

**‘The Ferringees are Flying - the ship is ours!’: the convict middle passage in colonial
South and Southeast Asia, 1790-1860¹**

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Abstract

This paper is part of a broader project that seeks to ‘read against the grain’ in reconstructing the experiences of convicts transported overseas to prisons and penal settlements in South and Southeast Asia during the nineteenth century. In many ways, convict ships are empty archival spaces. Colonial officials recorded their departure and arrival, and enumerated and described the convicts on board, often in meticulous detail. However, the limitations of these records make the experiences of convict men and women on board transportation vessels more difficult to access. This article will attempt to do so through an analysis of convict ship mutinies. From the 1830s there were more than a dozen incidents in which convicts rose against their captains and made a bid for freedom. These mutinies were transgressive acts that reveal much about convict journeys into transportation: the limitations of colonial regulation of convict vessels, conditions on board ship, and the alliances forged between convicts and crew. They also reveal the multi-dimensional nature of the convict middle passage, and dispel simplistic notions of single convict identities and experiences.

Introduction: Indian penal settlements

During the first half of the nineteenth century Indian convict ships zigzagged across the Indian Ocean in all directions, an important part of what has been conceptualised usefully elsewhere as a global system of convict migration.² The East India Company established its first penal settlement for the reception of Indian convicts in Benkulu (1787-1825). The Andaman Islands (1793-6), Penang, otherwise known as Prince of Wales Island (1790-1860), Melaka and Singapore (1825-60), and the Burmese provinces of Arakan and Tenasserim (1828-62) followed soon afterwards.³ In addition, one-time lieutenant-governor of Penang, R.T. Farquhar, lobbied successfully for convicts to be sent to the British colony Mauritius when he assumed governorship of the island in 1815.⁴ The British judicial authorities in the Straits Settlements (as Penang, Melaka and Singapore were known after 1825) and the Burmese provinces also used the punishment of transportation, and during the same period shipped a small number of offenders to mainland jails across India. They formed a sizeable prisoner minority in one of India's largest jails, Alipur, near Calcutta, as well as in smaller district jails across the Bombay and Madras presidencies. Transportation emptied overcrowded mainland prisons and assured new Company settlements a supply of cheap labour. As I have argued elsewhere, the convict workforce was vital to the development of early colonial infrastructure.⁵

As many as six transportation ships left from each of the Bengal, Bombay and Madras Presidencies each year, and about the same number brought convicts from the Straits Settlements and Burma to mainland jails. The number of convicts on board was widely variable, from less than a dozen to more than 200. Given the long duration of these early penal settlements, the organization of transportation across three presidencies

(and three Company departments – judicial, military and marine), compounded with the problem of missing shipping records and convict returns, the total convict traffic of the Indian Ocean is extremely difficult to quantify. Based on a close reading of convict ship indents drawn up in the three presidencies, my best estimates are as follows.⁶ The Company shipped just over 2,000 convicts to Benkulen in the period to 1825. It then transported at least 300 Bengal Presidency convicts to its first abortive Andaman Islands settlement. Most were from Bengal. Madras only sent convicts for a brief period (1820-24), and Bombay sent none at all. A relatively small number of convicts were shipped to Mauritius – about 1,500 – from Bengal and Bombay between 1815 and 1837. In 1825 the remaining Benkulen convicts were transferred to Penang, which was already a penal settlement. Stephen Nicholas and Peter R. Shergold have estimated that the Straits Settlements together received on average 200 arrivals per year from the three presidencies, making a grand total of 15,000 convicts.⁷ I think that this is probably an underestimate: one contemporary report stated that Singapore alone had received 16,000 convicts by 1858.⁸ The Bengal and Madras authorities also transported at least 5,000 and perhaps as many as 7,000 convicts to the Burmese Provinces after 1828. These figures do not include convicts transported from Ceylon to Southeast Asia. According to Nicholas and Shergold they numbered approximately 1-1,500.⁹ Again based on shipping records, I estimate that the authorities also incarcerated between 1,000 and 2,000 Southeast Asian transportation convicts in Indian mainland prisons during the course of the nineteenth century.

In the eyes of many East India Company officials, the sea was central to how convicts experienced the punishment of transportation, for crossing the *kala pani*, or

black water, resulted in a loss of caste. Thus Indians particularly feared it. Convict responses to transportation were rather more nuanced than this interpretation suggests.¹⁰ Nevertheless, the cultural dynamics of overseas transportation remain a good starting point for an article that seeks to explore some of the complexities of what we might refer to as the convict middle passage. I want to look at the interplay between the Company's organisation of convict transportation and convicts' own experiences of life on board ship, for this potentially troublesome cargo played a formative role in how the traffic was regulated and played out. Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker borrow the term 'hydrarchy' to think about early-modern ships as both engines of capitalism *and* spaces of resistance.¹¹ Two centuries later, and colonial expansion and convict agency were so closely intertwined that it is sometimes difficult to know where one ended and the other began.

I shall begin with a discussion of the regulation of convict transportation in the Indian Ocean during the period to 1860. By then the authorities shipped all Indian and some Burmese convicts to the Andaman Islands, which had been re-established as a penal colony in the wake of the uprisings that swept across India in 1857-8.¹² India remained the destination for some convicts from Burma and all those from the Straits Settlements. I will then move on to my second theme: convict unrest at sea. During the first half of the nineteenth century violent disorder broke out on 12 convict ships travelling to and from India and Southeast Asia, together with two carrying convicts inland to Calcutta for transportation. Mutiny plots were discovered and foiled on three more. (Table 1). Those vessels that experienced convict insurrection were a small proportion of the total; nowhere near the ten per cent of Atlantic slave ship passages that Stephen D. Behrendt,

David Eltis and David Richardson have estimated ended in uprising.¹³ Their relative rarity over a comparatively short period of time makes the sort of econometric analysis attempted by Behrendt, Eltis and Richardson impossible. Unlike the slave trade (a system of private trade), however, convict transportation was regulated publicly (by the Company). Unlike for many slave ships where unrest was covered up, disorder of any kind therefore created voluminous records in the form of extensive colonial enquiries, legal proceedings and newspaper reports. In this sense, the records on convict transportation share much with those on the passage of Indian indentured labourers, about whom we know relatively little.¹⁴ In recent years historians have rethought the meaning of the slave middle passage, interpreting it as a space of creative resistance. The limitations of the slave ship archive make detailed analyses problematic, however.¹⁵ The type of qualitative evidence produced as a result of convict revolts on the other hand allows us to attempt a convict-centred analysis of ship insurrection more difficult for the enslaved. It is also a useful means of looking at what we might conceptualise as the empty archival space of everyday life on board the convict ship.

Strictly speaking, unrest on board convict ships was not ‘mutiny’, for convicts were not soldiers or sailors responding to superior officers. However, contemporaries described it as such because convicts tried or succeeded in overthrowing the captain and crew whilst they were at sea.¹⁶ For this reason, I will refer to their acts as mutinies too. As Cornelius J. Lammers has noted, getting to grips with mutiny is ‘a tricky business’. Collective actions had multiple goals that changed over time and were potentially redefined quite differently by the authorities at a later stage.¹⁷ Yet convict mutinies do share certain features.¹⁸ I will consider why they occurred, and how convicts were able to

take control of ships. I will then look at colonial responses to these dramatic events, showing how congratulatory notes in the press about the firm actions of ships' crews masked deeper divisions about how to deal with the issue of authority at sea.¹⁹ Lastly, convict mutinies provide a window on some of the intricacies of the broader social and political order during the first half of the nineteenth century. I want to unpeel some of their onion layers to suggest that convict disorder was riddled with fractures and alliances based on loosely defined social affiliations. I will argue that mutinies show how blurred the boundaries between the seemingly diametrically opposed spaces of colonial officers and Indian convicts were. I also want to demonstrate that in these worlds turned upside down convict authority structures were strongly mimetic rather than entirely anti-colonial in nature.

Regulating convict transportation in the Indian Ocean

The regulation of Indian convict transportation during the first half of the nineteenth century can be divided into two periods. Before 1834 the East India Company had a monopoly over long distance trade routes, and regularly shipped Indian convicts to Southeast Asia on its Chinese fleet – the 'China ships'. Those same ships brought convicts back from Southeast Asia to mainland Indian jails. The presence of a medical attendant, the large number of crew and arms and the 'regularity of discipline' meant that there were never any convict uprisings on board. During this period, if there were no Company ships available, the local authorities invited tenders for the transportation of convicts on private trading vessels also - ships that were permitted by the terms of the Company's charter to work shorter passages in the region. After 1834, when the

Company lost its monopoly, most convicts were transported on such ships and arrangements became somewhat piecemeal and irregular. In general, this lack of regulation only came to light after some incident at sea.

After the convicts of the *Catherine* attempted to take the ship on the way to the Straits Settlements (1838), for instance, it emerged that there were no rules for the regulation of transportation.²⁰ The *Bombay Courier* much regretted the ‘blundering’ of the authorities in this respect.²¹ Rules were set shortly afterwards.²² At the same time the ratio of crew to convicts was fixed in a way that reflected colonial suspicions about the potential alliances formed between fellow countrymen. Three convicts were equal to one European sailor, and one convict equal to one native seaman, though it was said that this rule might be relaxed when vessels sailed clear of the coast and there were no convict seafarers on board.²³ A year later a more serious mutiny broke out on the *Virginia*. A group of convicts sailing from Bombay to Singapore murdered Captain Charles Whiffen, took over the ship and escaped inland south of Goa. The colonial authorities accused the ship’s officers of not following the *Catherine* rules.

The first memorandum for ships sailing in the other direction - from the Straits Settlements to the Indian mainland - was only issued in 1844, after a convict uprising on the *Harriet Scott*. The ship had been carrying convicts from Penang to Bombay. A group of convicts killed captain Philip Benyon; seven of them escaped. Subsequently, commanders were reminded not to trust convicts, and to examine them carefully to make sure they had nothing with which they could cut their fetters. Their irons were to be checked twice a day.²⁴ As late as 1859, however, there was still neither a fixed rations scale nor basic rules for medical procedures for convict ships sailing out of Southeast

Asia.²⁵ David Richardson puts the incidence of slave shipboard revolts down to such weaknesses in ships' managerial regimes.²⁶ These failings were also critical for convict vessels. Without exception, convict revolts took place on private trading ships; all but one sailing in the years following the abolition of the Company's charter.

The procedure for obtaining a ship and embarking convicts on it varied across the presidencies. In Bengal, the superintendent of Alipur Jail wrote to the secretary to government in the judicial department when there were convicts awaiting transportation. This letter was then sent to the superintendent of marine, who was asked to procure a passage for the convicts. He then found a Company vessel or put out for tender, inspected the ship to make sure it was suitable, and reported back to the judicial department. The superintendent at Alipur was informed, and told to have the convicts ready at a certain time. The military board was then instructed to ship provisions for the convicts, which it did through the commissariat department. Finally, the military department provided a guard, if it was seen as necessary.²⁷ In Bombay, the superintendent of the Indian navy made the arrangements through direct consultation with the session judge in charge of the convict holding jail at Tannah. He was also responsible for checking that the vessels were seaworthy and that the convicts were properly lodged and secured. It was the master of each ship's responsibility to apply for a guard if he felt unsafe without one.²⁸ In practice, often the government was unwilling to shoulder the additional cost of extra officers on board. In July 1840, the Bombay government toyed briefly with the idea of chartering vessels twice a year, but rejected it on the grounds of cost. Instead it was agreed that higher tenders would be accepted, in order to encourage 'respectable and capable ships' with large crews to take convicts on board.²⁹ Even after another mutiny on the *Freak*

(1841), when convicts under transportation from Bombay to Singapore murdered captain T.J. Suffield and escaped near Aceh (northern Sumatra), the master of another convict vessel due to sail from Madras, the *Resolution*, requested a guard and was turned down. The authorities in the presidency decided that in future it would send convicts on troop ships only in order to cut costs.³⁰ This probably explains why there were never any mutinies on board Madras convict ships during this period.

The cost of transportation depended on the availability of ships, the length of the voyage and whether rations and water were supplied. Including the cost of provisions, transportation from Bengal or Madras to Benkulu cost about 60 rupees per convict; to the Straits between 35 and 40 rupees; and, to the slightly nearer penal settlements in Burma around 30 rupees a head. The expense of transportation to Mauritius was around 60 to 75 rupees. Shipping links from Bombay were rather erratic, and because insurance offices excluded claims arising from mutiny, often those ships with room to spare were not keen to take convicts on board.³¹ This was reflected in the cost of transportation from the port. From the early 1800s, the authorities complained about the shortage of ships and the high tender rates.³² Nothing had changed 40 years later. In 1843 the governor wrote of the ‘exorbitant’ prices being demanded.³³ The relatively long voyage to Burma or the Straits cost about 75 to 80 rupees per convict. The cost of transporting convicts to Mauritius varied from 50 to 100 rupees a head.³⁴ Two-thirds of the money was paid to ship owners on departure, and the remainder upon delivery of the convict cargo.

Unlike slave ships crossing the Atlantic, or transportation vessels sailing from Britain to Australia during the same period, Indian ships were not specially fitted out for convicts. In general, on both Company and private vessels, convicts were accommodated

between decks, with their provisions in the hold. They were side-by-side with other cargo, goods such as bales of cotton, reels of silk, fresh dates, chests of opium, rattan canes, and sacks of betel nut. The space allotted to each convict was supposed to be six feet by two, which the superintendent of the Indian navy in Bombay described at the time as ‘about the same’ as that allotted to native sailors and troops.³⁵ Nevertheless, as we will see Bengal ships had a much smaller specification (six by half a foot). Even according to this extremely limited allowance not infrequently convict ships set sail in a grossly overcrowded state. Moreover, in what was essentially a cost-cutting measure, it was not usual practice to send medical attendants on board. Only in exceptional cases were ‘prisons’ constructed, notably when thugs were transported to the Burmese provinces from the 1830s.³⁶ The shipment of especially dangerous offenders or previously mutinous convicts also required extra precautions. The resident councillor of Penang described the fitting out of the *Sesostris* in 1844 thus: ‘A prison was constructed on the Tween Decks, in a place separated by a partition from that occupied by the seamen, but overlooked by means of 2 air holes. The prisoners were divided into 3 gangs; each gang had a chain passing through their irons. A guard was posted over them.’³⁷ A prison was constructed on the *General Wood* too (Hong Kong to the Straits, 1847), but it was destroyed to make room for a large cargo of sugar just before the convicts were embarked. This was to have disastrous consequences. The 92 convicts on board took over the ship, killed captain Stokoe and some of the crew and fled.³⁸

In response to the *Virginia* mutiny, and general astonishment that existing rules for the guidance of ships’ officers had not been followed, in 1841 the Bombay government laid down new regulations. This lengthy set of instructions is worth quoting

in full, for it shows that the authorities knew all too well what was likely both to precipitate and make possible an uprising, convict grievances combined with slack management:

1. The whole of the guard shall be under arms every morning from day light til 8 o'clock a.m. during which time the convicts shall be allowed to come on deck by 20 at a time for one hour; the same again in the evening for one hour.
2. The whole of the guard shall be loaded with musket grape and a particular spot shall be marked out on the deck beyond which the convicts shall not move.
3. Convicts are on no account to be made servants of.
4. Convicts are on no account to have their irons taken off except in dangerous illness or even of the ship being in most imminent danger.
5. All convicts to be ironed on both legs and on any mutinous or troublesome conduct to be double ironed.
6. The days the convicts are not admitted on deck to be entered in the log with the reasons.
7. All punishments amongst the convicts to be noted in the log.
8. Complaints by convicts to be written into the logbook. Sick convicts to be removed to the infirmary or hospital; death or escape to be entered into the log.
9. Food to be served out according to table.
10. The irons of the convicts to be examined by the ship's carpenter every morning when they come out on the deck for exercise.
11. Opportunity to be given to the convicts to bathe themselves in salt water during their morning exercise.
12. Handcuffs and leg irons spare to be sent with each convict ship.
13. The place where the convicts are kept shall always have the trellised hatch down, and a sentry or sentries on duty over this day and night; a lamp shall if possible be so fixed on the deck against the mast as to reflect the light down into the prison house.
14. If a Medical Officer be on board all the prisoners shall be minutely inspected once a week.
15. The main tops always to be furnished with a few firearms and spare ammunition, water and biscuit and the crew or guard to be directed as a last resort to retreat there.³⁹

The Bombay authorities also decided to transfer control of the embarkation of convicts from the navy to the superintendent of police, on the grounds that he would know more about the sort of security necessary for each batch. When the *Virginia* convicts were embarked, no mention had been made of the fact that the convicts were of 'a more

desperate character' than usual or that two of them – Siddee Almas and Abdul Kureem - were sailors. No extra precautions had been taken.⁴⁰ As we will see, in later years the *Virginia* rules were not always followed. As the secretary to the government of Bombay put it in 1841, if they had been a subsequent catastrophe on board the *Freak* would never have occurred.⁴¹ The result was an underlining of the need to follow regulations to the letter, particularly in relation to the provision of a sufficient guard.⁴²

On board the convict ship

Marcus Rediker has written of the careful organization and division of labour on eighteenth-century ships that, in his view, were at the centre of a sphere of circulation that exploited labour capital.⁴³ Convict ships too were remarkably hierarchical places, and despite the regulations prohibiting the employment of convicts, some were integrated into life above decks.⁴⁴ In this sense, convict experiences of the middle passage could vary widely. Ships' commanders chose convicts of diverse regional origin, social and economic background and religion to work on board, on the basis of their social origins, skill base and previous good behaviour. A small number of convicts were employed as sweepers, cooks and overseers for and of their fellow transportees. There are hints in convict ship logs that they may have been employed in the loading and unloading of provisions and cargo too. Convicts were frequently embarked some days before ships left port; occasionally a few were 'kept back' by captains after arrival at their destination.⁴⁵ Undoubtedly, this was a boon to ships' officers, but it could also prove their downfall, for employment on board gave convicts the freedom to move around the ship. Unlike others, often these working convicts were not fettered. Loongh, the cook on the *Harriet Scott*

moved around the ship to ‘observe and devise the insurrection’.⁴⁶ Those of the *Freak* apparently took the opportunity to unpadlock their fellow convicts’ irons.⁴⁷ Given that two of the convicts - Garoo bin Deojee and Puthia Vulud Meyia Saba - were being retransported after their escape from the *Virginia*, this was a serious miscalculation.⁴⁸

On slave ships there was a gendered dimension to shipboard resistance. Richardson has shown how closely enslaved women were involved in slave ship revolts because, unlike men, they were rarely shackled.⁴⁹ Though Indian women were not fettered either and they were sometimes allowed to remain on deck,⁵⁰ they made up a much smaller proportion of the total number of convicts than did female slaves – ten per cent at the very most.⁵¹ The mutiny ships under discussion did carry small numbers of women, but beyond the fact that female convicts were lodged separately from men,⁵² we know very little about their experiences on board. To what extent they engaged in sexual relations – voluntary or otherwise – for instance is difficult to say.⁵³ Though there is no direct evidence, it is entirely feasible that they used their relative freedom to pass on information about the movements of crew or the whereabouts of weaponry to the men. The authorities were quite aware of this possibility. In 1850, 39 transportation convicts en route from Allahabad to Calcutta escaped from the *Kaleegunga*. A committee of inquiry was set up, one of its lines of questioning being the role played by the convict women on board. Commander John Stout told the committee that the women could not have released the men because the guards were ‘too careful’.⁵⁴ Evidently they had not been careful enough to prevent the escape of every single convict on board.

It was poor management more generally that provided convicts with both the motive and the opportunity to revolt. In relation to the former, regulations governing the

amount of space allowed to convicts were on occasion ignored. Overcrowding was sometimes a problem in quarters where even according to the usual allowance convicts would have been packed in like beans in a can. Mutiny on the *Freak* was partly put down to a breach in the rules on overcrowding (six extra convicts had been embarked), and the governor of Bombay warned the superintendent of police to follow rules more strictly in the future.⁵⁵ More dramatically, the *Catherine* (1838) took 60 convicts, almost double the number it had been certified to carry. The smell below deck was so disgusting that even contemporary officials found it difficult to describe. Captain Frederick Pendency wrote later that when he went down into the convict hold it was so filthy that had the ship continued on its voyage disease would have broken out. The acting senior magistrate of police in Bombay was unable to find words to describe it. Several convicts sick with venereal and other diseases had been embarked, and there was no medical attendant on board.⁵⁶ The convicts' response was to resolve on murdering the captain and crew and escape, though they were discovered and taken back to Bombay before they could carry out their plot.

Like other passengers and sometimes even the crew, convicts suffered from debilitating seasickness, adding to their misery and desperation. In 1827, seven convicts sailing from Bombay to Mauritius on the *Constance* refused to go below decks, stating that it was hot enough to kill them and that 'they would not go'. They took over the ship and forced the crew to sail back to Kannur, on the southwest coast of India.⁵⁷ In 1849 the wife of Company judge Edward Benthall, Clementina, wrote of the 'rolling, pitching and jogging' of the convict ship *Enterprize* sailing to Moulmein. The passengers were 'a miserable set', and apparently even the captain felt ill.⁵⁸ Several of the *Virginia* convicts

spoke of their sickness on board. They claimed that illness had left them unable to participate in mutinous acts.⁵⁹ We will return to the theme of death rates at sea more generally in a moment.

As we have seen, it was the responsibility of each ship's owners to supply the convicts' rations, and provision for this was included in the per capita shipping rate. In an acknowledgement of caste Hindu cultural practices regarding sea voyages, there were supposed to be two types of rations: the first for convicts who cooked on board ship, and the second for convicts who did not. Those who ate cooked food received the same rations as lascars (sailors), that is rice, dhal and fish in addition to eating and smoking tobacco, betel nut, salt and basic condiments - ghee, tamarind, chillies, pepper, garlic and onions. Those who did not cook received the same tobacco, betel, salt and condiment rations, together with a ration of sugar, pawa and parched gram in lieu of rice, dhal and fish.⁶⁰ Two bottles of wine and two bottles of limejuice were also supposed to be issued for every five convicts.⁶¹ Although supplies were in theory inspected before ships departed, evidence suggests that captains sometimes skimmed on them, and provisions either ran short during the voyage or were of questionable quality. As Rediker shows, the denial of crews' customary victuals was a familiar tactic for commanders generally when they wanted to economise.⁶² Yet short rations proved an obvious spur to mutiny. During the trial of the *Virginia* mutineers, several of the defendants claimed that their rations were less substantial than the allowance they had received in jail. Their cross-examination of the witnesses (for this was a right accorded to convicts appearing in court) attempted to show that they were 'starved and ill-treated'.⁶³ The convicts on the

Singapore Packet, who made an ill-fated attempt to seize the ship between Bombay and Singapore in 1841, also held that their provisions were ‘bad’.⁶⁴

Disease sometimes broke out on board transportation vessels. Though there is little evidence of a direct link between sickness and mutiny, fears about its spread undoubtedly fed into convict anxieties about poor conditions more generally. At the same time, investigations into shipboard sickness reveal much about caste practices amongst at least some Hindu convicts. In 1853, the *Margaret Skelly* shipped 164 convicts from Bengal to Singapore. Six died of dysentery on the way.⁶⁵ Mortality rates in Indian jails were appalling; during the first half of the nineteenth century, they sometimes peaked at 25 per cent.⁶⁶ However, as the weakest convicts often died while awaiting embarkation and sick convicts were normally detained in jail, it was unusual for convicts to die on board transportation ships. Aboard 215 convict vessels sailing from Bengal between 1793 and 1848, for instance, there were just 25 deaths.⁶⁷ It is not clear what proportion of these deaths was from disease (only three were specifically described as such), and what proportion was the result of accidental drowning, suicide or escape bids. Nevertheless, the number of deaths on board ship was very small, so six deaths on a single journey was an extraordinarily high number. The governor of the Straits Settlements, W.J. Butterworth, ordered an immediate enquiry.

The resident councillor of Singapore, F. Church, reported that many of the convicts had disembarked ‘in a very weak state’. It seems that only 30 days’ provisions had been shipped, but the voyage had taken 42 days. He wrote that the convicts complained that their rations and allowance of water had been very limited.⁶⁸ The commander of the native guard, *subahdar* Shaik Hyder, stated that in his opinion the

convicts had not been rationed properly because the water ran short. This meant that convicts did not have enough to drink and that their rice could not be cooked properly.⁶⁹ If we read between the archival lines, there was clearly a cultural dimension to all this too. Commander Alfred Pearce wrote in response to the allegations of short rations that the convicts had thrown a good deal of cooked food overboard.⁷⁰ Chief mate George Holland reported that the convicts were ‘too lazy to cook’ and would not take their rations. However, on closer analysis it seems that they only refused them at the end of the voyage, when the non-cooking Hindu convicts’ grain had run out and been substituted with rice.⁷¹ Cultural norms made it impossible for many caste Hindus to take cooked food whilst at sea.⁷² Despite their claims that the convicts were at fault, it seems that the *Margaret Skelly*’s crew was all too aware of the religious dimension to their refusal to eat, and its potentially violent consequences. According to the convicts, the crew threw overboard their lotahs.⁷³ These were brass drinking vessels that prisoners had used with devastating effect in the murder of the British superintendent of Alipur jail in 1834.⁷⁴ The Bengal authorities ruled that the provisions put on board were only one third of what was required for the journey. The payment of the balance money for the journey (a third of the total) was therefore withheld.⁷⁵

The issue of violation of caste is one that emerges regularly in other places in the convict ship archive. It is clear that despite the dual rations system convicts’ religious mores were not always respected. When the *Freak* convicts were put on trial one of them stated that a convict named Ethaljagajee had ‘beat rice and sugar with grain as he would not eat what was cooked’. He had apparently complained to the captain; in response the captain had threatened to reduce his allowance altogether.⁷⁶ Saduck Ali of the *Virginia*

made a very similar claim during his trial, stating that the Hindu convicts on board could not eat their rice ration. He added that the Hindus on board thought: 'Death was preferable, god was above and the sea below'.⁷⁷ Ascribing a specifically religious motive to other convicts who engaged in 'everyday', individual acts of resistance is more problematic. On occasion, convicts committed suicide or leapt overboard in a bid to escape. British contemporaries put such actions down to their fear of crossing the 'black waters'. 'Draft rules for the management of transportation convicts proceeding to Calcutta' noted: 'it should be borne in mind that men meditating an escape are likely to be the quietest and best behaved and that every one of them would rather die at once than encounter the mysterious horrors of the "kalapanee"'.⁷⁸ Yet such actions do not create the sort of convict-centred evidence we see for collective events, making it difficult to ascertain motive. More usually, captains reported such losses without explanation, or noted that they had 'no apparent cause'.⁷⁹

During the 1840s and 1850s, several other convict vessels which had suffered high mortality rates came under scrutiny. In 1842, nine of the 49 convicts travelling to Singapore on board the *Palinurus* perished. Again, a committee was assembled to investigate. It pointed to the light winds that had prolonged the journey, reporting that the high mortality was not surprising given the convicts' previous long confinement, 'state of mind' and 'the entirely new position in which they were placed'.⁸⁰ When nine of the 97 convicts shipped on the *Imam of Muscat* died either on the way to Penang or shortly after arrival in 1850, most of dysentery, the Bombay superintendent of convicts reported that they had all been healthy on embarkation, and their sickness was in part due to the journey itself. There was a cultural element to it too, for it seems that at least four of the

convicts had refused to take any food or medicine whilst on board.⁸¹ Though the captain himself admitted that water and boiled rice ran short during the voyage of the *Fattay Salam* from Bombay to Penang in 1854, he stated that the convicts had refused to receive more than a day's rations of onions at once, so he had stopped issuing them altogether.⁸²

Similarly high mortality rates occurred amongst convicts transported to Singapore on the *Atlanta* in April 1857. Of the 131 convicts embarked, 19 died on board, one on landing and two others on their way to the convict lines. Two more died within a few days, and two months later 40 were still in hospital.⁸³ The convicts told the senior surgeon that they had been allowed to wash only once during the voyage, their food allowance had been insufficient and they suffered much from water shortages. Despite having inspected convict ships for the past 12 years, the surgeon claimed that he had 'never witnessed so much misery, disease and wretchedness as existed amongst these men'. They had, he said, been packed into a poorly ventilated hold without regard to their health.⁸⁴ Bengal's inspector-general of prisons, F.J. Mouat, headed an enquiry, which found that although the convicts had been allowed the stipulated space (six by half a foot), they could not lie down: 'to men suffering from fever diarrhoea and dysentery it needs no description to realize the terrible distress they must have endured.' In future, he recommended, transportation ships should allow convicts the same space as for indentured labourers (six feet by three). Mouat further concluded that shipboard sickness had been exacerbated by convicts having hidden their illnesses before embarkation, through fear of being forced to take purgatives. The 'filthy state' of the convicts was also a factor. The commander of the vessel told Mouat that he had made all the convicts bathe and wash their clothes and bedding once, but that it had excited such discontent that he

decided not to repeat the exercise.⁸⁵ This was perhaps because convicts were issued with only one set of clothes, and had nothing with which to cover themselves while they dried.

Poor conditions were sometimes in evidence on board vessels sailing out of the Straits Settlements too. Five of the 80 convicts shipped from the Straits to Bombay on the *City of Palaces* (1858) died on the way, for instance, another high death rate. Nearly all were suffering from scurvy on their arrival, and 16 were so weak they could not walk from the railway station to the jail.⁸⁶ The assistant sessions judge wrote of their emaciation, sickness and suffering.⁸⁷ It seems that their food and water had run short during the four-month voyage (25 days from Singapore to Penang, and three months from Penang to Bombay), and none of them were given any bedding. Some of the convicts determined to take over the ship. Mutiny was averted when one of the convicts - Allisha Madrassee - informed on the rest, and the captain chained all but eight together for the remainder of the journey. They were forced to eat, sleep and answer the call of nature in the same place where they were made to sit.⁸⁸ We will return to the shady figure of the convict informer below. There was a further dimension to sickness on board these Southeast Asian transportation ships, for many of the convicts were opium addicts. In 1851, six of the 39 convicts embarked on the *Paragon* died.⁸⁹ *Havildar* (sergeant) Ramnae Dhurumnae stated that the convicts had told them that they needed the drug. Captain William Wood Murch reported too that several convicts had told him that their comrades died for want of the stimulant.⁹⁰ In future, ships carrying convicts from Southeast Asia were ordered to carry a small supply of opium.⁹¹ Yet on the whole, as the very fact of close investigation into this handful of ships reveals, high mortality on board transportation ships sailing in both directions was exceptional.

Mutiny was not simply the result of convicts responding to poor conditions, but was enabled by failures in securing or guarding them. When the *Catherine* was inspected prior to the convicts' embarkation in 1838, for instance, there was no survey in these respects. Neither were the convicts' possessions searched.⁹² The *Ararat* (1859) convicts were said to have secreted a knife on board, which they had used to cut themselves free. There followed an extraordinarily violent uprising. The crew largely escaped injury, but 35 of the 74 convicts were either shot or went overboard.⁹³ In every case where convicts managed to take over ships it is clear that the crew had flouted the regulations on the movement of convicts on board or the storing of weaponry. On occasion, not enough care was taken with the passing of convicts between decks, or large numbers of convicts were allowed up for air at once. The senior magistrate of police in Bombay concluded that such unregulated movement was also the cause of events on the *Virginia*. All 34 convicts had been on deck at the same time.⁹⁴ The secretary to government of Bombay put the mutiny on the *Recovery* (1846) in part down to slack management in the movement of convicts around the ship.⁹⁵ Thirty men had rushed at captain Thomas Johnson, though astonishingly he had managed to beat them off and only one convict was killed.⁹⁶ The Bombay superintendent of convicts recommended that in future that no convicts should be permitted on deck until any men already up there had been locked down. Only one convict should be allowed on the ladder at a time.⁹⁷ The European guard on board the *Ararat* was said to have fallen asleep on duty, allowing the convicts to come up unchallenged. Indeed, he was later found stabbed, apparently whilst still asleep.⁹⁸ Sometimes weaponry was not properly locked up. Eighteen loaded muskets were stored

within arm's reach of the *Kaleegunga* convicts' sleeping quarters. All 39 convicts on board escaped.⁹⁹

All convicts were embarked for transportation wearing irons; those of dangerous or notorious offenders were heavier than usual. Sometimes convicts were even chained from the waist to the wrists and neck.¹⁰⁰ As I have noted elsewhere, fetters were a far from perfect penal technology because they both sustained and confounded the goals of prison management.¹⁰¹ The restriction that they placed on movement caused real problems in marching and working convicts, and for this reason in practice lighter ones serving as little more than a visual tag of criminality were often used. It was also accepted practice for convicts to tie their chains up around their waists, greatly ameliorating the restrictions on movement that fetters were supposed to cause.¹⁰² The superintendent of convicts in Bombay claimed that the disturbances on board the *Recovery* were partly the result of district prisoners being received on board wearing lighter than normal irons. This was necessary because they were marched – often from a considerable distance– to Tannah jail ready for embarkation. During the uprising, the heavier irons worn by the Tannah convicts had prevented them from getting upon deck. Only the district prisoners had managed to do so. Captain Johnson wrote: ‘their irons are of no use only to deceive us’.¹⁰³

Even when heavy irons were worn, the fit was not always good. Those used on both the *Harriet Scott* and the *Ararat* were apparently so big that convicts simply slipped them off.¹⁰⁴ Master attendant D. Ross claimed that the fetters worn by the *Virginia* convicts gave ‘too much freedom of their limbs’.¹⁰⁵ In addition, if shackles were even slightly corroded, they were easily removed.¹⁰⁶ Once removed, irons could be turned

from an instrument of punishment to a means of resistance, for they could be tied up to make ‘a formidable weapon’.¹⁰⁷ After the death of captain Benyon on the *Harriet Scott*, the Bombay authorities recommended that in future fetters should be made with several rivet holes in order to adjust them to fit the ankle.¹⁰⁸ Even the heaviest irons were a relatively unsophisticated means of securing convicts. In the case of the *Kaleegunga*, the convicts were locked on a single chain padlocked at one end only. If one man needed to be released, the whole had to be unlocked. When two men were let off to answer the call of nature, the remaining convicts accordingly took this chance to slip off the chains and attack the ship’s officers.¹⁰⁹

Irons sometimes caused awful sores on prisoners’ ankles and legs; left untreated they could lead to gangrene and even death.¹¹⁰ Penal administrators were always suspicious that convicts rubbed their irons deliberately in order to shirk labour, so they issued ankle leathers to protect the skin. Convicts too bound cloth around the shackles of the irons. However, this meant that the fetters were hidden from view and they could file them through gradually without attracting attention, as in the case of the *Catherine*.¹¹¹ Even when their irons were not bound with cloth, convicts were able to cut them unobserved. Convict Gourmohun Soor, en route to Penang on the *Ariel* in 1813, for instance, was able to cut his irons and jump overboard.¹¹² Forty years later, the superintendent of Alipur jail, H. Fergusson, wrote that several convicts who had arrived in the jail for transportation in 1856 had almost cut through their ankle rings. The convicts told him that they had used waxed silk, and stuffed the cuts with cement made from wax, chaman and dye so that they could not be seen. Fergusson added that he had seen the same thing in Alipur jail, and suggested a prohibition against convicts having

cord, thread or silk on their clothes or bedding.¹¹³ He noted that often small files, iron nails and emery boards were found sewed in the folds and ends of transportation convicts' bedding.¹¹⁴

Though poor management in a general sense gave convicts both the motive and the opportunity to rebel, there is a further dimension to shipboard disorder. It took place mainly when convicts on board had experience at sea. I think this explains why convict mutinies occurred overwhelmingly on vessels sailing out of Bombay or the Straits Settlements, rather than Bengal or Madras. Two of the *Virginia* convicts, for instance, were sailors by profession. They were variously described as 'caffrees' and 'sydees' (both words here meaning African) and before their arrest the governor of Bombay, J.R. Carnac, wrote that they would probably try and make for Mozambique or Arabia.¹¹⁵ At least one of the convicts shipped on the *Catherine* had been a lascar.¹¹⁶ Moideen Ally of the *Chinsurah* was also a seaman.¹¹⁷ Many of the convicts involved in the Straits mutinies had been convicted of piracy – as in the case of eight of the 16 convicts transported on the *Harriet Scott*,¹¹⁸ and the 52 pirates embarked on the *Ararat*.¹¹⁹ The convicts of the *General Wood* too carried 92 pirates from Hong Kong to Singapore.¹²⁰ It was not simply that convict seafarers were on board though, for there are hints in the sources that captains of vessels sometimes took them on as crew, though they were not supposed to. This was an informal arrangement through which the captain gained a free pair of hands and the convicts escaped from the privations below deck. After he was picked up at sea, the captain of the *Lady Wallace* (1840), which had been accidentally shipwrecked off Cape Comorin, for instance, declined to mention that he had convicts on

board. When challenged to hand them over to the authorities he refused angrily, stating that they were ‘like private servants to him’.¹²¹

Of course if convicts could persuade ships’ crews to assist them, skills at sea were not so important, and this brings me to another point – the alliances forged between convicts and crew, particularly when the former were sailors by profession.¹²²

Frequently, the possibility of such collusion was a focus for post-mutiny investigations, with the colonial authorities suspicious about the role played by ships’ crews during convict takeovers. As Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker have pointed out, crews were international and often found themselves locked up in the jails of colonial port cities. Moreover, working on a ship was in many ways like being in prison.¹²³ This suggests that crew might have had some sympathy for convicts. It is of course difficult to make sense of the material, for crews had an obvious reason for downplaying their role during colonial investigations, and convicts an obvious reason for playing it up. When he was recaptured, convict Siddee Almas of the *Virginia* claimed that some of the crew were in league with the mutineers, and that they had assisted in landing them on shore.¹²⁴

Consider this exchange between gunner Jacob de Cruz, the judge and two other *Virginia* convicts during their supreme court trial:

Question by Hameer Radhoo, Prisoner: Did the Convicts throw the Captain overboard or the people of the Ship.

Answer: We did not ...

Question Do [ditto]. What and how many persons took the Boats to the Land and when was it.

Answer. The Convicts took away 3 Boats at night.

Questioned by the Judge. Did any of the Crew go in the Boats.

Answer. We lowered the Boats, but they took them on shore. No Lascars or Seamen were with them.

Question by Prisoner. Did you not conspire with us.

Answer. Never. I have served the English since the age of 15 years ...

Question by Saduck Ali [convict]. Did the Crew know of this disturbance before it happened.

Answer: No.

Questioned by the Judge. How do you know that.

Answer. If they had they would have told me.¹²⁵

It was beyond doubt that gunner Joseph de Cruz had steered the ship to shore, and that the ship's cook had provided for the convicts;¹²⁶ but it was impossible to prove whether they had done so willingly or under duress. The second mate of the *Freak*, Francis Ward, claimed that the crew was 'very familiar with the convicts', and thought that they must have known of the convicts' intentions. Once again, this could not be proved.¹²⁷ Indeed, it is perhaps worthy of note that no crew members were convicted alongside their convict charges in any of the cases under discussion.

All too often, when convicts took to arms, ship crews scrambled up the rigging or jumped overboard to meet their fate in Davy Jones' locker. According to the report in the *Bengal Hurkaru*, for instance, as soon as the convicts broke loose the crew of the *Ararat* (who were unarmed) climbed up the rigging.¹²⁸ One *kalassi* (sailor) on board the *Clarissa* claimed that most of his comrades were either shot or jumped overboard in the affray. He himself with about ten others had gone up the rigging, and only came down when the convicts promised to spare their lives if they would sail the ship for them. When they landed on shore, the convicts took them prisoner.¹²⁹ The *burra tindal* (head petty officer) also spoke of the lascars being 'set to work'.¹³⁰ What is more conclusive is the extent of everyday interaction between convicts and crew. Convicts employed on board ship were on deck most of the time; others came up for air at least once a day. This gave them ample opportunity to converse with crew members. Those convicts who cooked on board

ship prepared their rations with the crew. During the *Virginia* trial, convict Saduck Ali even claimed that the crew had given them marijuana to smoke, and after three days without food their ‘heads were turned’. It was this, he claimed, that had caused the mutiny.¹³¹

Another fear on the part of the colonial authorities was the ambivalence of the military guard in preventing mutiny. The regulations on transportation itself were framed according to notions of race and loyalty, and as we have seen the ratio of European or Indian guards to convicts was fixed accordingly. In each of these outbreaks, the requisite number of guards was on board, and so at worst colonial officials considered the Indian guard collusive and at best inactive in putting down uprisings. One official wrote that the *Kaleegunga* incident was the inevitable result of hiring men for just three rupees a trip. Another stated that he heard them say that they were not going to risk their lives for such wages.¹³² A third noted that the sentries had been extremely familiar with the convicts.¹³³ On board was a ‘Sikh general’, Narain Singh, and two of his subordinates. All three had been sentenced to transportation in the Panjab for treason.¹³⁴ The guards were no doubt in awe of their convict charges, for they were important military commanders in their own right. Even after their recapture and imprisonment, they were found with files in their possession, which it was believed the jail guards had passed to them.¹³⁵ The difference in structures of command was also a factor in the inactivity of guards. When three convicts jumped overboard the *Aurora* in 1800, for example, the sepoys on board did nothing. Because they were not subject to his military discipline, the commander of the vessel was at a loss about how to deal with them.¹³⁶

Mutiny could be a response to conditions on board ship by men with skills at sea. However, as the actions of Narain Singh show – and as we will see in our discussion of the mutiny on board the *Clarissa* in 1854 - the desire to escape from British control was also a factor and, in this sense, at least some ship mutinies drew on wider-ranging socio-political grievances.¹³⁷ There is a great deal of evidence that many incidents were pre-planned, often while convicts were still in prison. A paper detailing the convicts' plan was found on the *Catherine* convicts, for instance.¹³⁸ According to two of the convicts on board, Sahoo Fuzul and Rama Balloo, the ringleaders were *bhils* named Kondajee Bapoo and Ram Chunder Valaloo. They had used a 'conjuring book' in deciding the timing of events.¹³⁹ This can probably be read as a reference to the witchcraft and sorcery in which commonly *bhils* were believed to engage.¹⁴⁰

There is also some evidence of divisions between Hindu and Muslim convicts in this respect, though the material is difficult to interpret. Archival evidence suggests that events on the *Freak* were the result of particular desires on the part of the Muslim convicts on board, for instance. Convict informer Michael Anthony claimed that after killing the chief mate, one of the convicts declared: “now all the poison all the liquor is coming out.” They then threw the crew's shoes overboard, declaring them “‘infidels' things”.¹⁴¹ Once rid of the ship's crew, the convicts resolved to go to Mecca (second mate Francis Ward's testimony is in agreement with Michael Anthony's on this point).¹⁴² When they realised they would likely be taken up at sea, they decided to go to Aceh instead – according to Michael Anthony because ‘all are Musselmen there and they would be safe.’ He claimed that the leader, Hadjee Hussain, asked the second mate whose country it was:

[H]e said a Mohamedan country, the inhabitants are Malay. Hadjee Hussain asked if there are any English? [T]he 2nd mate said “No” if the English go there they are killed and if an English vessel go there, all the men are killed and the ship plundered, Hadjee Hussain asked how large is the country 2nd mate said 14 miles broad and 200 long. The Rajah and Troops reside there, and 12 Governors in different parts, so Hadjee Hussain said “take the vessel there” and the 2nd mate steered for Aceh.¹⁴³

What to make of this testimony? Michael Anthony – elsewhere described as Miguel Antonio – was described as a ‘native Catholic’ who could speak English.¹⁴⁴ During the uprising he acted as an interpreter between the convicts and crew.¹⁴⁵ He may have felt some sort of cultural alignment with the Europeans on board, for he claimed that the convict mutineers made threats against them all as *kafirs* (infidels). As Ranajit Guha has argued in another context, rebelliousness does sometimes have its roots in religion.¹⁴⁶ In the case of the *Recovery*, the convicts were said to have sworn on the Qur’an to mutiny. Before the ship set sail rumours reached the authorities that some Arabic vessels would be waiting in the harbour to help them. When they did not appear, the captain dropped his guard, and it was then that the convicts rose.¹⁴⁷ Yet divisions between convicts on board ship were not necessarily based on religion. Gender, social standing, skill base – and as we will see in our analysis of the *Clarissa* mutiny – regional origin all played a part.

The convicts of the *General Wood* had their own dreams of freedom too, and attempted to sail the vessel back to China. According to lieutenant Seymour, who was in charge of the guard on board, the mutinous convicts had threatened repeatedly his wife. They said that had she been the wife of the deputy superintendent of police in Hong Kong, they would have ‘chopped her into pieces’.¹⁴⁸ A piece of ‘Chinese writing’ was

found on one of the convicts. The translation of this paper speaks to their sense of common experience:

If any of us should die, the death of such person is to be made known to the survivors.
If any of us should succeed in procuring a boat the same is to be made known to all of us.
None of us are to leave the Island [Pulo Oly, to the southeast of Cambodia] until we have fed and lived well so as not to be recognized as convicts when we get to China.
When I go to China, no one save God will know who I am.
We are to share alike in every thing, if we procure food we are to share alike.
If one of us procure[s] a boat the same is to be made known to all of us, that we may go together.
We all swear to assist and stand by one another to the last.
God only besides ourselves shall know our actions and what is in our possession.¹⁴⁹

Such ‘round robins’ captured what Rediker describes as the ‘collective logic’ behind mutiny. They were used to organise resistance without revealing the identity of its ringleaders.¹⁵⁰

What shall we do with the drunken sailor? Authority at sea

Before turning to a detailed analysis of one mutiny - that took place on board the convict ship *Clarissa* in 1854 - I would like to make some comments about the personal nature of authority at sea and what Rediker has described as its often violent and arbitrary nature.¹⁵¹ ‘Hydrarchy’ might have characterised the ship as a space of resistance, but any hint of disorder on the part of the convicts met with an immediate and harsh response. In 1832, for instance, the crew of a ship carrying 40 convicts from the Straits to Bombay, the *Fort William*, heard a noise coming from the convicts’ quarters. Captain James Peish ordered them to secure the hatches, went below decks, seized the convict who seemed to be the ringleader and flogged him immediately in front of all the others.¹⁵² Captain

Thomas Johnson of the *Freak* summarily flogged a convict who had threatened to kill him.¹⁵³

When the convicts of the *Singapore Packet* complained about their rations, they were unsatisfied by captain Tingate's response, and broke out of their accommodation below deck. Though it is not exactly clear what happened next, four of them died from the wounds they received. The governor of the Straits, S.G. Bonham, congratulated the captain, with the press reporting his most satisfactory 'bold and manly conduct'.¹⁵⁴ Attempted mutiny on board the *Recovery* was suppressed with even more brutality. Captain Johnson gave all convicts on deck at the time three dozen lashes, and 20 others 'as much as they could take' - his being assured that they were at the bottom of events.¹⁵⁵ The *Bengal Hurkaru* later reported these actions of 'courage and promptitude'.¹⁵⁶

In at least two cases the sort of violence that seems to have characterised relations at sea was the catalyst if not the cause of unrest. The attempt to seize the *Catherine* for example took place after convict Kondajee Bapoo complained about his fetters - or rations, depending on whether you believe captain Pendygrass or the convict who turned informer, Rama Balloo. Both men agreed that the captain slapped Kondajee around the face, and threatened him with a flogging. Convict Rama Balloo stated that later that evening Kondajee resolved to murder him.¹⁵⁷ One of the *Virginia* convicts, Hameer Rhadoo, claimed that captain Whiffen had threatened to seize any man who was seasick and throw him overboard. Other convicts spoke of being kicked and thrown down by him.¹⁵⁸ Captain Benyon of the *Harriet Scott* killed one of the convicts trying to get up the hatch. This enraged the remainder, and they apparently 'cut his body in pieces'. The remaining crew killed seven more.¹⁵⁹

Convict Rama Balloo was not unusual in giving information to the authorities. Informing was officially encouraged in prisons and penal settlements, and the authorities offered convicts rewards for turning against their fellow men. Informing was an integral part of colonial penal strategies, and convicts who warned the authorities of imminent attacks were well rewarded with release from fetters, hard labour on the roads or even remission of sentence. Mutiny plots sometimes came to light when convict informers made their intentions known to one of the officers on board. In the case of the *Recovery* (1846), for instance, prisoner Hussa Bulla reported that he had overheard convicts awaiting embarkation in Bombay county jail planning to seize their ship, claiming that a ship would accompany them out of Bombay to help them.¹⁶⁰ It seems that Rama Balloo had been involved in the *Catherine* plot too, and offered to give information against his comrades if the captain released him from irons.¹⁶¹ The convict Sahoo Fazul also gave information.¹⁶² The captain of the *Recovery* claimed that he knew who was involved ‘from information I got from other Prisoners’.¹⁶³ Unfortunately for Rama Balloo, his offence (administering intoxicating drugs with intent to rob) was described as so serious that he was not recommended for release. Sahoo Fazul was.¹⁶⁴ It was not uncommon for convicts like Rama Balloo to turn informer. Juggenath Ramjee too, one of the ringleaders in the planned *Chinsurah* mutiny (1852), also told a *jemadar* (superior military officer) on board what was about to take place.¹⁶⁵ It is difficult to say what motivated them: fear of failure, or of the consequences? In other cases convicts gave incriminating information during post-insurrection court proceedings. This was known as the admission of King’s or Queen’s evidence. Here motive is easier to read, for it led to their automatic acquittal. Nasen, of the *General Wood* mutineers for instance escaped sentence in this way.¹⁶⁶

After an attempted mutiny on board the *Ararat*, sailing from the Straits Settlements to Bombay in 1859, captain Joachim Manuel Correya stripped all the surviving convicts naked, and gave them as much of a flogging as they could stand: three and in some cases four dozen lashes, a substantial punishment. This included the 28 men who it was obvious had taken no part in the disturbance because they had been locked in the hold the whole time.¹⁶⁷ Again the *Hurkaru* congratulated this man ‘of courage and pluck’ for staving off disaster. Reported in the style of a *Boy’s Own Adventure*, the newspaper went on to note that the captain’s wife had displayed extraordinary courage in loading and reloading her husband’s pistols, passing them up to him from the cuddy.¹⁶⁸ The secretary of state for India was not so forgiving of his actions, writing that the level of violence used against innocent men was ‘quite inexcusable’, and that the stripping of the convicts was ‘to say the least, a very cruel measure.’¹⁶⁹ The advocate-general recommended that the magistracy if not the supreme court institute legal proceedings against Correya, for a harsh and unnecessarily severe act.¹⁷⁰ However, the senior magistrate of police decided to take no action beyond recommending that he should not command transportation ships in future.¹⁷¹ The board agreed.¹⁷² The captain himself claimed that he had removed the convicts’ clothing to make sure that none had hidden weapons,¹⁷³ but there is no doubt that the public removal of garments was also an emasculating punishment which, as I have noted elsewhere, was part of the armoury of colonial penal practice during the first half of the nineteenth century.¹⁷⁴ Forty years earlier, the commander of the *Ariel*, D. Jones, reported that after convict Gourmohun Soor escaped, he had stripped the remainder to see if any had hidden sharp implements with which they might cut their irons.¹⁷⁵

Given the stakes – and knowledge of convicts’ former successes that must surely have played on captains’ minds - the violence directed against convict mutineers is perhaps unsurprising. Yet as we have seen, there was a fine line between what was acceptable and what was not, and a certain colonial ambivalence about the issue. Like the captain of the *Ararat*, the chief mate of the *Harriet Scott* John MacDuff was lucky to escape a jail sentence. Fourteen of the 16 convicts on board had mutinied on the way from Penang to Bombay in 1843. They killed captain Philip Benyon and for a brief time took control of the ship. Seven of the convicts escaped (they were later taken back to Penang by another vessel), and the crew finally managed to overpower the remainder.¹⁷⁶ MacDuff had drunk a considerable amount of brandy and was - according to the testimony of Robert Cort, a passenger on board - staggering about. In this drunken state, MacDuff shot two convicts who had taken no part in the mutiny. Fearing what might happen next, the passengers and crew placed him in irons.¹⁷⁷ W.J. Butterworth, governor of the Straits Settlements, described MacDuff’s actions as barbaric.¹⁷⁸ He was arrested when the ship arrived back in Penang and the authorities indicted him for manslaughter, but he was acquitted. Though the judge congratulated him on the verdict, the secretary to the government of Bombay later wrote that he was disappointed that he had not been convicted.¹⁷⁹

Once they had successfully taken a ship, convict mutineers relished the opportunity to turn the nature of violence at sea on its head. The *Virginia* convicts for example beat captain Whiffen’s brains out, until his left eye was forced from its socket.¹⁸⁰ Those on the *Harriet Scott* broke captain Benyon’s back, and left his head ‘shockingly fractured’. Second mate Thomas Jones placed his body in an empty cask, and

poured a keg of brandy on it in order to preserve it for burial.¹⁸¹ Magistrate E.H. Lushington described what he saw on the *Kaleegunga* thus: ‘The decks of both vessels were dyed with blood at one end lay a man with his stomach ripped open near him was a pool of Blood where it is said a man’s head had been severed from his body’.¹⁸² There was something symbolic about convict violence too. After captain Whiffen’s death, the convict Saduck Ali cut the back of Whiffen’s thighs with a sword.¹⁸³ When the captain of the *Clarissa* was put into the jolly boat, fatally wounded, there was according to one of the sepoys on board ‘a very great noise in the ship’.¹⁸⁴ Michael Anthony, a convict on the *Freak*, spoke of the attack against captain Thomas Suffield thus. The convicts had first tied the captain up: ‘The 2nd Prisoner kicked the Captain when he asked for water, he had tied up his irons and so was able to kick the Captain ... [he] kicked the Captain and said he should have only two tinpots’. After cutting the captain and chief mate’s throats, the *Freak* convicts chained them up before throwing them overboard.¹⁸⁵ It seems – as second mate Francis Ward said - that after the crew had uncovered a plot by the convicts the captain had chained all of them to the chain cable, thinking that if they caused trouble they could all be thrown over board with the anchor.¹⁸⁶ According to Michael Anthony during the uprising one of the convicts said: “‘now this chain has been so many days on your legs is now on their’s [sic]’”.¹⁸⁷

A second aspect of the inversion of authority at sea was the destruction of the ship’s papers, especially the ship’s log and the roll individually identifying each convict – the convict indent. The ripping up or burning of official papers – the monotonous daily record that might have damned an individual or in which each convict was carefully registered and described – was a highly symbolic act, for it prevented convict bodies

from being matched to their criminal record. The *Freak* convicts apparently threw all the ‘books and papers’ found in the captain’s cabin overboard.¹⁸⁸ Officials going on board ships after mutinies frequently described how their papers were strewn all around, scenes of disorder standing in stark contrast to the methodical order of colonial record-keeping.¹⁸⁹

Third, after taking ships, convicts often dressed themselves in the clothes of the captain and his officers. The *Freak* convicts for instance adorned themselves with the garb of the captain and chief mate,¹⁹⁰ as did those of the *General Wood*.¹⁹¹ The leaders of the *Virginia* convicts too put on the captain’s coat and hat.¹⁹² There is no evidence that convicts stripped ships’ officers; rather clothes were stolen from the hold. This was possibly meant to fool passing ships that all was in order,¹⁹³ but these acts were also clear inversions of authority. Yet authority was not overturned altogether and convicts used clothing in their construction of alternative structures of command. Dress became a visual token of status and power – convict leaders usually wore the captain’s coat, sash and sword; others took silk handkerchiefs and wore them around their necks. Finally, feasting at the captain’s table usually followed a successful mutiny. The convicts enjoyed a sort of carnivalesque atmosphere on board. The *Freak* convicts slaughtered four sheep and six fowls, and made pilaf and curry for all on board. They then turned the ship’s stock of sugar into sherbet. According to Michael Anthony, though the Hindus and Muslims dined separately there was ‘dancing singing merry making’.¹⁹⁴ The *Virginia* convicts too ate at the captain’s table.¹⁹⁵ In these extraordinary scenes, dressed in the garb of captain and crew and feasting on their provisions, convicts must have delighted at their metaphorical capsizing of the transportation ship.

'The Ferringees are flying – the ship is ours': mutiny on the Clarissa

The mutiny on board the *Clarissa* in 1854 caused a sensation. In the words of the advocate-general of Bengal, it was a case of 'great atrocity and destruction of life', and an example had to be made of the ringleaders.¹⁹⁶ One hundred and thirty-three escaped convicts were placed on trial in the district court of Amherst (Moulmein), each charged with 'being an accomplice in the murder of the captain and part of the crew and guard on board the *Clarissa* and in escaping from custody, from the said barque, and affray with culpable homicide'. In a 13-day hearing S.R. Tickell (principal commissioner and district magistrate of the Tenasserim and Martaban Provinces) convicted 29 of the convicts of affray with culpable homicide and four of murder, and directed that they be committed to trial in the appropriate court, as his district court had no jurisdiction to try offences committed on the high seas. He wrote that not only had they attacked the captain and crew with 'every kind of missile they could lay their hands on', but that they had caused the death of many more who jumped overboard. Almost half of the crew and guard died, 31 out of 61 souls.¹⁹⁷

Those convicts fit to travel (129) were returned to Bengal to face trial in Calcutta's supreme court (admiralty side).¹⁹⁸ The chief judge, Sir J. Colville, stated that it was the most serious case that he had ever come across.¹⁹⁹ Company officials decided to try the convicts under three heads other than piratical seizure of the vessel: thus 18 men were charged with the murder of the captain, three more with the murder of the *subadar* (head) and *havildar* of the guard, and one with shooting a *kalassi* after he jumped overboard. The difficulty for the authorities was, of course, as in all mutiny cases that

reached the courts, proving that individual convicts had committed specific acts.²⁰⁰ In the confusion that characterised outbreaks, this was not easy, particularly as the leaders of mutinies like these were often killed on the spot. In this respect, of all the mutiny cases only Narain Singh of the *Kaleegunga* was singled out, meaning that despite an 11-day trial the rest could only be convicted of escaping from the vessel.²⁰¹ As the government solicitor in Bombay put it in his legal opinion on the attempted mutiny on the *Ararat*, proceedings could not be taken against convicts for simply ‘yelling’ or ‘being disobedient’.²⁰² Sixteen of the *Clarissa* men died after their capture and readmission to Alipur jail, and most of the remainder were transported to serve their original sentence – as the judge put it ‘to that place of exile and that life of slavery to which you have been already condemned’. These men were marked out, and the lieutenant-governor of Bengal decided that they would not be allowed to earn remission of sentence through future good behaviour, like other convicts in the Straits Settlements. Instead they would remain in the fifth class, and be kept at hard labour during the whole term of their sentence. Four of them were sentenced to death.²⁰³

The *Clarissa* left Calcutta on 26 April 1854, destined for the penal settlement at Melaka. The pre-embarkation survey had reported that the ship could hold 155 convicts. The superintendent of marine noted that the usual space allowed to each convict was six by half a foot and by this measure it could carry 171 men.²⁰⁴ It is clear that the very maximum number of convicts was squeezed on board, though whether this played a part in the mutiny is less certain. First officer James Squire later reported that when the convicts first embarked they complained to him, the captain and the *subadar* of the guard about the lack of room.²⁰⁵ Goolah, a *kalassi* on board, testified during the magistrate’s

hearing that the convicts complained about the crowding and heat below decks.²⁰⁶

According to another member of the crew, the outbreak on the *Clarissa* started when one man complained that he did not get enough water, and struck the sepoy guard on the head with his lotah.²⁰⁷ Third mate Charles Blaney later said that ‘the convicts used to grumble about not having enough water’.²⁰⁸ Boor Singh, one of the convicts put it like this: ‘In the ship we all got cheated out of our provisions. Short measure and not enough water. All men discontented and began to be alarmed at our fate.’²⁰⁹ Indeed, it seems that one of the first things the convicts did after seizing the ship was to make a drink by mixing some sugar that they found in the hold with seawater.²¹⁰ The uprising was planned at least a week before – several convicts testified to this²¹¹ – and it was to a certain extent opportunistic. As on many other transportation ships, there were ten unfettered convicts up on deck who were employed as sweepers, and in other ship duties. Disorder broke out when they were serving water to 12 convicts who had been brought out of the hold.²¹²

Sheikh Ramran, a sepoy guard, stated that during his five former trips with convicts he had never seen arrangements such as were made on board the *Clarissa*. He claimed that the muskets were kept on deck and the ammunition in the main hatch (at some distance away), and that 12 convicts were always on deck, four without handcuffs. One convict, he said, was even in charge of the captain’s swords and muskets.²¹³ In this, as in the rationing and fitting out of convict ships, there was often a large gap between the rules and practices of convict transportation. Access to arms did not however imply successful use of them. One of the convicts stated in his defence: ‘I am a cultivator ... I never knew how to hold a musket how could I have fired one on board[?]’.²¹⁴ However, it

is evident that some of the convicts on board were well versed in the operation of weaponry.

According to officials who appeared before magistrate Tickell, and press reports that were published in July, the events were as follows. A group of convicts captured the ship, and murdered captain Johnstone, the chief and second mates (all Englishmen) together with a number of the crew. They then ransacked the ship – destroying the log book and register (the convicts’ descriptive roll) – ran the ship aground and landed on the Burmese shore with all the arms and ammunition on board, some rope and canvas (presumably to make shelters) and as many provisions as they could carry. They believed – mistakenly as it turned out – that they had landed in territory as yet untaken by the British. Magistrate Tickell was informed and sent a party in search of the convicts, who were said to be near Ye, a small town between Rangoon and Tavoy. He was afraid that if the men remained at large, unrest might break out amongst the transported convicts already in the provinces, who numbered about two thousand. Yet the most worrisome aspect of the mutiny for him was the fact that these were not ordinary convicts, but ‘Seikhs, Pathans, Rohillas and the like’. As such, recapturing them was no simple matter. Meanwhile, rumours of their whereabouts abounded.²¹⁵

The escaped convict party quickly assumed the proportions of a military campaign. One of the convicts – Soor Singh – assumed charge, putting on the captain’s coat and boots, and the gold necklace, sword and sash belonging to the *subadar* of the guard. He armed six other convicts, who wore the military guard’s ‘caps and accoutrements’, referring to them as ‘his sepoy’s’.²¹⁶ They waded from the ship to the beach, where they all assembled, Soor Singh sitting before them in a chair.²¹⁷ Thinking

that they were in Burmese country, the convicts decided to make their way to the ‘Burma Rajah’ and offer him their services in anti-British campaigns. I will take up the story in the words of Kurrim Singh, a convict who turned informer against his shipmates, according to his testimony before the district magistrate’s court:

They all went into the Rajah’s Cutcherry. The Rajah salaamed and gave Soor Singh a chair to sit on, there were several interpreters there. The Rajah asked Soor Singh where he had come from and where he was going to. Soor Singh said he was a sikh from Lahore and had come with 175 men to help the Burma Rajah. They had some conversation and the Rajah wishing, as he said, to call all the rest of Soor Singh’s men, Soor Singh gave him one of his party to shew [sic] where they were and the Rajah sent 25 armed Burmese with him. Scarcely had the man gone out, when Soor Singh’s eyes alighted on a written piece of paper with a Court[’]s [East India Company] seal impressed on it which was stuck against the wall. He instantly took the alarm, jumped to his feet and rushed out of the House with his 5 men.²¹⁸

In the gunfight all six convicts – including the leader Soor Singh - were killed.²¹⁹ Over the next few days, most of the remaining convicts were brought in. Only a couple of dozen remained unaccounted for, presumed drowned, starved or mauled by wild animals.²²⁰

So who were the *Clarissa* convicts? The fact that the mutineers destroyed the ship indent (descriptive register) is a boon, for copies of ship indents were always kept in Calcutta as well as being sent to the penal settlements. Most of these – including the *Clarissa* roll - survive in the Bengal judicial proceedings series.²²¹ But there is a second list too, for at the time, once they realised their copy of the list was missing, officials in Burma made a new list from details given by the convicts themselves.²²² This provides a unique insight into convicts’ perceptions of the crime for which they were transported, and gives details of former occupation not usually recorded by officials in the

presidencies. The first – official – list does not seem to show anything unique. Like most convicts at the time, they were transported for the crimes of dacoity (gang robbery), murder or the rather woolly offence of thuggee.²²³ There is only one exception: Mohomed Buksh who was convicted of ‘wounding with intent to murder Mr RP Jenkins, Assistant Commissioner of Leia by striking him on the head and shoulder with an iron hammer’. A large majority of the convicts came from Lahore and Allahabad. The second – convict – list does not mention ‘thuggee’, only ‘dacoity’, which perhaps tells us something about convict perceptions (or confirms the vagueness) of the offence. Neither is the list suggestive that any of the convicts had been soldiers, except for the informer Kurrim Singh. The leaders of the mutiny – who almost certainly had military backgrounds - were all killed, however, so they are not on the convict-generated list. The original ship indents did not record occupation. Incidentally, in the convict-generated list, Mohomed Buksh’s crime appears as ‘murder’ – an attempt on the convict himself to present himself in a more flattering light, or the contraction of a clerk under pressure? Only about 30 of the convicts were from Bengal, a point we will return to below.

During the sessions court hearings, a story of huge divisions between the convicts on board the *Clarissa* emerges. At least some of the convicts were motivated by a desire to escape beyond British control, and tried to offer themselves in service against them. Convict Shaik Sooiah told magistrate Tickell that Soor Singh called out: ‘The Feringees [foreigners, meant here to signify the British] are flying – the ship is ours’.²²⁴ Another convict who claimed he was unconcerned in the outbreak – Beejah - deposed that he told them ‘you shall be taken to the Burma Raja’s and there be all free men’.²²⁵ The non-Sikh convicts like Beejah (who referred to themselves in a rather eclectic way as Bengalis,

‘Deswalees’, or Hindustanis) all claimed that they had nothing to do with the mutiny, which they said was the work of the Sikhs and some of the Muslims. It is perhaps notable that the self-appellation ‘Bengali’ crossed religious lines, for according to the descriptive roll about a third of the Bengali convicts were Muslims themselves. The Bengalis claimed that the Sikhs were kept separate, and after the mutiny they had imprisoned the Bengalis below deck, giving them even less water than before. The seasickness of many meant that they could not have joined in, even if they had wished to.²²⁶ When the ship ran aground, the mutineers made them carry their luggage. Cassee Barah put it like this:

None of us Bengallees had anything to do with the outbreak we were nearly murdered ourselves and kept confined after the outbreak till we came to the shore, where we were forced to land and carry the Sikhs['] burden, till they went away across the river and we all gave ourselves up to the first Burmese who came up.²²⁷

The sorts of hierarchies on board ship were a further source of divisions between convicts, for there is some evidence that the *Clarissa* mutineers targeted those who had enjoyed various privileges. Convict Bunkur Doss had been appointed overseer whilst in Alipur jail, and he had reported several of the men for bad conduct. He told magistrate Tickell that he had been uninvolved in the mutiny: ‘I was up on deck every day and better off than the rest I had no cause to join in the tumult.’ However, his position in the penal hierarchy made him vulnerable. ‘I now feared for my life,’ he said.²²⁸ Though it is clear that the unfettered working convicts on deck were crucial to the success of the seizure of the ship, first officer James Squire said that there were often fights amongst convicts about their provisions.²²⁹

The convict-turned-informer, Kurrim Singh, is an interesting character, for during later evidence it emerged that he had been at the centre of events. Initially, the colonial authorities in Burma wanted to believe his innocence and thereby construct a plausible version of events in the face of a mass of confusing and contradictory evidence. How else to make sense of the testimony of almost over 100 witnesses? Tickell himself wrote on submitting the papers to Calcutta: 'In these proceedings, I trust all irregularities and omissions will be leniently considered. I have no precedent to guide me ... The difficulties are the magnitude of the case, its complexity, incessant interruptions, and the fact that the matters alleged have not been investigated by the police.'²³⁰ If only Tickell had had the original descriptive roll in his possession, for it listed Kurrim Singh as a 'desperate character requires to be carefully watched', the only convict on board so described.²³¹

During the trial, a number of witnesses spoke of Kurrim Singh's pivotal role during the mutiny. Sheikh Kurwodeen, a sepoy guard on board, testified that he was one of the self-elected convict *jemadars* (head overseers).²³² The convict Bunkur Doss (who had been an overseer in Alipur jail) stated that he was one of the worst of the convicts, and that his word was 'good for nothing'.²³³ A third man, Chatoo, claimed that he had planned the whole thing days beforehand, and had been 'second in command' after Soor Singh.²³⁴ According to reports of the trial in the *Bengal Hurkaru*, Kurrim Singh said that he had been an artilleryman in the fifth company at Rangoon, and understood a little Burmese.²³⁵ Yet magistrate Tickell wrote during the Amherst sessions that the evidence against him was insufficient and motivated only by the desire for revenge on the part of the other convicts. This was clearly not the case. Superintendent of Alipur jail H.

Fergusson wrote after the trial: 'It is now well known that he was one of the principal instigators of the lamentable tragedy ... He is a cunning, clever, intriguing desperate scoundrel and became approver against the men he had instigated and led.' The other convicts had, apparently, sworn to take their revenge and murder him. Fergusson kept him away from them in prison, and recommended that he be sent to a different penal settlement. It was agreed that whilst the others be shipped to Melaka, he be sent to Singapore, and the resident councillor there informed of who he was.²³⁶

I mentioned above that one of the convict guards testified that the captain of the *Clarissa* had made rather unusual arrangements in the keeping of the ship's weaponry, and had even employed one of the convicts to clean his swords and muskets. He added that the *subadar* of the guard had complained to the captain, who told him 'to hold his tongue'.²³⁷ It turns out that – despite the explicit warning noted on the descriptive roll – this man was none other than convict-turned-informer Kurrim Singh.²³⁸ I suspect that the captain had a sneaking admiration for some of his convict charges, for at least some of them were military men or in the words of one of the sepoys on board 'fine-looking fellows'.²³⁹ If this was the case, it was certainly a costly mistake.

On a former occasion a group of convicts from Allahabad seized the *Kaleegunga*, on which they were being shipped to Calcutta for transportation. Three guards were killed during the uprising. The notorious 'Sikh general', Narain Singh, and two of his subordinates were on board.²⁴⁰ During this mutiny colonial stereotypes contrasting manly, loyal Europeans with weak, treacherous natives were turned on their head. The Europeans on board had simply fled, one man sergeant Cunningham jumping overboard leaving his wife and two children behind. Captain H.M. Nation who was in charge of the

guard much regretted 'the disgrace cast on the Europeans' character' by such acts.²⁴¹

Narain Singh, on the other hand, had behaved with impeccable manners. Mary Ann Cunningham said that when the other convicts suggested that they kill her Narain Singh had said that because she had two young children she should be spared: 'He then turned to me and said you are my mothers and fathers it is not to take your life that we are doing this it is to get away with our own lives.' He also saved the life of her two children.²⁴²

The sessions judge certainly sympathised with the treatment Narain Singh – 'a man of caste and rank' - had received, locked on a single chain with ordinary prisoners. He urged the court to take 'the hardships of his situation' into account: 'the ignominy of being treated as a common felon chained with the lowest criminals such as Thugs, Dacoits, and Murderers, and with sweepers by caste, to all [of] which he was subjected must have been to him, as he himself states less supportable than death.'²⁴³ Despite finding him guilty of murder, he recommended him to the mercy of the court. The court also ordered that all the other prisoners on board should be transported to serve their original sentence.²⁴⁴ The 25 convicts were shipped to Moulmein on the *Fire Queen* later that year.²⁴⁵ The types of assumptions ships' commanders made about such convicts of rank could be fatal. Kurrim Sing, and speculatively other convicts on board the *Clarissa* too, were configured in relation to their military rank and social standing rather than their conviction and prior record. The privileges as such accorded to Kurrim Singh provided him with the chance to mutiny.

Investigations into mutinies among Straits convicts sailing to mainland India often pointed the finger of blame at crews' inability to read the criminals in their charge. As the second mate of the *Harriet Scott*, Thomas Jones, put it: 'the crew used to say that the

convicts looked too innocent to do any harm.’²⁴⁶ The secretary to government Bombay, W. Norris, relied on familiar racial tropes when he wrote:

Persons unacquainted with the Malayan character, are apt to suppose from his generally dull and phlegmatic countenance, that the Malay is a harmless and not unwilling slave, to be coerced with ease, beaten with impunity and requiring no particularly vigilant oversight. You are of course aware that, a more dangerous error cannot be fallen into, especially in the case of Malayan convicts, who are generally persons of piratical and wandering habits, ardently fond of liberty, impatient of a restraint, reckless of their own lives, and those of others, courageous, hardy, revengeful and prepared at whatever cost, to resent a blow and to have recourse to any violence or stratagem to recover their freedom.²⁴⁷

In future, commanders of vessels from the Straits were warned not to place the slightest confidence in the convicts. Malays, Norris said, prized freedom and were sensitive to both good treatment and to injury or insult: ‘a blow is rarely if ever forgiven’. He noted further that Chinese convicts were ‘active, earnest and energetic’, and would use their ‘cunning and connivance’ to assist them.²⁴⁸

The Sikh convicts on board the *Clarissa* denied the Bengalis’ claims that they had led the mutiny. Assah Singh deposed: ‘I came all the way from Lahore to Calcutta a thousand coss if I had wishes to rebel outbreak from confinement could I not have done so more easily during that long journey on land than at sea?’²⁴⁹ He was one of the four convicts sentenced to death, and apparently ‘sneered’ throughout the supreme court trial. When the sentence was read out, the press reported that he gave a ‘sneering contemptuous laugh which made one shudder’.²⁵⁰ Convicts were free to cross-examine witnesses in court, and sometimes did so with remarkable aplomb. Others refused to participate in the whole procedure. Bela, one of the *Virginia* defendants, was asked to question a witness in the court. He said: ‘I am not a prophet to know what to ask ... It is

your Lordship[']s business to question him here if I met him the Bazaar I would ask him.'

One of his fellow shipmates - Hameer Rhadoo - had a clear sense of the only way they would get justice, telling the judge: 'God is above and your Lordships below.'²⁵¹

Conclusion

Indian convict ship mutinies were dramatic and complex events that can be rendered historically meaningful in multiple ways. With Indian convict transportation regulated by the East India Company, the enquiries that invariably followed violent uprisings generated a voluminous archive. This gives us a unique insight into the convict middle passage. It is possible to use archival records on convict mutinies to reconstruct aspects of everyday life on board transportation vessels. They reveal colonial limitations in relation to the management, confinement and provisioning of convicts, for there was a wide breach between the regulations and practices of transportation. There is no doubt that although on the whole transportation ships were relatively healthy, overcrowding and outbreaks of disease could render conditions intolerable. This meant that convicts had various experiences. Such differentiation was compounded by the integration of convicts into the remarkably hierarchical arrangements on board the convict ship. The variability of convict experiences was also in evidence in relation to caste practices. Ships' officers showed some degree of sensitivity to them; ignorance could have devastating consequences. In this sense, shipboard authority and convict agency were closely intertwined to the point that this potentially troublesome human cargo determined particular aspects of shipboard life.

Further, convict mutinies are suggestive of the existence of a particular regime of authority at sea, which in taking over ships convicts simultaneously mimicked and inverted. Among colonial officials there was considerable anxiety about how best to deal with refractory convicts – to read congratulatory press reports alone masks the substance of contemporary debates on the issue. On occasion officials on the Indian mainland severely reprimanded ships' captains for the arbitrary authority they displayed towards convicts. Mutinous convicts displayed few such nerves, for they delighted in turning ships' regimes on their head – attacking officers and crew, burning records, dressing in officers' clothing, feasting, dancing and singing. Yet such convicts did not abandon shipboard authority regimes altogether. Some convicts set up their own structures of leadership in which they exploited other convicts to their own ends.

Convict uprisings therefore not only reveal the multi-faceted nature of the middle passage, but perhaps most significantly in their divisions and hierarchies they dispel simplistic notions of a single convict identity or experience of transportation. This has potentially important ramifications for readings of subaltern studies more generally, particularly in relation to interpretations of other forms of coerced labour and migration. Who was - or rather was rendered - subaltern, both by the colonial authorities and their fellow men and women, and how they played out that role, moved both within and beyond supposedly common identities and experiences.

Table 1. Disorder on Convict Ships, c. 1790-1860²⁵²

Route	Ship	Captain	Embarked	No. of convicts	Summary of events
Bombay to Mauritius	<i>Constance</i>	Captain Reynaud	Dec. 1827	7	16 Dec., take over ship and force crew to sail them back to India. They are arrested but escape from jail.
Penang and Singapore to Bombay	<i>Fort William</i>	Captain James Peish	Nov. 1832	41	27 Nov., captain hears convicts rioting below deck. Secures the hatches, then goes down and gives a summary flogging to the ringleader in the presence of all. Flogs three more the following morning.
Bombay to Penang and Singapore	<i>Catherine</i>	Captain F.W. Pendygrass	Dec. 1838	60	Plot to murder captain and officers uncovered off Mangalore, 25 Dec. Taken back to Bombay; no court proceedings and convicts transported as per original sentences.
Bombay to Singapore	<i>Virginia</i>	Charles Whiffen	Dec 1839	36	Murder captain and mate, 17 Dec., taking possession of the ship until they abandon it and make for shore south of Goa. A number of persons subsequently arrested and released on suspicion of being escaped convicts. 7 convicts tried, and 6 executed. The remainder transported as per original sentences,

					two of them on the <i>Freak</i> (see below).
Bombay to Singapore	<i>Singapore Packet</i>	Captain Tingate	Feb. 1841	18	Attempt to seize captain and officers off Ceylon, unsuccessful.
Bombay to Singapore	<i>Freak</i>	Captain T.J. Suffield	Jan. 1841	45	Murder captain and chief mate, anchor near Aceh (northern Sumatra). Recaptured and tried in Straits Settlements: 8 convicts executed, 3 transported for life, remainder have original sentences carried out.
Penang to Bombay	<i>Harriet Scott</i>	Captain Philip Benyon	Sept 1843	16	14 of the convicts lock up the crew below deck and attempt to take control of the ship. The captain kills one of them, the convicts then murder him (18 Nov.) 7 escape and are picked up by another ship <i>en route</i> to Penang. They are tried, found guilty and hanged. The drunk chief mate John MacDuff also tried for shooting dead 2 of the convicts not involved in the mutiny. Controversial acquittal. No action taken against the remaining convicts.
Bombay to Singapore	<i>Recovery</i>	Captain Thomas Johnson	Feb. 1846	79	Plot to mutiny uncovered before arrival; notwithstanding this, mutiny breaks out 5 Feb. 1 man killed and 5 injured. The captain secures and summarily flogs a number of convicts.

Hong Kong to Singapore and Penang	<i>General Wood</i>	Captain Stokoe	Dec. 1847 (left Singapore Jan. 1848)	92	3 Jan. convicts successfully seize ship after leaving Penang, and attempt to navigate to China. Murder the captain, third mate and four lascars. Wreck ship off Cambodia. 19 convicts tried by Singapore criminal sessions, 3-5 Apr: 3 executed, 23 life transportation to Bombay. 27 more tried 4 June: 3 executed, 24 life transportation to Bombay.
Allahabad to Calcutta	<i>Kaleegunga</i> (in tow of <i>Burrampooter</i> [<i>Brahmapootra</i>])	Captain John Stout	Apr. 1850	39	22 June, the convicts murder 2 guards and escape near Patna.
Bombay to Penang	<i>Chinsurah</i>	Captain W. Rogers	Dec. 1851	62	On 5 Jan. 1852, two convicts inform the ship's officers of a planned mutiny. One of them, uncovered as a ringleader, was threatened with a flogging. He threw himself overboard shortly afterwards.
Bengal to Penang	<i>Clarissa</i>	Captain Johnstone	April 1854	171	Seize vessel 10 May, murder captain, chief officer and boy. Land in Tenasserim Provinces and offer their services to the Burmese authorities to fight against the British, in the mistaken

					belief they are in Burmese territory. Tried in Calcutta; 4 executed, the remainder transported as per original sentences.
Allahabad to Calcutta	<i>Burrampooter</i> [<i>Brahmapootra</i>]	Acting commander Robert Ewin	Feb. 1855	204	The steamer was damaged during a storm on 14 Feb. 6 convicts took the opportunity to escape. Another convict killed.
Bombay to Singapore	<i>Julia</i>	Captain John Edward Fittock	Feb. 1858	44	Nothing known of the outbreak, ²⁵³ except that one man was killed. 40 of the convicts had been convicted of treason, mutiny, rebellion and riot during 1857. As mutineers, they were transferred to Andaman Islands before they could stand trial in Singapore. ²⁵⁴
Karachi to Singapore	<i>Edward</i>	-	Feb. 1858	133	Nothing known of the mutiny, except that it was quelled. 6 or 7 convicts were killed.
Singapore and Penang to Bombay	<i>City of Palaces</i>	Captain Jones	Aug. 1858	80	A convict informs the captain that there is a plot to seize the ship in place. 8 prisoners are separated from the rest. Food and water ran very short on the voyage; 5 convicts die on the ship and 2 shortly after their arrival in Bombay.
Singapore and Penang to Bombay	<i>Ararat</i>	Captain Joachim Manuel Correya	June 1859	62 + 12	28 June convicts attempt to take ship – 35 consequently shot or missing. No proceedings taken against the captain or surviving convicts after the former's violent punishment of the latter.

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² Nicholas and Shergold, 'Transportation as Global Migration'.

³ Anderson, *Legible Bodies*; Pieris, 'Hidden Hands and Divided Landscapes'; Rai, 'Sepoys, convicts and the "bazaar" contingent'; Sandu, 'Tamil and other Indian convicts'; Turnbull, 'Convicts in the Straits Settlements'.

⁴ Anderson, *Convicts in the Indian Ocean*, ch. 2.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 3-5.

⁶ IOR Bengal and Bombay judicial proceedings; TNSA Madras judicial proceedings.

⁷ Nicholas and Shergold, 'Transportation as Global Migration', p. 30.

⁸ *Bombay Gazette*, 14 Sept. 1858.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Anderson, 'The politics of convict space', pp. 41-5.

¹¹ Linebaugh and Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra*, p. 144.

¹² Sen, *Disciplining Punishment*. For accounts on the later transportation of political offenders to the Islands see: Aggarwal, *The Heroes of Cellular Jail*; Mathur, *Kala Pani*; Majumdar, *Penal Settlement in Andamans*.

¹³ Behrendt, Eltis and Richardson, 'The costs of coercion'. On the cultural meaning of slave ship revolts, see also Finkenbine, 'The Symbolism of Slave Mutiny'.

¹⁴ For a comparison with the shipping of indentured labourers, readers might like to consult Carter's *Servants, Sirdars and Settlers*, ch. 4, and *Voices from Indenture*, pp. 92-6.

¹⁵ Richardson, 'Shipboard Revolts', p. 78.

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- ¹⁶ Finkenbine makes the same point in relation to slave ships: *ibid.*, p. 249 (n. 1).
- ¹⁷ Lammers, 'Mutiny in Comparative Perspective', p. 477.
- ¹⁸ On the universal features of mutiny, see Hathaway, 'Introduction', p. xv.
- ¹⁹ On violence against indentured labourers on board ship, see Carter, *Voices From Indenture*, pp. 93-5.
- ²⁰ IOR P.402.30 (30 Jan. 1839): W. Howard, acting advocate-general Bombay, to J.P. Willoughby, secretary to government Bombay, 22 Jan. 1839.
- ²¹ *Bombay Courier*, 17 Jan. 1839.
- ²² IOR P.402.30 (30 Jan 1839): Willoughby's memorandum, 22 Jan. 1839; TNSA JP vol. 362: Willoughby to H. Chamier, chief secretary to government Madras, 24 Jan. 1839.
- ²³ IOR P.402.31 (20 Feb. 1839): Willoughby to R. Oliver, superintendent Indian navy, 16 Feb 1839.
- ²⁴ IOR P. 142.15 (29 Apr. 1844): memorandum for the information of commanders of vessels engaged for the conveyance of convicts, 29 Feb. 1844.
- ²⁵ IOR P.407.22 (21 Feb. 1859): resolution of the board, 11 Jan. 1859.
- ²⁶ Richardson, 'Shipboard Revolts', p. 75.
- ²⁷ IOR P.142.60 (6 Jan. 1847): note by under-secretary to government, A.R. Young, 29 Dec. 1846.
- ²⁸ IOR P.402.30 (30 Jan 1839): Willoughby's memorandum, 19 Jan. 1839.
- ²⁹ IOR P.402.50 (19 Aug. 1850): Oliver to W.R. Morris, secretary to government Bombay, 21 July 1840, enc. D. Ross, superintendent Indian navy and master attendant, to Oliver, 25 June 1840; Morris' memorandum, 27 July 1840.
- ³⁰ TNSA JP vol. 418A: agents *Resolution* to secretary marine board, 21 June 1841; minute of government, 22 June 1841.
- ³¹ IOR P.404.33 (29 May 1848): E. Baynes, superintendent convicts Bombay, to J.G. Lumsden, secretary to government Bombay, 9 May 1848.
- ³² IOR P.398.44 (25 June 1817): H. Meriton, superintendent marine, to secretary to government Bombay; P.398.83 (4 July 1821): Meriton to secretary to government Bombay; P.400.51 (7 Dec. 1831): C. Malcolm, superintendent Indian navy, to J. Bax, secretary to government Bombay, 29 Nov. 1831; P.402.27 (19 Dec. 1838): Oliver to Willoughby, 11 Dec 1838.
- ³³ IOR P.403.15 (11 Jan. 1843): minute of the governor, 6 Jan. 1843.

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- ³⁴ IOR P.400.11 (21 Nov. 1827): Thomas Buchanan, superintendent marine, to C. Norris, secretary to government Bombay, 21 Nov. 1827.
- ³⁵ IOR P.403.11 (31 Aug. 1842): Oliver to Willoughby, 6 Aug. 1842.
- ³⁶ IOR P.143.1 (12 May 1847): J. Sutherland, secretary marine board, to R.H. Mytton, superintendent Alipur jail, 23 April 1847. On the transportation of thugs more generally, see Anderson, *Legible Bodies*, pp. 25-30.
- ³⁷ IOR P.142.16 (27 May 1844): S. Garling, resident councillor Penang, to governor W.J. Butterworth, Straits Settlements, 28 Feb. 1844.
- ³⁸ *Bengal Hurkaru*, 27, 30 Mar. 1848.
- ³⁹ IOR P.403.2 (10 Nov. 1841): 'Instructions to the officers of convict ships', n.d.
- ⁴⁰ IOR P.402.42 (15 Jan. 1840): list of convicts to Singapore *per Virginia*, 14 Dec. 1839, who have escaped; IOR P.402.43 (26 Feb. 1840): Oliver to Willoughby, 30 Dec. 1839; Willoughby to Oliver, 27 Feb. 1840.
- ⁴¹ IOR P.403.6 (2 Mar. 1842): Willoughby's memorandum, 8 Aug. 1841.
- ⁴² IOR P.403.17 (26 Apr. 1843): resolution on the court's despatch, 22 Feb. 1843.
- ⁴³ Rediker, *Between the Devil*, ch. 2.
- ⁴⁴ Christopher has also noted this with regard to convict transportation from Britain to Australia: "Ten Thousand Times Worse".
- ⁴⁵ See for example the following East India Company ships' logs: IOR L/MAR/B/210A *Lord Duncan* (1799); L/MAR/B/232B *Dover Castle* (1801); L/MAR/B/3C *Castle Huntly* (1814).
- ⁴⁶ IOR P.142.15 (29 Apr. 1844): W. Norris, secretary to government Bombay, to Butterworth, 7 Feb. 1844.
- ⁴⁷ *Bombay Gazette*, 22 May 1841.
- ⁴⁸ IOR P.402.49 (22 July 1840): E.H. Townsend, magistrate Belgaum, to Morris, 10 July 1840; IOR P.402.53, 56 (28 Oct. 1840, 20 Jan. 1841): lists of convicts to Singapore *per Freak*, 17 Jan 1841. Just over two years after his arrival in the Straits, Puthia Vd Meyia Saba escaped from Province Wellesley. IOR P.403.24 (20 Dec. 1843): J. Ferrier, superintendent Province Wellesley, to Garling, 9 Sept. 1843.
- ⁴⁹ Richardson, 'Shipboard Revolts', p. 76.
- ⁵⁰ IOR P.402.30 (30 Jan. 1839): information of Captain F.N. Pendygrass (*Catherine*), 19 Jan. 1839.

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- ⁵¹ Anderson, *Legible Bodies*, p. 37; Sen, 'Rationing Sex'.
- ⁵² For example, IOR P.405.34 (31 Dec. 1851): Baynes to H.E. Goldsmid, secretary to government Bombay, 12 Dec. 1851.
- ⁵³ On sexual relations on Australian convict ships, see Damousi, *Depraved and Disorderly*.
- ⁵⁴ IOR P.143.51 (31 July 1850): committee of inquiry, 8 July 1850 (Deposition of John Stout, Commander of the *Kaleegunga*).
- ⁵⁵ IOR P.403.6 (2 Mar. 1842): Willoughby's memorandum, 8 Aug. 1841; minute of governor G.W. Anderson, 11 Feb. 1842.
- ⁵⁶ IOR 402.30 (23 Jan. 1839): depositions of Captain F.N. Pendencygrass, 12, 19 Jan. 1839.
- ⁵⁷ IOR P.400.14 (9 Jan. 1828): declaration of Captain Reynaud of the English ship *Constance*, n.d. [Dec. 1827].
- ⁵⁸ Centre of South Asian Studies, University of Cambridge: Benthall Papers: Box XXX, part iii: typescript copy of diaries of Mrs Clementina Benthall, Jan. 1849 – Mar. 1850.
- ⁵⁹ *Bombay Gazette*, 20 July 1840; IOR P.402.49 (22 July 1840): S. Babington, acting third assistant magistrate Belgaum, to Townsend, July 1840.
- ⁶⁰ IOR P.403.24 (6 Dec. 1843): J. Burrows, captain and superintendent convicts Bombay, to Willoughby, 29 Nov. 1843.
- ⁶¹ IOR P.402.37 (18 Sept. 1839): J. Glen, secretary medical board Bombay, to L.R. Reid, acting chief secretary to government Bombay, 12 Aug. 1839.
- ⁶² Rediker, *Between the Devil*, p. 127.
- ⁶³ *Bombay Gazette*, 20 July 1840. See also IOR 402.39 (31 Dec. 1839): deposition of Charles de Cruz, seacunnie [steersman] of the *Virginia*, n.d.
- ⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 6 July 1841. This incident made the pages of the *London Times*, 6 Sept. 1841.
- ⁶⁵ IOR 144.55 (16 Mar. 1854): F. Church, resident councillor Singapore, to E.A. Samuells, superintendent Alipur jail, 30 Sept. 1830.
- ⁶⁶ Arnold, 'The Colonial Prison', p. 167; Arnold, *Colonizing the Body*, pp. 103-4.

⁶⁷ Data extracted from convict ship records in the IOR Bengal judicial proceedings series. The recorded figures can be taken as accurate, because when the number of convicts embarked did not match the number arrived, an explanation was usually given. If not, one was always called for.

⁶⁸ IOR 144.55 (16 Mar. 1854): Church to Samuells, 30 Sept. 1853.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*: information of Shekh Hyder, 22 Dec. 1853.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*: Alfred Pearce, commander *Margaret Skelly*, to Church, 31 Oct. 1853.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*: information of chief mate George Holland, 22 Dec. 1853.

⁷² On the provisioning of indentured migrants see Carter, *Servants, Sirdars and Settlers*, p. 122.

⁷³ IOR 144.55 (16 Mar. 1854): List of provisions distributed to the Bengal convicts on board the *Margaret Skelly* as stated by the Hindoo convicts, n.d.

⁷⁴ Arnold, 'The Colonial Prison', p. 152. On the significance of lotahs to Bengal prisoners see also Yang, 'The Lotah Emeutes of 1855'.

⁷⁵ IOR 144.55 (16 Mar. 1854): C. Beadon, secretary to government Bengal, to F.E. Rogers, superintendent marine, 6 Mar. 1854.

⁷⁶ IOR P.403.6 (2 Mar. 1842): court of judicature Penang, 7 June 1841, deposition of convict Michael Anthony.

⁷⁷ *Bombay Gazette*, 20 July 1840.

⁷⁸ IOR P.145.30 (10 Jan. 1856): rules for the management of transportation convicts proceeding to Calcutta, 3 Oct. 1855

⁷⁹ For instance TNSA JP vol. 399: G. Andrie, commander *Clarissa*, to Church, 21 June 1840; IOR P.403.36 (7 Nov. 1844): D.C. Graham, acting superintendent convicts, to W. Escombe, secretary to government Bombay, 26 Nov. 1844; IOR P.403.28 (1 Mar. 1844): W.H. Harrison, register Bombay sudder foujdaree adawlut, to Escombe, 7 Feb. 1844; IOR P.206.60 (12 Nov. 1858): W.J. Shum, acting master Indian navy, to C.D. Campbell, senior naval officer, 31 Oct. 1858.

⁸⁰ IOR P.403.11 (31 Aug. 1842): Oliver to Willoughby, 6 Aug. 1842.

⁸¹ IOR P.405.1 (20 Mar. 1850): Blundell to Lumsden, 17 Jan. 1850; P.405.3 (14 Apr. 1850): Baynes to Lumsden, 18 Mar. 1850, enc. D. Costello, civil surgeon Tannah jail, to R. Keays, session judge Konkan, 13 Mar. 1850.

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- ⁸² IOR P.406.8 (13 May 1854): R. Macpherson, superintendent convicts Penang, to W.J. Lewis, officiating resident councillor Penang, 15 Mar. 1854.
- ⁸³ IOR P.146.4 (26 Nov. 1857): R. Macpherson, executive engineer and superintendent convicts and roads Singapore, to H. Somerset Mackenzie, resident councillor Singapore, n.d. (June 1857).
- ⁸⁴ *Ibid.*: J. Rose, senior surgeon Straits Settlements to secretary medical board Calcutta, 25 Apr. 1857.
- ⁸⁵ *Ibid.*: F.J. Mouat, inspector-general of jails Bengal, to C.J. Buckland, junior secretary to government Bengal, 15 June 1857.
- ⁸⁶ IOR P.407.20 (31 Dec. 1858): A. Ward, civil surgeon Tannah jail, to M. Melville, acting assistant sessions judge in charge of Sudder Station, 30 Nov. 1858.
- ⁸⁷ *Ibid.*: Melville to J.L. Anderson, secretary to government Bombay, 2 Dec. 1858.
- ⁸⁸ *Ibid.*: translation from Mahratta into English of the prisoner Allisha Madrassee Mooselmin, 1 Dec. 1858.
- ⁸⁹ IOR P.405.34 (31 Dec. 1851): A. Spens, senior police magistrate, to Goldsmid, 23 Dec. 1851, enc. extracts from the log book of the ship “Paragon” from Singapore to Bombay, 8 Nov. – 2 Dec. 1851.
- ⁹⁰ IOR P.405.36 (21 Jan. 1852): Spens to A. Richardson, deputy secretary to government Bombay, 10 Jan. 1852, enc. statements of William Wood Murch, 1 Jan. 1852 and Ramnae Dhurumnae, 5 Jan. 1852.
- ⁹¹ IOR P.405.40 (7 Apr. 1842): G.W. Blundell, resident councillor Penang, to Lumsden, 5 Mar. 1852.
- ⁹² IOR P.402.39 (30 Jan. 1839): Howard to Willoughby, 22 Jan. 1839.
- ⁹³ *Bengal Hurkaru*, 15 Sept. 1859.
- ⁹⁴ IOR P.402.39 (31 Dec. 1839): P.W. Le Geyt, acting senior magistrate police, to Willoughby, 24 Dec. 1839.
- ⁹⁵ IOR P.402.2 (24 June 1846): Willoughby’s minute, 9 June 1846; IOR P.404.3 (6 Aug. 1846): W.F. Curtis, superintendent convicts Bombay, to Escombe, 18 July 1846.
- ⁹⁶ IOR P.404.2 (24 June 1846): deposition of captain Thomas Johnson, 20 Apr. 1846; *Bengal Hurkaru*, 23 May 1846 (reporting *Singapore Free Press*, 30 Apr. 1846).
- ⁹⁷ IOR P.404.3 (6 Aug. 1846): Curtis to Escombe, 18 July 1846.
- ⁹⁸ *Bengal Hurkaru*, 15 Sept. 1859.
- ⁹⁹ IOR P.143.51 (31 July 1850): E.H. Lushington, magistrate Patna, to J.P. Grant, secretary to government Bengal, 23 June 1850.

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- ¹⁰⁰ IOR P.142.40 (24 Dec. 1845): H.M. Durand, commissioner Tenasserim Provinces, to F.J. Halliday, secretary to government Bengal, 20 Nov. 1845; Mytton to Halliday, 8 Dec. 1845.
- ¹⁰¹ Anderson, *Legible Bodies*, p. 34.
- ¹⁰² IOR P.402.32 (20 Mar. 1839): J.A. Forbes, acting senior magistrate police, to Willoughby, 25 Jan. 1839.
- ¹⁰³ IOR P.402.32 (20 Mar. 1839): Forbes to Willoughby, 25 Jan. 1839, enc. Thomas Johnson to Messrs W. Nichol and Co., off Cochin, 12 Feb. 1846.
- ¹⁰⁴ IOR P.142.15 (29 Apr. 1844): deposition of Second Thomas Jones (*Harriet Scott*), 19 Dec. 1843; *Bengal Hurkaru*, 15 Sept. 1859.
- ¹⁰⁵ IOR P.402.43 (11 Mar. 1840): D. Ross, master attendant, to Oliver, 9 Jan. 1840.
- ¹⁰⁶ IOR P.142.8 (13 Nov. 1843): Butterworth to A. Turnbull, under secretary to government Bengal, 7 Oct. 1843 (*Harriet Scott*).
- ¹⁰⁷ IOR P.142.15 (29 Apr. 1844): deposition of second mate Thomas Jones (*Harriet Scott*), 19 Dec. 1843.
- ¹⁰⁸ IOR P.142.15 (29 Apr. 1844): Norris to Butterworth, 7 Feb. 1844.
- ¹⁰⁹ IOR P.143.51 (31 July 1850): captain H.M. Nation, commanding Behar station guards, to J.W. Dalrymple, under secretary to government Bengal, 25 June 1850.
- ¹¹⁰ See for example IOR P.145.30 (17 Jan. 1856): Mouat's circular to officers in charge of jails, 24 Dec. 1855.
- ¹¹¹ IOR P.402.30 (23 Jan. 1839): deposition of Captain F.N. Pendyagrass, commander *Catherine*, 12 Jan. 1839; P.402.32 (20 Mar. 1839): Forbes to Willoughby, 25 Jan. 1839.
- ¹¹² IOR P.131.31 (1 Jan. 1814): statement of Lieut. John Pepper, 23 Nov. 1813.
- ¹¹³ IOR P.145.51 (12 June 1856): H. Fergusson, superintendent Alipur jail, to Buckland, 7 June 1856.
- ¹¹⁴ IOR P.145.32 (14 Feb. 1856): Fergusson to A.W. Russell, under secretary to government Bengal, 24 Jan. 1856.
- ¹¹⁵ IOR P.402.39 (31 Dec. 1839): deposition of seacunnie Charles de Cruz, n.d., minute of governor J.R. Carnac, 28 Dec. 1839; IOR P.402.43 (11 Mar. 1840): Willoughby's summary, 27 Feb. 1840.
- ¹¹⁶ IOR P.402.30 (23 Jan. 1839): depositions taken before the officers and crew of the Brig *Catherine* now employed by government for the conveyance of convicts from Bombay to Penang and Singapore and the

former of these ports we left on the 22nd December 1838 on the intended voyage; deposition of Sahoo Fuzul (the lascar convict was called Tuzlodeen Bagdadee).

¹¹⁷ IOR P.405.36 (21 Jan. 1852): list of convicts to Penang *per Chinsurah*, 23 Dec. 1852.

¹¹⁸ IOR P.403.24 (20 Dec. 1843): S. Garling, resident councillor Singapore, to Willoughby, 14 Sept. 1843; *Bombay Courier*, 6 Mar. 1844.

¹¹⁹ *Bengal Hurkaru*, 14 Sept. 1859.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 27 Mar. 1848. The case of the *General Wood* fed into a growing ambivalence in Singapore about the continued transportation of Chinese convicts to a by now flourishing colonial settlement. See Turnbull, 'Convicts in the Straits Settlements', pp. 88-9. See also the *Straits Times Extra*'s use of the incident to attack maladministration in Hong Kong, reproduced in *Bengal Hurkaru*, 27 Mar. 1848.

¹²¹ TNSA JP vol. 398: E.P. Thompson, magistrate Tinnevely, to Chamier, 6 July 1840.

¹²² On sympathetic alliances between sailors and convicts on Australian convict vessels, see Christopher, "'Ten Thousand Times Worse'".

¹²³ Linebaugh and Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra*, p. 160.

¹²⁴ IOR P.402.44 (25 Mar. 1840): W.B. Jackson, captain commanding Mucktul, to J.S. Fraser, resident Hyderabad, 7 Mar. 1840.

¹²⁵ *Bombay Gazette*, 20 July 1840.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ IOR P.403.6 (2 Mar. 1842): deposition of second mate Francis Ward, 7 June 1841.

¹²⁸ *Bengal Hurkaru*, 15 Sept. 1859.

¹²⁹ IOR P.144.61 (15 June 1854): deposition and information of Peerbuksh son of Nemoolla aged about 30 of Dinapore lately employed as Clashie [*kalassi*] on board the *Clarissa*, 18 May 1854.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*: deposition and information of Sheikh Suvraj son of Sheikh Kitaboodeen aged 30 – burra tindal of the *Clarissa*, 19 May 1854.

¹³¹ *Bombay Gazette*, 20 July 1840.

¹³² IOR P.143.51 (31 July 1850): Nation to Grant, 25 June 1850; committee of inquiry, 8 July 1850 (deposition of John Chew, chief mate *Berhampooter* [towing the *Kaleegunga*]).

¹³³ IOR P.143.51 (31 July 1850): Lushington to Grant, 10 July 1850.

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- ¹³⁴ IOR P.143.51 (23 June 1850): Lushington to Grant, 23 June 1850; IOR P.144.5 (23 July 1851): list of prisoners sentenced to transportation beyond seas – dispatched from the Agra Jail to the superintendent of Allipore, 10 Apr. 1850 (convict no. 6 Narayan Singh, convicts Polaub Sing and Khunjun Singh).
- ¹³⁵ IOR P.144.5 (23 July 1851): Lushington to Grant, 29 Apr. 1851.
- ¹³⁶ IOR P.129.7 (19 July 1804): extract letter commander *Aurora* to secretary marine board, 1 Aug. 1800. On the ‘administrative entanglement’ of military law, see Peers, ‘Sepoys, Soldiers and the Lash’, p. 222.
- ¹³⁷ Hathaway, ‘Introduction’, p. xv.
- ¹³⁸ IOR P.402.30 (30 Jan. 1839): deposition of captain F.N. Pendygrass, 19 Jan. 1839; Forbes to Willoughby, 22 Jan. 1839.
- ¹³⁹ IOR P.402.30 (23 Jan. 1839): depositions of Sahola Fuzul and Rama Balloo, 25 Dec. 1838.
- ¹⁴⁰ Skaria, *Hybrid Histories*, p. 42. I would speculate that the *bhils* on board had been caught up in resistance against the extension of British control over the forests of western India. See Gordon, *Marathas, Marauders, and State Formation*, ch. 7. Unfortunately the *Catherine’s* convict register is missing, making further exploration of the social origins of the men on board impossible.
- ¹⁴¹ IOR P.403.6 (2 Mar. 1842): deposition of convict Michael Anthony, 7 June 1841.
- ¹⁴² *Ibid.*: deposition of second mate Francis Ward, 7 June 1841.
- ¹⁴³ *Ibid.*: deposition of convict Michael Anthony, 7 June 1841.
- ¹⁴⁴ IOR P.402.53 (20 Jan. 1841): list of convicts to Singapore *per Freak*, 17 Jan 1841.
- ¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*: depositions of convict Michael Anthony and Second Mate Francis Ward, 7 June 1841.
- ¹⁴⁶ Guha, ‘The Prose of Counter-Insurgency’, pp. 1-2, 38-9.
- ¹⁴⁷ IOR P.403.56 (11 Mar. 1846): J. Geddes, marshal Bombay county jail, to Curtis, 1 Feb. 1846.
- ¹⁴⁸ IOR P.143.21 (12 July 1848): statement of Lieut. L.W. Seymour, second regiment Bombay cavalry, n.d.
- ¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*: translation of a Chinese writing found on the person of a Chinese convict at Pulo Oly, n.d.
- ¹⁵⁰ Rediker, *Between the Devil*, pp. 234-5.
- ¹⁵¹ Rediker, *Between the Devil*, ch. 5.
- ¹⁵² IOR P.400.59 (19 Dec. 1832): James Peish, commander *Fort William*, to J.D. Devitre, senior magistrate of police Bombay, 5 Dec. 1832.
- ¹⁵³ IOR P.403.6 (2 Mar. 1842): deposition of second mate Francis Ward, 7 June 1841.

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- ¹⁵⁴ *Bombay Gazette*, 6 July 1841.
- ¹⁵⁵ IOR P.404.2 (24 June 1846): captain J. Johnson to Church, 15 Apr. 1846.
- ¹⁵⁶ *Bengal Hurkaru*, 23 May 1846.
- ¹⁵⁷ IOR P.402.30 (23 Jan. 1839): deposition of Rama Balloo, another convict, 25 Dec 1838; IOR P.402.30 (30 Jan. 1839): information of captain F.N. Pendygrass, 19 Jan 1839.
- ¹⁵⁸ *Bombay Gazette*, 30 July 1840.
- ¹⁵⁹ IOR P.142.8 (13 Nov. 1843): Butterworth to Turnbull, 7 Oct. 1843.
- ¹⁶⁰ IOR P.403.56 (11 Mar. 1846): Geddes to Curtis, 24 Feb. 1846. Hussa Bulla was left behind sick: IOR P.404.2 (24 June 1846): deposition of Thomas Johnston, 20 Apr. 1846, Johnson to Church, enc. 'Names ... of the Moguls who were reported by the Bombay Government who intended to revolt', 15 Apr. 1846; IOR P.403.55 (4 Feb. 1846): list of convicts to Singapore *per Recovery*, 1 Feb. 1846.
- ¹⁶¹ IOR P.402.30 (30 Jan. 1839): information of Captain F.N. Pendygrass, 19 Jan. 1839.
- ¹⁶² *Ibid.*: Forbes to Willoughby, 22 Jan. 1839.
- ¹⁶³ IOR P.404.2 (24 June 1846): Johnson to Church, 15 Apr. 1846.
- ¹⁶⁴ IOR P.402.30 (30 Jan. 1839): Forbes to Willoughby, 22 Jan. 1839; IOR P.402.59 (5 May 1841): resolution on the court's dispatch, 3 Feb. 1841.
- ¹⁶⁵ IOR P.405.40 (21 Apr. 1852): abstract from the log of the *Chinsurah*, 5, 8 Jan. 1852.
- ¹⁶⁶ IOR P.143.21 (12 July 1848): Butterworth to Dalrymple, 2 June 1848.
- ¹⁶⁷ IOR P.407.36 (11 Oct. 1859): advocate-general's opinion, 27 Sept. 1859.
- ¹⁶⁸ *Bengal Hurkaru*, 14 Sept. 1859.
- ¹⁶⁹ TNSA JP (14 Dec. 1860, 101-2): extract dispatch from HM's secretary of state for India, 20 Sept. 1860.
- ¹⁷⁰ IOR P.407.36 (11 Oct. 1859): advocate-general's opinion, 27 Sept. 1859.
- ¹⁷¹ IOR P.407.38 (10 Nov. 1859): William Crawford, senior police magistrate, to Anderson, 28 Jan 1859.
- ¹⁷² IOR P.407.36 (11 Oct. 1859): resolution of the board, 3 Oct. 1859.
- ¹⁷³ *Ibid.*: advocate-general's opinion, 27 Sept. 1859.
- ¹⁷⁴ Anderson, *Legible Bodies*, p. 39.
- ¹⁷⁵ IOR P.131.31 (1 Jan. 1814), D. Jones, commander *Ariel*, to R. Scott, secretary marine board, 23 Nov. 1813.

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- ¹⁷⁶ IOR P.142.8 (13 Nov. 1843): Butterworth to Turnbull, 7 Oct. 1843.
- ¹⁷⁷ IOR P.142.9 (27 Nov. 1843): deposition of Robert Cort, n.d.; IOR P.142.12 (22 Jan. 1844): deposition of Thomas Jones, 25 Sept. 1843.
- ¹⁷⁸ IOR P.142.9 (27 Nov. 1843): Butterworth to Turnbull, 13 Oct. 1843.
- ¹⁷⁹ IOR P.142.15 (29 Apr. 1844): Norris to Butterworth, 7 Feb. 1844.
- ¹⁸⁰ *Bombay Gazette*, 20 July 1840.
- ¹⁸¹ IOR P.142.9 (27 Nov. 1843): deposition of second mate Thomas Jones, n.d.
- ¹⁸² IOR P.143.51 (31 July 1850): Lushington to Grant, 23 June 1850.
- ¹⁸³ *Bombay Gazette*, 20 July 1840.
- ¹⁸⁴ *Bengal Hurkaru*, 18 Aug. 1854.
- ¹⁸⁵ IOR P.403.6 (2 Mar. 1842): deposition of Michael Anthony, 7 June 1841.
- ¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*: deposition of second mate Francis Ward, 7 June 1841.
- ¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*: deposition of Michael Anthony, 7 June 1841.
- ¹⁸⁸ IOR P.403.5 (16 Feb. 1842): J.W. Salmond, resident councillor Penang, to Willoughby, 15 July 1841.
- ¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*; P.145.18 (13 Sept. 1855): S.R. Tickell, principal assistant commissioner and district magistrate Amherst, to A. Bogle, commissioner Tenasserim Provinces, 8 June 1854.
- ¹⁹⁰ IOR P.403.6 (2 Mar. 1842): deposition of Michael Anthony, 7 June 1841.
- ¹⁹¹ *Bengal Hurkaru*, 27 Mar. 1848.
- ¹⁹² *Bombay Gazette*, 20 July 1840.
- ¹⁹³ As claimed in the *Bengal Hurkaru*, 27 Mar. 1848 (*General Wood*).
- ¹⁹⁴ IOR P.403.6 (2 Mar. 1842): deposition of Michael Anthony, 7, 8 June 1841.
- ¹⁹⁵ *Bombay Gazette*, 20 July 1840.
- ¹⁹⁶ IOR P.144.61 (15 June 1854): opinion of C.R. Prinsep, advocate-general, 9 June 1854.
- ¹⁹⁷ IOR P.145.18 (13 Sept. 1855): Tickell to Grey, enc. matter of the Queen v. the life convicts on board the *Clarissa* for affray attended with homicide and for murder on the high seas, 14 July 1854.
- ¹⁹⁸ IOR P.144.61 (15 June 1854): Prinsep's opinion, 9 June 1854.
- ¹⁹⁹ *Bengal Hurkaru*, 12 Aug. 1854. For further reports of the supreme court trial, see *Bengal Hurkaru*, 14, 16-19 Aug. 1854.

²⁰⁰ *Bengal Hurkaru*, 19 Aug. 1854.

²⁰¹ IOR P.144.5 (23 July 1851): F.J. Lougham, sessions judge Patna, to E.A. Samuel, officiating register sudder nizamat adalat, n.d. (March 1851).

²⁰² IOR P.407.36 (11 Oct. 1859): advocate-general's opinion, 27 Sept. 1859.

²⁰³ *Bengal Hurkaru*, 19 Aug. 1854. See also Russell to Butterworth, 10 Jan 1855.

²⁰⁴ IOR P.144.58 (29 Apr. 1854): A report of survey upon the under mentioned ship [*Clarissa*] tendered for conveyance of native convicts to Malacca, n.d. (Mar. 1854).

²⁰⁵ IOR P.145.18 (13 Sept 1855): deposition of first officer James Squire, 13 June 1854.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*: deposition of kalassi Goolab, 14 June 1854.

²⁰⁷ IOR P.144.61 (15 June 1854): deposition of Sheikh Suvraj son of Sheikh Kitaboodeen aged 30 – burra tindal of the *Clarissa*, 19 May 1854.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*: deposition and information of Charles Blaney aged 14 years and 7 months third mate on board the barque *Clarissa*, 13 June 1854.

²⁰⁹ IOR P.145.18 (13 Sept. 1855): deposition of Boor Singh son of Humeer Singh no. 115, 6 July 1854.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*: deposition of Edoo Serang, 13 June 1854.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*: deposition of Chatoo, son of Lahoree, convict no. 36, 27 June 1854; depositions of Boor Singh son of Humeer Singh no. 115, and Mullaga Sing, son of Phudah Sing, convict no. 119, 6 July 1854.

²¹² *Ibid.*: deposition of Sheik Kurwodeen, son of Sheikh Bhin, sepoy Alipur Militia, 17 June 1854; *Bengal Hurkaru*, 12 Aug. 1854.

²¹³ *Ibid.*: deposition of Sheikh Ramran son of Russub Alla, sepoy Alipur Militia, 17 June 1854. For corroboration see also deposition of Hwikh Joomur, son of Sheikh Talib, sepoy Alipur Militia, 17 June 1854.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*: deposition of convict Verream Sing son of Joe Sing no. 105, 5 July 1854.

²¹⁵ IOR P.144.61 (15 June 1854): Tickell to Bogle, 18 May 1854; *Bengal Hurkaru*, 6 July 1854.

²¹⁶ Many of the witnesses testified to this military display. For example: IOR P.145.18 (13 Sept 1855): deposition of Edoo Serang, 13 June 1854.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*: deposition of Sheikh Suvraj son of Sheikh Kitaboodeen aged 30 – burra tindal of the *Clarissa*, 19 May 1854.

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- ²¹⁸ IOR P.145.18 (13 Sept. 1855): deposition of Kurrim Singh, son of Hennath Singh, convict no. 1, 8 June 1854.
- ²¹⁹ *Ibid.*
- ²²⁰ *Ibid.*: Bogle to W. Grey, secretary to government Bengal, 22 July 1854.
- ²²¹ *Ibid.*: list of 199 convicts to Melaka *per Clarissa*, 26 Apr. 1854.
- ²²² *Ibid.*: descriptive roll of recaptured life convicts from the *Clarissa*, 28 June 1854.
- ²²³ Singha, “‘Providential’ Circumstances’, pp. 83-146.
- ²²⁴ IOR P.145.18 (13 Sept. 1855): deposition of Shaik Sooiah, son of Chambale, convict no. 72, 30 June 1854.
- ²²⁵ *Ibid.*: deposition of Beejah Sing son of Punchum sing, convict no. 5, 21 June 1854.
- ²²⁶ *Ibid.*: Queen v. life convicts on the *Clarissa*; convict depositions nos 21, 27-8, 30 June, 3-7, 12 July 1854.
- ²²⁷ *Ibid.*: deposition of Casee Barah, son of Indee Narain, convict no. 49, 28 June 1854.
- ²²⁸ *Ibid.*: deposition of Bunkur Doss, son of Sewa Sing, convict no. 6, 21 June 1854.
- ²²⁹ IOR P.144.61 (15 June 1854): deposition of first officer James Squire, 18 May 1854.
- ²³⁰ IOR P.145.18 (13 Sept. 1855): Tickell to Grey, 14 July 1854.
- ²³¹ *Ibid.*: list of 199 convicts for Melaka *per Clarissa*, 26 April 1854.
- ²³² *Ibid.*: deposition of Sheikh Kurwodeen, son of Sheikh Bhin, sepoy Alipur Militia, 17 June 1854.
- ²³³ *Ibid.*: deposition of Bunkur Doss son of Sewa Sing, convict no. 6, 21 June 1854.
- ²³⁴ *Ibid.*: deposition of Chatoos, son of Lahoree, convict no. 36, 27 June 1854.
- ²³⁵ *Bengal Hurkaru*, 16 Aug. 1854.
- ²³⁶ IOR P.145.18 (13 Sept. 1855): Fergusson to H. Pratt, under secretary to government Bengal, 6 Nov 1854.
- ²³⁷ *Ibid.*: deposition of Sheikh Ramran, son of Russub Alla, sepoy Alipur Militia, 17 June 1854.
- ²³⁸ *Ibid.*: deposition of Sheikh Joomur son of Sheikh Talib, sepoy Alipur Militia, 17 June 1854.
- ²³⁹ *Ibid.*: deposition of Sheikh Akhbur son of Sheikh Ruhum, sepoy Alipur Militia, 17 June 1854.
- ²⁴⁰ IOR P.143.51 (23 June 1850): Lushington to Grant, 23 June 1850.
- ²⁴¹ *Ibid.*: Nation to Grant, 25 June 1850.

²⁴² IOR P.144.5 (23 July 1851): proceedings in the trial of Narain Singh and twenty-four convicts charged with combining to escape and maliciously murdering three of their guards: deposition of Mary Anne Cunningham, 1 Mar. 1851.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*: Lougham to Samuells, n.d. (March 1851).

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁵ IOR P.144.12 (17 Dec. 1851): list of convicts to Moulmein *per Fire Queen*, 9 Dec. 1851.

²⁴⁶ IOR P.142.15 (29 Apr. 1844): deposition of second mate Thomas Jones, 19 Dec. 1843.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*: Norris to Butterworth, 7 Feb. 1844.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁹ IOR P.145.18 (13 Sept 1855): deposition of Assah Singh, son of Chur Sing, convict no. 91, 3 July 1854.

²⁵⁰ *Bengal Hurkaru*, 19 Aug. 1854.

²⁵¹ *Bombay Gazette*, 20 July 1840.

²⁵² Compiled from records in the IOR Bengal, Bombay and India Judicial Proceedings series and press reports.

²⁵³ Correspondence took place with the Bengal government during 1858. The judicial proceedings for most of this year are missing.

²⁵⁴ In April 1858 it was decided that all mutineers shipped to Singapore or Penang would be transferred to the recently settled Andaman Islands. The transfer was completed by June. The *Julia* convicts thus escaped trial, much to the chagrin of the *Singapore Free Press*. See IOR P.407.10 (6 July 1858): C. Beadon, secretary to government of India, to Buckland, 24 Apr. 1858; IOR P.407.13 (21 Sept. 1858): Blundell to Anderson, 15 June 1858; *Singapore Free Press*, 22 July 1858.