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978-1-107-07679-2 - New Histories of the Andaman Islands: Landscape, Place and Identity in the Bay of Bengal, 1790–2012

Clare Anderson, Madhumita Mazumdar and Vishvajit Pandya

Excerpt

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## 1 Introduction

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*Clare Anderson, Madhumita Mazumdar  
and Vishvajit Pandya*

Tucked away in the Bay of Bengal, some thousand miles from the great city of Kolkata, the Union Territory of the Andaman Islands is a relatively isolated and marginalized part of the Republic of India, constituting a long chain of 204 islands, some 40 of which are inhabited. In recent times, the catastrophic tsunami of December 2004 brought the Islands under the glare of national and international media. Suffering some of the worst damage unleashed by the earthquake, the Islands acquired new forms of visibility and attracted unprecedented interest both in mainland India and across the world. News reports driven by both humanitarian and commercial interests, for instance, sought to generate new forms of appreciation of the Islands as a tropical paradise replete with forests, beaches and ‘exotic natives’ that desperately demanded conservation. Such texts complemented previous knowledge of the islands as *kala pani*, the black waters over which the British transported thousands of convicts and freedom fighters to a life of exile or forced labour. However, despite the post-tsunami national and international interest in the Andamans, little has been done to change or even to question the enduring stereotype of the Islands as no more than the home of ‘tropical exotica’ and nationalist martyrdom. The larger historical, social and cultural context of the Islands has remained quite apart from debates on island tourism, conservation and development, as well as symbolic acts of remembering the freedom struggle. This book seeks to correct this partial image of the Andaman Islands and to bring into focus the story of the complex multicultural society encompassed within its territorial bounds.

Our approach is one of integration, with respect to our disciplinary focus and the subjects of our concern. We propose chapters that start from the vantage points offered within the disciplines of History, Sociology and Anthropology in order to bring the past to the centre of present-day issues and concerns. In part, we want to show the importance of understanding how society, culture and political economy in the Andamans have been historically constituted. But we also offer interpretations of how history is understood in the Islands today and how it has

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been deployed (and contested) in the making of nation, community and identity. Our conceptual tools turn on ideas of landscape and space, and in particular on the importance of human intervention in the making of place. The book is strongly island-centred. Though it is necessarily engaged with the relationship between the Islands, the British Empire and the Indian mainland, we look outwards, deliberately, from within. In each of these ways, *New Histories of the Andaman Islands* offers a fresh perspective to studies of India and the Bay of Bengal, as well as to scholarship on other post-colonial spaces forged through indigenous marginalization and migration – coerced or free.

### Entangled histories

Situated along the sea routes to Southeast Asia and the South China Sea, the pristine islands of the Andamans have long attracted a range of people to their shores: sailors, traders, pirates, colonizers and settlers from various parts of India, Burma and Malaysia. Previously uncolonized, the British first became interested in the Islands in 1789, when the Governor-General of India, Lord Cornwallis, dispatched Lieutenant Archibald Blair on a survey mission, instructing him to raise the Union Flag and to set up a harbour where merchant and navy ships might be refreshed and refitted. At this time, it was widely believed that the Islands were inhabited by ferocious cannibals with dog-like faces and tails. There was scant contemporary knowledge of the Andamans, and what the British knew was drawn largely from the writings of the second-century Mediterranean astronomer and geographer Ptolemy as well as the seventh, thirteenth and early eighteenth-century travellers I-Tsing, Marco Polo and Alexander Hamilton. Lieutenant Blair was the first visitor to offer a more nuanced commentary on the Andamanese, writing that though he once noted their hostility and ‘rude and uncivilized state’, he also found them to be of happy disposition and ‘susceptible of the most tender impressions’.<sup>1</sup>

In his report to the East India Company in 1789, Blair recommended that the colonial settlement be established at the mouth of the large harbour of South Andaman. This was quickly effected; the site was named Port Cornwallis, and Blair took charge of about two hundred labourers, sepoy and settlers who he put to work on Chatham Island. They cleared land of jungle, built huts and storehouses, and planted fruits and vegetables on the island; within a few months, they had constructed a road

<sup>1</sup> Selections from the Records of the Government of India (Foreign Dept), 24, John Gray, ‘Calcutta Gazette’ Office, 1858, Survey of the Andamans, Report of Archibald Blair, 27 May 1793, 92–3, RGS.

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between what are now Phoenix and Navy bays. So successful were they that many sent for their families. Blair, meanwhile, believed that a second harbour in the northeast of North Andaman had great potential, and in 1792 the Company ordered that the Chatham settlement move, with Major Alexander Kyd replacing Blair as officer in charge. He was ordered to report on the comparative advantages of Port Cornwallis and Prince of Wales Island as naval stations.<sup>2</sup> Although the settlers duplicated the labours of South Andaman, and the workforce was augmented with convicts from Bengal, the new settlement, also named Port Cornwallis, was a disaster. This was because when Britain went to war against France, Kyd was forced to divert resources from colonization to fortification. Moreover, the settlers and convicts quickly fell ill with fevers, sores and scurvy, and many died. After the surgeon succumbed, the East India Company decided to abandon the Andamans altogether. It transferred the surviving convicts to its penal colony in neighbouring Prince of Wales Island (Penang), and sent the free settlers back to Calcutta.

Because of their central position in the Asian trading routes that criss-crossed the Bay of Bengal, the Company remained interested in the Islands during the years that followed, and its ships occasionally anchored there. This maritime traffic increased as Company interests penetrated South India, the Burmese coast, and the littorals of Singapore and the Malacca Straits. During the 1840s and 1850s, however, stories of Andamanese attacks on prospectors and shipwrecked sailors and passengers began to circulate. Though Governor-General Charles Canning was initially sceptical, the Company began to reconsider settling the Islands, bolstered by the positive reports of the Commissioner of neighbouring Arakan, Henry Hopkinson.<sup>3</sup> Their view was only strengthened when shortly afterwards a group of Andamanese killed eight Chinese traders when they landed on the Islands in search of fresh water.<sup>4</sup> '[I]t appears highly discreditable in a civilized Government to allow such a state of things to exist within a sea', the Magistrate of Tenasserim

<sup>2</sup> Copy of the first part of a report from Major Kyd relative to the Settlements at Prince of Wales Island and the Andamans with its appendix, 4 March 1795, Reports of the surgeons at Port Cornwallis during the years 1793 and 1794, IOR G/34/1 ff. 379–518.

<sup>3</sup> W. Grey, secretary to government Bengal, to J. W. Dalrymple, under secretary to government of India, 29 February 1856; Henry Hopkinson, commissioner of Arakan, to Grey, 8 February 1856, cited in M. V. Portman, *A History of Our Relations with the Andamanese*, vol. 1 (Calcutta: Superintendent of Government Printing, 1899), 189–97.

<sup>4</sup> Governor-General Canning to the Court of Directors, 22 April 1856, enc. A. Bogle, Commissioner Tenasserim and Martaban Provinces, to G. Edmonstone, secretary to government of India, cited in Portman, *A History of Our Relations*, vol. 1, 197–204.

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wrote, ‘bounded by its own territories and on the high road to many of its chief emporia’.<sup>5</sup>

Governor-General Canning remained sceptical, and set up a survey party under the direction of Bengal army surgeon F. J. Mouat to gather further information.<sup>6</sup> His planned survey was quickly overtaken by events, for in the middle of these discussions much of North India broke out in revolt. There were mass jailbreaks, following rebel attacks on Company prisons. The British government had no means of securing the many thousands of escaped prisoners who they were able to recapture, or the rebels and mutineers tried, convicted and sentenced by special tribunals. By the time Mouat left Calcutta, therefore, he was issued with new instructions: he was not to gather information but to select the best site for a penal colony.<sup>7</sup> As officer-in-charge of the Andamanese M. V. Portman wrote later, if the cause of colonization was the British desire to dominate and pacify Islanders, its catalyst was the 1857 Revolt.<sup>8</sup>

The first batch of 200 convicted mutineers and rebels arrived in the Andamans in March 1858, and they were landed at Chatham under the charge of J. P. Walker, who had previously been the Superintendent of Agra Jail, which was at the time one of the largest prisons in the world. They were joined by almost 4,000 transportees convicted in the aftermath of the 1857 Revolt. Death rates during the first eighteen months of colonization were appalling, and about one-third of the convicts then transported died. But as the jungles and swamps were cleared and convicts were moved from canvas shelters to wooden barracks, the health of the settlement improved. Through the exertions of convict forced labour, the Andaman settlement expanded year on year, and the British continued to use it as a penal colony.<sup>9</sup> They transported some 80,000 criminal convicts to the Islands during the period to the 1930s, and about 1,000 political prisoners, most famously about 350 nationalist agitators during the period 1910 to 1916 and again in 1932. Ordinary convicts were put to

<sup>5</sup> J. C. Haughton, Magistrate Tenasserim and Martaban Provinces, to Bogle, 3 March 1856, cited in *Portman, A History of Our Relations*, vol. 1, 198.

<sup>6</sup> Canning’s Minute; Canning to the Court of Directors, 8 April 1857, cited in *Portman, A History of Our Relations*, vol. 1, 203–4, 206–7.

<sup>7</sup> C. Beadon, secretary to government of India, to F. J. Mouat, G. F. Playfair and J. A. Heathcote, 20 November 1857, IJC 15 January 1858, IOR P.188.49.

<sup>8</sup> Portman, *A History of Our Relations*, vol. 1, 186. For a detailed account of the 1857 survey and the decision to recolonize the Andamans in the aftermath of the Indian revolt, see Clare Anderson, *The Indian Uprising of 1857–8: Prisons, Prisoners and Rebellion* (London: Anthem, 2007), chapter 5.

<sup>9</sup> Anderson, *The Indian Uprising*, chapter 5; Satadru Sen, *Disciplining Punishment: Colonialism and Convict Society in the Andaman Islands* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000); Aparna Vaidik, *Imperial Andamans: Colonial Encounter and Island History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2010).

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forced labour on various developmental projects; political prisoners were punished through exile and isolation. Many of the latter were incarcerated in the Islands' notorious Cellular Jail, a panoptican structure with a central watchtower and radiating three-storey wings that was opened in 1906.<sup>10</sup>

With the penal colonization of the Andamans began the decimation of the Islands' indigenous peoples. From the first years of British settlement, they were made subject to violent kidnaps and confinement, and subjected to various forms of industrial training, for the purpose of 'civilization'. Populations dwindled, partly after violent colonial incursions and indigenous retaliation, and partly due to the spread of disease, including high rates of stillbirth probably caused by syphilis. During the period after 1858, the British veered between policies of tribal incorporation, separate containment and non-contact. The changing ideas about indigenous-settler relations might be seen as the historical background to post-colonial forms of reservation, and the debates around them, which are one focus of this book and continue into the present day.<sup>11</sup>

Over the years, there were various government inspections of the Islands, underpinned by extensive correspondence and productive of voluminous reports. In the years prior to the construction of the Cellular Jail, these were Charles Napier (1865), H. Nelson Davies (1867), J. S. Campbell and H. W. Norman (1874), A. Mackenzie (1886), C. J. Lyall and A. S. Lethbridge (1890). After 1906, there were reports in 1913 (Reginald Craddock), 1920 (Indian Jails Committee), 1925 (Alexander Muddiman), 1933 (F.A. Barker) and 1935 (Henry Craik). These reports made various interventions into the management of the penal colony, as well as over time suggesting how it might become more penal in character, how it might strive for economic productivity and self-sufficiency, and how it might encourage convict rehabilitation and permanent settlement.

<sup>10</sup> A. N. Aggarwal, *The Heroes of Cellular Jail* (Patiala: Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, 1995); L. P. Mathur, *Kala Pani: History of Andaman and Nicobar Islands with a Study of India's Freedom Struggle* (New Delhi: Eastern Book Corporation, 1985), 73–125. Many political prisoners wrote accounts of their incarceration in the Andamans. See David Arnold, 'The Self and the Cell: Indian Prison Narratives as Life Histories', in David Arnold and Stuart H. Blackburn (eds.), *Telling Lives in India: Biography, Autobiography, and Life History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 29–53.

<sup>11</sup> Vishvajit Pandya, *In the Forest: Visual and Material Worlds of the Andaman Islanders 1858–2000* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2009). See also Clare Anderson, 'Colonization, Kidnap and Confinement in the Andamans Penal Colony, 1771–1864', *Journal of Historical Geography* 37, 1 (2011), 68–81. Satadru Sen, *Savagery and Colonialism in the Indian Ocean: Power, Pleasure and the Andaman Islanders* (New York: Routledge, 2010); UNESCO, *The Jarawa Tribal Reserve Dossier: Cultural & Biological Diversities in the Andaman Islands*, Pankaj Sekhsaria and Vishvajit Pandya (eds.), (Paris: UNESCO, 2010), 212; Claire Wintle, *Colonial Collecting and Display: Encounters with Material Culture from the Andaman and Nicobar Islands* (Oxford: Bergahan, 2013).

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Ultimately, following the critical tone of the report of the Indian Jails Committee (1920), the British decided to abolish the penal colony. However, there was insufficient jail capacity on the mainland for this policy to be effected, and transportation continued. More than 1,000 Moplah convicts were transported to the Islands' capital Port Blair after the Malabar Rebellion of 1921, and given land around Bamboo Flat. They were joined by 'volunteer' convicts, who chose transportation under relatively favourable conditions over continued incarceration in mainland jails. After serving a limited term, they were released as near-free settlers.<sup>12</sup>

A few hundred non-convict settlers were shipped to the Andamans during the colonial era too, primarily to plug labour gaps. Though they were neither criminally convicted nor sentenced to transportation, these settlers were certainly coerced migrants. In 1920, Karen people from Bassein (Burma) were shipped to the Islands under the Baptist missionary Reverend Lugyi. They settled in Webi, in North Andaman, and worked as forest labourers.<sup>13</sup> A few Ranchis from Chotanagpur in Bihar were also recruited at about this time, and also as labourers in the forest department.<sup>14</sup> The Bhandus were a tribe of supposedly hereditary criminals from North Central India. Between 1926 and 1928, almost 300 of them were shipped to the Islands under the purview of the Salvation Army, which was paid to oversee the Bhandus by the government of India. They settled down as agriculturalists in the villages of Caddelgunj and Aniket.<sup>15</sup> By the 1930s, then, the Islands had become quite socially complex. Living there were the indigenous inhabitants, convicts, ex-convicts, convict descendants (the local born) and these various other coerced migrant groups.

In 1937, following a mass hunger strike, the last political prisoners were repatriated to India.<sup>16</sup> Just two years later, the world went to war. When Japan entered the war in the east in 1941, they invaded Burma, and it was not long before they occupied the Andamans. The

<sup>12</sup> Taylor C. Sherman, 'From Hell to Paradise? Voluntary Transfer of Convicts to the Andaman Islands, 1921–1940', *Modern Asian Studies* 43, 2 (2009), 367–88.

<sup>13</sup> Palash Chandra Coomar, *Tradition and Transformation in an Immigrant Island Society: The Karen of Andaman Islands* (New Delhi: Abhijeet Publications, 2009).

<sup>14</sup> O. P. Verma, 'The Working Composition of the Ranchi Tribal Labourers in Andaman and Nicobar Islands: A Case Study of Baratang Island', *Journal of Social Research* 19, 2 (1976), 114–24.

<sup>15</sup> Palash Chandra Coomar, *Migration and Social Change: A Study of the Bhandu of Andaman Islands* (Calcutta: Anthropological Survey of India, 1997); Palash C. Coomar and Manis K. Raha, 'Family among the Bhandu of Andamans', *Journal of the Indian Anthropological Society*, 24, 2 (1989), 122.

<sup>16</sup> Pramod Kumar Srivastava, 'Resistance and Repression in India: The Hunger Strike at the Andaman Cellular Jail in 1933', *Crime, History and Societies* 7, 2 (2003), 81–102.

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British evacuated Rangoon and Port Blair on the 7 and 13 March 1942, respectively, and the Japanese invaded on 23 March 1942. They released all the convicts and arrested the two remaining British officials, Chief Commissioner Charles Waterfall and his assistant A. J. Bird. Initially, the population assisted the Japanese, collaborating with them in the administration of the Islands as well as their larger anti-British imperial and pan-Asian agenda. Importantly, Islanders set up a branch of the Indian Independence League. It was not long, however, before the occupation turned sour. The Japanese publicly executed Bird, and arrested hundreds of ordinary people, on trumped-up charges of spying for the British. The British had during 1942 through 1943 managed to land four missions on the Islands, and from there directed air and submarine raids against Port Blair. They had been assisted by villagers in Ferrargunj and Wimberleygunj, as well as Ranchi forest labourers. Against this backdrop, in October 1943, the leader of the Provisional Indian Government, Subhas Chandra Bose, visited Port Blair.<sup>17</sup> He was received as a hero, though the Japanese kept him away from the locals, and he was seemingly unaware of their brutal treatment, which included death by torture and mass executions. By the time the Japanese surrendered in a formal ceremony on 7 October 1945, the Islands had been reduced to a state of extreme privation and near starvation.<sup>18</sup>

The British returned to the Islands to oversee their rehabilitation. Under Chief Commissioner N. K. Paterson, they abolished the penal colony and liberated all remaining convicts. The eventual transfer of power came when the first chief commissioner of independent India, Imam-ul-Majid, was appointed in 1947. Although the Islands acquired notoriety under the British colonial regime and were devastated by the Japanese occupation, the stigma attached to them perhaps wore off sooner than expected. In the aftermath of Indian Independence and Partition in 1947, about 500 refugee families, fleeing the communal violence that broke out on the subcontinent, readily agreed to be 'rehabilitated' into a region they had hitherto feared.<sup>19</sup> They were joined

<sup>17</sup> For a fascinating recent biography, see Sugata Bose, *His Majesty's Opponent: Subhas Chandra Bose and India's Struggle Against Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012).

<sup>18</sup> B. B. Lall, *A Regime of Fears and Tears (History of the Japanese Occupation of the Andaman Islands)* (New Delhi: Farsight Publishers, 1992); Rabin Roychowdhury, *Black Days in Andaman and Nicobar Islands* (New Delhi: Manas Publications, 2004).

<sup>19</sup> Swapan Kumar Biswas, *Colonization and Rehabilitation in the Andaman Islands* (New Delhi: Abhijeet Publications, 2009); Sabyasachi Basu Ray Chaudhuri, 'Exiled to the Andamans: The Refugees from East Pakistan', in Pradip Kumar Bose (ed.), *Refugees in West Bengal: Institutional Processes, Contested Identities* (Calcutta: MCRG, 2000), 131–9; Sabyasachi Basu Roychowdhury, 'Exiled in the Andamans: The Refugees of East

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by other batches from East Bengal in the 1950s. Indeed, they came to make their homes in a place they perceived to be free of the social hierarchies, prejudices and conflicts of mainland India – social gradations that had been dissolved and remade by the social and cultural syncretism effected through the transportation of convicts from all over the subcontinent. Meantime, however, the local-born population – many of whom had been economically ruined by the war – began to resent the seemingly favourable conditions that the new settlers enjoyed. This drew a line of distinction around the local borns – the descendants of convicts – who began to call themselves ‘pre-42’ settlers. In the 1960s, free settlers began to migrate in greater numbers from the mainland, and so more housing was needed in and around Port Blair, in particular.<sup>20</sup> As land and forest clearance and infrastructural work progressed and expanded in the 1950s and 60s, during this period we find the historical roots of one of the biggest social issues in the Islands today: the encroachment of settlers onto reserved tribal land.<sup>21</sup>

The Andaman Islands, then, have a complex and entangled history: they constitute and remain a place at the centre of networks of governance, coercion and mobility that span the Bay of Bengal, South and Southeast Asia and beyond; where the colonized could also be colonizers; and where old hierarchies could give way to the making of new social structures. Its geographical situation in the Bay of Bengal has, over time, given rise to particular geopolitical relationships with the colonial metropole (Britain), the mainland (as Islanders call continental India), Burma, the Straits of Malacca and Japan. As is often recognized, colonization and settlement –

Pakistan’, in Pradip Kumar Bose (ed.), *Refugees in West Bengal: Institutional Processes and Contested Identities* (Calcutta: Calcutta Research Group, 2000); and Udit Sen, ‘Dissident Memories: Exploring Bengali Refugee Narratives in the Andaman Islands’, in Panikos Panayi and Pippa Virdee (eds.), *Refugees and the End of Empire: Imperial Collapse and Forced Migration in the Twentieth Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 219–44.

<sup>20</sup> Kumar Suresh Singh (ed.), *People of India: Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Volume XII* (New Delhi: Anthropological Survey of India, 1994).

<sup>21</sup> For general overviews of migration and settlement, see S. K. Bhattacharya, *Sagarkanya Andaman* (Calcutta: Swati Prashani, 1983); S. K. Bhattacharya, P. C. Dutta and S. Bhattacharya, ‘The Migrant Oraon in the Andaman: Demographic Aspects’, *Journal of Indian Anthropological Society* 20, 1 (1985), 86–92; Sabyasachi Basu Ray Chaudhuri, ‘Exiled to the Andamans: The Refugees of East Pakistan’, in Pradip Kumar Bose (ed.), *Refugees in West Bengal: Institutional Practices and Contested Identities* (Calcutta: Calcutta Research Group, 2000); Kiran Dhingra, *The Andaman and Nicobar Islands in the Twentieth Century: A Gazetteer* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005); Rabin Roychowdhury, *The Untold Andaman and Nicobar Islands* (New Delhi: Manas Publications, 2011); A. K. Joshi, *Emigration and Social Change: A Sociological Study of Early Emigrants of the Andamans* (New Delhi: Rawat Publications, 2005); Kailash, ‘Peaceful Coexistence: Lessons from Andamans’, *Economic and Political Weekly* 35, 32 (2000), 2859–65; Singh (ed.), *People of India*.



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even that effected through the exploitation of some of the most marginalized peoples of Empire – has ushered in profound environmental and human degradation and devastation. And yet, at the same time, the seemingly peaceful coexistence in the Islands of people from all over South Asia has led to the often-cited notion that they are a ‘mini India’, a place of ‘unity in diversity’. But what is less well understood are the ways in which indigenous peoples and settlers alike have made sense of colonialism and its aftermath; and how they express their relationship to the land, to Empire or nation, and to each other. Such an appreciation will assist us in understanding whether ‘mini India’ as a social form has been produced out of nationalist or statist narratives, or has developed out of the Islands’ inner history and social dynamics, rather than through any easy replication of mainland social formations. How, we ask in the chapters that follow, are ethnicity, caste, cultural distinction, historical memory and a sense of belonging articulated in the Islands, and how do they relate to the transformation of space into place?

### **Collaboration, integration, relationships**

The aim of this book is to develop a historicized analytical approach that addresses these gaps in understanding, and unpicks the nature and meaning of some of the contemporary problems, issues and debates related to the complexities of the social and cultural formation of the Andaman Islands. We contend that such an analysis requires scholarly collaboration and integration at a number of levels. First, we bring together the island spaces of the Andamans with the Indian mainland and beyond, and we ask questions about what work a Bay of Bengal-centred cartography of the British Empire and its aftermath in South Asia can do. Second, we foreground in our analysis the making of historic and contemporary relationships between the various communities that constitute the Islands’ population today, rather than seeing particular groups of people as necessarily distinct or isolated from each other. This enables us to think beyond the categories of state governmentality, and to centre the peoples of the Islands rather than their political interlocutors in our analysis. Third, we seek to cross the invisible line of scholarly convention that frequently separates the ‘colonial’ from the ‘post-colonial’. Here, it is not just that we wish to stress the ongoing economic, social and cultural effects of the British Empire, as we certainly do, but that we want to show how and for what purpose since Indian Independence the ‘colonial’ has been invoked in the Islands, and what the nature of that invocation has meant for the way in which history in the Andamans is understood, interpreted and represented.

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In each of these respects, our integrative approach has compelled us towards a multidisciplinary engagement – with theory, with archives and with ethnographic research. We have considered in the same frame of analysis histories, sociologies and anthropologies of the Islands; historic papers, texts, photographs and inscriptions; and monuments, memorials and other sites of memory and commemoration. We have thought about the relationship between these literatures, material traces and representations of Empire, and what the descendants of convicts and other settlers have told us about the past, and their individual and collective family genealogies. We have listened to the stories and narratives of the indigenous peoples and refugees of the Islands, to reflect upon their construction of history in the world today. Our research has included work in colonial and post-colonial archives in India, the Andamans, North America and Great Britain. It has incorporated interviews, anthropological work and ethnographic observation. Our point in working with people living in the Islands has neither been to verify or to add nuance to the always partial and incomplete archive, nor to seek out the roots or ‘truth’ of our anthropological and ethnographic observations in written texts, but rather to explore what history means in the Andamans and how that meaning has been constituted historically and in the present day.

In this sense, the collaboration that underpins this book is a productive engagement between ourselves as scholars, with our distinct areas of research expertise, and between history, ethnography and anthropology. *New Histories* will be of obvious interest to scholars of the Andamans, and of South Asia and the Bay of Bengal; however, it seeks to make further contributions even more broadly: to the history and contemporary politics of *inter alia* indigenous–settler relations, colonization, land, migration, environment, labour, penal transportation, refugees and tribal welfare, in India and other national or imperial contexts.<sup>22</sup> It shows also, we hope, the value of a collaborative and multidisciplinary approach to other

<sup>22</sup> Sunil S. Amrith, *Crossing the Bay of Bengal: The Furies of Nature and the Fortunes of Migrants* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013); Sunil Amrith, ‘Tamil Diasporas across the Bay of Bengal’, *American Historical Review* 114, 3 (2009), 547–72; Tracy Banivanua Mar and Penny Edmonds (eds.), *Making Settler Colonial Space: Perspectives on Race, Place and Identity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2010); Joya Chatterji, ‘Dispositions and Destinations: Refugee Agency and “Mobility Capital” in the Bengal Diaspora, 1947–2007’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 55, 2 (2013), 273–304; Tim Harper and Sunil Amrith (eds.), ‘Sites of Asian Interaction’, *Modern Asian Studies* 46, special issue 02 (2012), 273–304; Stuart Macintyre and Anna Clark, *The History Wars* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2003); Sujit Sivasundaram, ‘Ethnicity, Indigeneity, and Migration in the Advent of British Rule to Sri Lanka’, *American Historical Review* 115, 2 (2010), 428–52; Bruce Tranter and Jed Donoghue, ‘Convict Ancestry: A Neglected Aspect of Australian Identity’, *Nations and Nationalism* 9, 4 (2003), 555–77.