efforts to ‘extinguish’ ‘thuggee’ (*thagi*) – which they represented as a pseudo-religious ritual of theft and murder by strangulation. In fact, as recent research has shown, *thagi* was a kind of militarised practice, closely related to the military labour market in the region, and in which a large percentage of the male population was engaged.109 Some of the convicts transported to Burma were allegedly so violent that on arrival they were made to wear leg fetters, and handcuffs – attached with a chain to an iron neck ring.110

Such convicts were not kept apart from other ordinary transportation convicts, and they often joined together to resist their situation. There were mass escapes in Burma in the years after 1843, for example, after discipline generally was tightened up and common messing was introduced (so that convicts cooked and ate together, rather than according to their own desires or cultural or religious imperatives.)111 In 1846, transportation convicts attempted to break out of the jail on Ramree Island (off the coast of north Burma), and when they failed instead burnt down their wards and the guardrooms.112 Some violent episodes were inspired by convict knowledge of the weaknesses of the system. In 1847, for example, 120 convicts working on the Burmese roads attempted to get away. The Commissioner of Arakan claimed that he had no power to judicially punish any of them, for they were already subject to hard labour in chains, with limited rations. The convicts knew this all too well.113

Transportation could also constitute a vector for the spread of insurrection, for convicts drew on and perpetuated the wider-ranging socio-political, and anti-colonial grievances that had on occasion underpinned their initial transportation. In this respect, it is important to note that there were sometimes significant connections between the land-based rebellions for which some of the Indian convicts were transported, convict mutinies at sea, and uprisings in the penal settlements. In Aden, it was the Kolhapur rebels who led ongoing attempts to kill their guards and to escape, including one mass attempt in 1844 in which five convicts died. A further convict mutiny at one of the coal depots in Burma, in 1849, involved 100 Punjabi men, who tried to escape while they were employed in weighing and packing coal. They did not succeed, and three were left dead and eight severely wounded in the ensuing gunfight. Commissioner A. Bogle reported: ‘the Secks [Sikhs] had ... bound themselves by an Oath never to return

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111 IOR P/142/61: H. Bower, magistrate in charge of Moulmein Jail, to Colvin, 21 January 1847.
113 IOR P/142/60: A. Bogle, commissioner Arakan, to Halliday, 27 November 1846.
to the prison and to eat beef sooner than abandon their purpose ... Bold men will ever be found keen to emancipate themselves from thraldom, and when determined upon it, they are not to be restrained ...’

Bogle's comments on the Sikh convicts’ oath brings us to the question of culture and religion in transportation. They were not made subject to Christian proselytization, but otherwise we know relatively little about convicts' religious practices. Fragments in the archives suggest that in the period to the 1850s in many locations Hindu and Muslim convicts built and worshipped in temples and mosques, often alongside the free population. To be sure, transported convicts both led and participated in the Muharrum, which marks the end of the period of mourning for the martyrdom of the Prophet’s grandson Husayn. In Singapore, they broke out in riots in 1856, after government banned their procession. They also took charge of the cremation or burial of their dead, according to community traditions. The Andaman Islands after 1858 had a different religious character to the pre-revolt settlements. Though a few low-caste men were employed as sweepers, and a few high-caste Brahmins worked as cooks, otherwise the British took little notice of caste in allocating convicts to labour. They also refused to allow the construction of religious buildings, and would not let caste panchyats (councils) sit, even in self-supporter villages. The Andamans thus witnessed some astonishing transformations in caste, and the emergence of transformative social and religious formations (including Hindu/ Muslim inter-marriage without conversion) that were distinct from those of the mainland.

**Conclusions**

The volume of convict flows around the Bay of Bengal and Indian Ocean from the late eighteenth to mid-twentieth centuries was a fraction of that of the circular mobility and migration of Asian contract, indentured and kangani labour during the same period. Nevertheless, as a detailed examination of the figures shows, penal transportation was used as a means of population management, or governmentality; and of providing the EIC and British Crown with labour vital to its geographical and strategic expansion in and beyond the Bay of Bengal, including with respect to the transportation of convict women and families, permanent settlement. From the late eighteenth century onwards, in many locations convicts were preferred to slaves and other free workers. Finally, convicts were the first settler-colonists of the uncolonized (if not unpopulated) Andamans, both in 1793 and again in 1858, and if not willing colonizers they were tools of indigenous dispossession.

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114 IOR P/143/40: Bogle to Grant, 16 November 1849.
In the middle of the nineteenth century Indian convict flows gathered pace just as outward metropolitan ones were being abolished (see Hamish Maxwell-Stewart, in this volume). This reveals the variegation of imperial penal practices. In particular, it opens out to view the importance of race in imperial policy, for the labour of Asian convict bodies was exploited in settlements and colonies for a much longer period of time than that of the British and Irish. Further, the use of penal transportation as a punishment for serious offences in the Indian Empire until the Second World War cautions against the idea that the emergence of modern punishment in the nineteenth century was characterised by a global shift from the corporal to the carceral. Not at all, if we take an empire-wide view of the persistence of particular penal forms.

There is no question that there are large numbers of Indian convict descendants living today in places like Mauritius, Myanmar (Burma), Malaysia (Penang, Malacca) and Singapore, as well as in the Indian hill station of Ootacamund (Burmese, Malay and Chinese). However, they have little history that is recognisably separate or distinct. This post-emancipation outcome tells us a great deal about the depth of convict social and cultural mobility during the transportation era, as also the relations and connections that existed between convicts and other people. These were so important that through marriage and other intimacies ultimately convict descendants have simply ‘disappeared.’ In the Andamans, however, where indigenous islanders were not settled cultivators, and where as we have seen there were almost no other free settlers, there today exists a distinct, convict-descended community. They are known as the ‘pre-42s’ or the ‘local-born’, and in the aftermath of Indian Independence in 1947 have enjoyed particular state sanctioned privileges, including access to education and government employment.118 Though the eminent nationalists incarcerated in the Islands’ cellular jail were all repatriated, today India celebrates the symbolic importance of the Andamans in the Indian freedom struggle. It also perceives the Islands’ religious and cultural harmony – a social aftermath of cosmopolitan convict flows - as so profound that it calls for the whole nation to follow the model of ‘unity in diversity’. It is extraordinary, indeed, that a once feared imperial penal colony is now transformed into a moral lesson for an entire nation.

118 1942 was the year of Japanese occupation; the appellation ‘pre-42’ invokes the idea of a person’s settlement in the Andamans before Indian independence (1947), and includes people descended from the Bhantus and Moplahs.