



Manufacturing India beyond India –

Policies and Politics of Migration in the Andaman Islands¹

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Abstract

Popular discourse on the Andaman Islands has been dominated either by exotic notions of insular savagery or by bourgeois-nationalist views of colonial history emphasising the incarceration of revolutionaries. Both grand narratives have silenced representations of the Andaman migrant society that has emerged as a consequence of British and Indian colonisation. The largely subaltern population has incorporated reformed convicts, soldiers, traders, contracted labourers, clerks, rehabilitated refugees, repatriates, and landless people from various religious, regional, and linguistic backgrounds. This paper critically examines how the formation of diasporic communities along linguistic lines has led to conflicts over resource distribution, quota reservation, conservation, and the very discourse of migration itself. It aims to highlight the impact of social-engineering policies on the politicisation of ethnicity in an Indian overseas settler colony.

Keywords: Migration, Social Engineering, Multiculturalism, Politics of Belonging, Andaman Islands, India

“The Andaman society is like a Xerox copy of India”. With this metaphor, my local interlocutor did not intend to reduce the whole population of this group of islands in the Bay of Bengal to mere paper existence. He alluded to his own society, called ‘Mini-India’. Most Andaman people refer to the icon of

Mini-India when they represent their multi-ethnic, but nonetheless Indian, society. Such a statement is not self-evident: the strategically important islands are located more than one thousand kilometres away from the Indian subcontinent.

Despite geographic vicinity to the South-East Asian countries of Myanmar, Thailand and Indonesia, the territory of the Andamans belongs to India.² This must be regarded as a result of the entangled history of the islands, the British Empire and the ensuing post-colonial nation state. The present population came into being due to colonial and postcolonial settlement and social-engineering policies.³ Resemblances of the contemporary Andaman society with larger representations of the Indian nation can, therefore, be regarded as a manifestation of this very history. Andaman Indians hail from different regions, ethnic groups, castes and creeds of the Indian subcontinent. Some smaller sections have come from Burma as well. The term Mini-India serves to symbolically incorporate highly diverse migratory backgrounds “from Kashmir to Kanyakumari” into an encompassing model of nationalism. It indicates that the society represents a harmonious ‘unity in diversity’ due to the ideals of the secular nation state; however, contrary to such obvious declarations of attachment and belonging to *Bharat Mata*, or Mother India, ‘mainland’ Indians, in general, have very limited knowledge about the territory. Few are aware that there are approximately five hundred thousand island inhabitants. This perception can be regarded as a result of two

dominant forms of mass media representation.

First, the islands are projected as a space of Orientalist fantasy. Since pre-colonial times, travel accounts, among others from Marco Polo, have depicted them as tropical islands inhabited by 'savages'.⁴ Continuous media coverage of the indigenous people has reiterated a persisting imaginary that the archipelago consists of large tracks of 'virgin' forest; within this tropical fantasy, the supposedly 'Noble Savages' function as an exotic signifier of 'nature'.⁵ In the last decade, the expanding tourism industry has taken up this paradigm of an 'untouched' frontier to market mass compatible 'dream' holidays in a 'paradise lost'.

The second perception of the Andamans has to do with the anti-colonial struggle. In the aftermath of the Mutiny/ Rebellion of 1857 (Anderson, 2007), state-directed deportation of political and criminal convicts served the colonisation of the islands. For the British Empire, the Andaman penal colony functioned as a permanent outpost in the Indian Ocean. Overseas transportation, in general, meant that many convicts and indentured labourers did not return to their homelands. They either died or settled down at these destinations; the dread, anxiety, and uncertainty of their relatives and friends who stayed back on the sub-continent, was associated with the allegory of *Kala Pani*, literally the "black water" (Bose, 2006, p.24; Mathur, 1984, p.1; Sen, S., 2000, p.5).

In the context of nationalist mobilisation in the first half of the 20th century, media reports and rumours about the deportation of anti-colonial revolutionaries to the Andamans and their incarceration in the notorious Cellular Jail contributed to the islands' discursive embodiment as one synonym for *Kala Pani*. This image was gradually reiterated through prison literature written by bourgeois-nationalist inmates. When such narratives were incorporated into the hegemonic nationalist memory of the anticolonial struggle, the revolutionaries' imprisonment came to be transformed into a symbolic 'martyrdom' for the independence of India. Thus, subsequent generations of Indian citizens have been taught to imagine the islands as a site of patriotism and the freedom struggle.⁶

Beyond evolutionist representations of 'savagery' or elitist glorifications of the nation, this paper focuses

on largely unnoticed consequences of historical processes of overseas migration and place-making in the islands.⁷ Like the former two grand narratives, Mini-India is a representation of the Andaman society; a product of hegemonic relations of power and knowledge that is efficacious in the islanders' everyday life.

As early as 1937, the colony's social and cultural diversity had been conceptualised as India in "miniature form" (Dass, 2001, p. 73). After independence, government servants and academics have continued to portray Andaman society as "Mini-India" (Das, 1982, p.110). Many had the urge to incorporate the multitude of colonial and postcolonial migrants into a common national framework of multi-culturalism: each individual has been categorised as member of, at least, one specific migrant community;⁸ all of these communities, in turn, have been represented as 'organic' components of a 'whole', the Indian nation. While these writers ascribed Otherness to each community, they proclaimed a common 'Indian-ness' as a unifying element (Das, 1982, p.74-5; Naidu, 1998, p.246; Dhingra, 2005, p.155).

The idea of the Indian nation, depicted with the trope 'unity in diversity', serves here to classify, divide and encompass a society in the making. Due to hegemonic nationalist discourse, representations of the Andaman 'melting pot' as Mini-India have not only become omnipresent in public and private contexts. Moreover, the local model of multi-culturalism has been established as the framework of 'speaking' the language of the secular state. In order to be 'listened', most Andamanis have, thus, appropriated Mini-India as collective self-representation of their society.⁹

During eighteen months of fieldwork on the islands, most of my interlocutors confronted me with utterances about Mini-India and its supposed qualities. It is thus worthwhile to ask how far these representations of communal harmony correspond to my empirical observations. Do they really cohabit in the manner one is supposed to believe? Indeed, I have found a lot of congruence between nationalist depictions of the society, and local values, norms and practices. My everyday experience has confirmed that – apart from mandatory lip services to the nation –

there are concrete manifestations of secular ideology.

As described in the literature, I have frequently observed that people embrace 'Nehruvian' ideas: religion is regarded mostly as private matter (Mathur, 1985, p.264); a large number of intermarriages, often love marriages between different castes, linguistic groups and, to a certain extent, religious groups, indicate a gradual shift of group boundaries; there are very few instances of caste or communal violence (Tamta, 1991, p.120); caste discrimination based on ritual purity is generally absent in everyday interactions of people from different linguistic backgrounds; however, it might occur within some recently migrated groups coming from particular mainland settings, which have been able to reproduce a diasporic model of caste, *jati* or *gotra*, from their place; in general public, people from various social and cultural backgrounds mingle with each other, in professional as well as in private matters.

The local way of creating unity can be seen as result of speaking a common vernacular as well. For effective communication, every migrant, hailing from one of the multiple linguistic backgrounds present in the islands, has to adopt the colonial lingua franca: Andaman Hindustani, a colloquial type of Urdu that – in tune with the all-embracing nationalist unification – is often termed as Hindi. Even Tamils, who are known for their political aversion against the hegemony of Hindi, regularly learn it. Andaman Hindustani is spoken in a large variety of tongues according to the linguistic context of each speaker. There are constant adaptations from other vernaculars, e.g. from the fashionable 'Bombay Hindi', as many youngsters emphasise. While change and transformation have been constant features of linguistic diversity in the islands, the adoption of a lingua franca has also contributed to the formation of local identification and belonging.

Based on what I have described, I do not deny the efficacy of the local version of nationalist integration. My stance is, rather, to critically examine Mini-India as a projected model of multi-culturalism. This involves questioning Mini-India's taken-for-granted status as a signifier of communal harmony. There is a 'flip side of the coin': during my fieldwork on political

negotiations of Otherness in the local migration discourse, I encountered multiple forms of conflict lurking beneath the surface. I want to highlight this more conflict-laden, politically charged aspect of Mini-India.

While migration to the Andamans was conducive to create an Indian 'model' diaspora of creolised overseas communities, the very model of multi-culturalism led to political conflict between these communities. In sharp contrast to public representations of Mini-India, I have found intense political competition between communities. These lines of communal divide are formed on the basis of essentialised difference. I wondered if this phenomenon can be understood by looking at the political relationship between the state and identified communities through which welfare policies are channelled.¹⁰ The local welfare regime is, indeed, tied to community politics. Voice and political demands for sinecures are formulated through powerful patrons. The strength of the patrons depends, among others, on their number of supporters, their so-called "vote bank".

One of the most obvious examples of such political conflict is the discourse of migration itself: continuous population growth and increasing social complexity in the last decades has led many to worry about the economic and ecological balance of the islands. People, who consider themselves to be locals or islanders, have stimulated negative views about migration in public; by pointing to threats of overpopulation, they have pressurised the administration to stop further migration to the Andamans.

This article aims at highlighting the politicisation of community. I am therefore asking about the particular consequences of historical migration processes on the formation of communities. What kind of attachment to the place have they developed and how are these forms of belonging articulated and performed in politics? To answer these questions, I will refer to ethnographic data collected in Port Blair, the only town of the Andamans, and in rural areas between 2006 and 2012.¹¹

In the first part of the paper, I depict the history of the Andaman regime of migration and the social engineering policies that led to the crystallisation of

distinct communities in Mini-India. Political competition, which emerged in the migration process, is addressed in the second part. Here, I dwell on an example demonstrating the politically charged process of reification of community identification by elaborating on a contemporary conflict about reservation policies. In the final part, I highlight some contradictory problematics entailed in the local discourse of migration and their subsequent implications for state policies.

History of the Andaman Regime of Migration

Colonial and postcolonial forms of managing migration have continued to shape material and discursive frameworks of subjectivation. The Andaman regime of migration has to be analysed by taking into account broader socio-economic and historic conditions. For the sake of analysis, the regime can be divided in a twofold manner: first, state-directed policies of planned population movement; second, independent migrations occurring without administrative planning.

Both the British (1858-1942) and the postcolonial Indian state have applied overlapping technologies of power and knowledge. Social engineering implied the shaping of a new and 'better' society through population movement. Transport and rehabilitation of 'problem populations', such as convicts or refugees, served to ameliorate 'receiving' as well as 'sending' contexts (Sen, S., 2000). Here, subalternity¹² appears both as precondition for the transportation of populations as well as their continuous domination in the island colony.

In addition to that, there has been an independent, 'self-motivated' population movement to and from the islands since the early years of colonisation. The urge to 'develop' the colony's infrastructure, and to enhance its institutionalisation, has attracted labourers, adventurers, scientists, entrepreneurial traders, soldiers, and white-collar as well as blue-collar government servants.¹³ Due to these two different types of migration, state-directed and independent, particular property relations and specific divisions of

labour developed. This has had consequences for the cohabitation and interaction of communities. In the following, I describe the ideological and material premises that have shaped the Andaman regime of migration and the subsequent emergence of communities.

Forced labour migration - the foundation of the 'Local Born' community

After the Mutiny/ Rebellion of 1857, delinquents from all over India and Burma were transported overseas to the Andaman penal settlement at Port Blair.¹⁴ The diversity of convicts posed a significant problem for the administration. There was a constant urge to classify the subalterns in order to know and discipline them.¹⁵ As soon as the convicts had arrived on the islands, the administration took over the management of their religious and social activities (Mukhopadhyay, K., 2002, p.10).

Convict labour was primarily utilised to dry swamps and cut forests, and to develop the infrastructure in order to ease the colonisation process. The penal colony was established out of strategic and punitive considerations.¹⁶ A rehabilitation scheme was set up which allowed loyal convicts to settle down with their mainland families as free, self-supporting colonists at the end of their term (ibid, p.27). To create families for the permanent settlement of the colony, the British encouraged self-supporters to marry convict women, too (Sen, S. 2004, p.261). In these weddings, less emphasis was placed on the observance of rigid rules of engagement from the mainland. Spouse and groom just had to be from the same denomination (Temple, 1909, p.67). There was an attempt to reconstruct caste amongst 'Hindus' after 1884 (Sen, S. 2004, p.279); however, as suitable matches in the same *jati* were regularly lacking, inter-caste marriages became common. Facing less social control through extended family networks, sometimes even inter-religious marriages were arranged. The offspring of these often caste and language barriers transcending unions was classified as 'Local Born' community by the administration.

In the following decades, many Local Born raised their socio-economic status through education and

employment in the administration (Dhingra, 2005, p.163). Descendants of older generations of Local Borns have confirmed that, due to spatial distance to their kin on the mainland, the importance of caste status and ritual purity has weakened. Contemporary self-representations of the Local Born community emphasise that they had developed a “caste-less” society.¹⁷ Because of their appropriation of various cultural elements from the convicts’ contexts of origin, their community has also been conceptualised as a cosmopolitan “creole culture” (Ghosal, 2001, p.206). The Local Borns’ approach of encompassing cultural difference and Otherness expresses a core value of contemporary Andaman society or Mini-India; for example, people from different confessions regularly take part in each other’s religious festivals (Tamta, 1991, p.120). Initially, the term Mini-India was applied to this particular hybrid community. Later, the ascription, along with its connotations of modernity and secularism, has been extended to the whole Andaman society.

Migrations after 1920 – from convict to contract labour

Sustenance and sustainability have continued to be exigent issues of island policy. Since the opening of the settlement, the administration had to uphold the chain of food supply and all other necessary amendments of ‘civilised life’; rations, transport of passengers and convicts, and communication were regularly provided by overseas shipping (Vaidik, 2010, p.63-4). Expenses multiplied due to steady arrivals of convicts and the crystallisation of the Local Born population.¹⁸ Poor climatic conditions, high expenses, and the dependence on imports urged the administration to reconsider their settlement policy in the 1920s. They considered closing down the penal settlement at Port Blair and developing it into a free colony (Anderson, 2008, p.5; Mukhopadhyay, K. 2002, p.8). Additionally, the realisation that the effect of transportation of ‘criminal classes’ was not as deterrent as expected, and led to the emergence of a new policy that placed more emphasis on agricultural development (Tamta, 1991, p.69). Commercial farming and plantations were to replenish self-supporting farming activities and thus

ensure self-sufficiency (Dhingra, 2005, p.71).

One distinct outcome of this policy change was the settlement of two criminalised groups of subalterns as self-supporters: the Bhandu, a ‘criminal tribe’ from North India, and the Moplah, rebels from the Malabar Coast. Both groups were not split up like the previous convicts in the settlement. Instead, they were settled in isolated spaces of jungle, far away from the villages and stations of the penal settlement (Coomar, 1997, p.23; Dhingra, 2005, p.161; Mukhopadhyay, K., 2002, p.8). This served to avoid potential menace to the well-maintained order of the colony, which these rebellious and ‘criminal’ groups were thought to cause through insubordinate behaviour.¹⁹

Moreover, the development of new plots of agricultural land coincided with a desire to stretch the geographical boundaries of the colony. An increase of surplus production could only be realised through the clearing of forest land. This ‘settler colonialist’ policy of stretching the frontier into ‘virgin’ forest was combined with the expanse of commercial forestry. The exploitation and export of high-valuable timber like the endemic Padauk, Teak and other hard-wood species was to provide a source of income.

Timber exploitation in tropical rain forests required labourers, who were deemed fit for this purpose. That’s why the Karen, an ethnic group from Burma, and other Burmese labourers,²⁰ were brought in by the government. Burmese, including Karen, were assumed to cope better with the humid, tropical climate because of the Andamans’ geographical proximity to Burma (Dass, 2001, p.108). From 1918 onwards, indigenous labourers from the Chotanagpur plateau in Middle India were recruited as coolies by the Catholic Labour Bureau in the city of Ranchi. Their subalternity can be regarded as a precondition for the physical exploitation of their labour power by the recruiters and the Andaman authorities; the example of their ‘ethnic’ naming, however, demonstrates how they were subjected to epistemic violence, too: Instead of enumerating and recognising a large variety of *Adivasi* (aboriginal/ indigenous people of the Indian subcontinent) labourers, according to their belonging to groups such as Oraon, Munda, Kharia, have all been subsumed under one category with

reference to their place of recruitment: they have been called 'Ranchis' or 'Ranchiwallahs' (Mukerji, 1992, p.113).

Most circulating labourers and many free settlers who had a place on the mainland to return to left the islands before the Japanese occupied them in World War II (1942-45). Only those groups, who had collectively stayed back during the occupation, i.e. the Local Born, Bhantu, Moplah and Karen, were later recognised as 'pre-42' communities (Mukhopadhyay, K., 2002, p.18). Pre-42 is a specific category of settlement that denotes contemporary descendants of colonial inhabitants. It indicates, therefore, a certain periodical sense of time, which implies a sense of place too. This attachment to the islands has become a marker of differentiation from postcolonial settlers and migrants.

Rehabilitation and Colonisation Settlement

After independence, the dominant perception of the Andamans was that vast spaces of dense tropical forest were *terra nullius*. Due to the steady numerical decline of indigenous people, these lowly populated jungles were thought of as being suited for colonisation (Sen, U., 2011, p.223). They appeared suitable for the settlement of Bengali Hindu refugees.²¹ The decision to settle the island territory was decisively influenced by larger strategic considerations. The distribution of citizens in the name of the recently founded nation state into low-populated, marginal regions was to prevent internal political instabilities and invasions of neighbouring countries.

The colonial "garbage dump" policy, the deportation and settlement of problem populations (Sen, S., 2000, p. 53), was, therefore, continued by the post-colonial Andaman administration. Emulating its predecessor, the policy not only served to increase the governance of the mainland by removing landless people, squatters, refugees, and other categories of uncontrollable subalterns to the former penal colony, where they were rehabilitated as sedentary farmers; this massive state-directed population movement also had the aim to rejuvenate the older colonial project of attaining self-sufficiency in terms of agricultural

production (Dhingra, 2005, p.187; Mukhopadhyay, K., 2002, p.15; Venkateswar, 2004, p.126).

Thus, between 1949 and 1978, under the so-called rehabilitation and colonisation schemes, a total of 4531 families were settled on cleared plots of jungle (Dhingra, 2005, p.167). Most families were provided with either ten or five acres of hilly and paddy land, supplied with food items and timber, pesticides, a buffalo, and/or a milk cow plus some cash (Mathur, 1985, p.266). More than 86 per cent of these families were Bengali refugees (Biswas, 2010, p.90).

Apart from that, landless communities like the Malayalis from Kerala, and the Ranchi labourers from Middle India were rehabilitated. Furthermore, Tamil Sri Lankan repatriates, and Telugu as well as Tamil repatriates from Burma, came to the islands under the same schemes. These non-Bengali families were probably brought in by the government as a reaction to protests of the Local Born community. The old inhabitants, who were in control of political power, had fears that a Bengali majority might overpower them (ibid., p. 89-90).

Influenced by secular and egalitarian concepts of the Nehruvian welfare state, rehabilitation functioned as a social uplifting policy for the previously deprived settlers. In the beginning, they were cast as agricultural pioneers that colonised the frontier (Sen, U., 2011, p.222). While agriculture had been the main source of livelihood for the first generation of settlers, many of their descendants in the second and third generation have become government servants (cf. Paul, 1994, p.44; Biswas, 2010, p.147-8). This has reduced their economic dependency on agriculture and, therefore, their willingness to cultivate the land. Nonetheless, being a land-owner turned out to be a crucial advantage for many settlers. Migrants who later came to their neighbourhoods had to lease or buy land from them. I have observed that some migrants even acted as share-croppers of settlers (Paul, 1994, p.43-44). In this 'neo-zamindari' system, a certain proportion of the harvest, often a third of it, must be handed to the land owners.

Independent Migration

Parallel to the state-directed settlement of people, an independent movement of people to and from the Andamans has always existed. These migrants – soldiers, administrators, servants, labourers, traders, teachers, fishermen etc. – have come either temporarily, as circulating labour, or they have settled down permanently. Most of them were from Kerala and West Bengal (Mukhopadhyay, K. 2002, p.16). Many had been attracted from the mainland with raised salaries. While the majority of educated white-collar migrants returned to the mainland after some years of service, a considerable number has also taken up permanent residence in the islands.

In the decades after independence, objectives of development in the Andamans resembled the colonial focus on agricultural development and a timber-based industry (Mukhopadhyay, C., 2002, p.30). A large number of government servants and labourers was needed to provide the development of infrastructure. Possibilities of private employment were generated in fisheries and the evolving service and trade sector. In order to clear plots for the rehabilitation settlements in the remote forest areas of South, Middle, North and Little Andaman, there was a demand for specialised forest labour. Since convict labour was no longer available, a new labour recruitment scheme had to be set up (ANI Administration, 1976, p.149). In continuity with colonial schemes, the administration hired many Ranchi labourers from the Chotanagpur plateau in Central India to work on a contract basis. Several officials have confirmed that as *Adivasis*, as indigenous people of India, were assumed to be racially fit for this kind of labour. Their ‘aboriginality’ and ‘primitiveness’ have both served as the main explanation for their ‘docility’ and ‘hard-working’ character (cf. Ghosh, 1999).²²

Additionally, there was a demand for workers in the timber industry, in large-scale infrastructure projects, and in the domestic sector. Chatham saw mill, one of the biggest in Asia at that time, was especially in need of manpower. Therefore, contractors mainly brought labourers from Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Ranchi (Dhingra, 2005, p.254). Until now,

labour migration has been organised by subcontractors, who work for larger contractors that often take over infrastructure development projects from the administration. These subcontractors go to respective villages on the mainland and bring whole groups of precarious, but able-bodied, labourers to the Andamans.²³

As a rule, migrants were not given any land under rehabilitation or colonisation schemes, even if they were employed by the administration. Migrants were not regarded as potential settlers but repeatedly termed as “floating population” (ANI Administration, 1976, p.150), implying that a ‘reserve army’ of circulating migrants is willing to sell their labour power without establishing personal relationships or attachments to the place.²⁴ Based on ideological conceptualisations of cultural ‘rootedness’ of communities, it has been expected that migrants were keen to return to the mainland after their contracts had expired. Assumptions that people ‘naturally’ want to return to a definite place of ‘origin’, defined by kinship and territoriality, have continued to shape the migration, employment and development policies in the Andamans for several decades.²⁵ It has led officials to ignore the fact that migrants have continuously taken up residence in the islands.²⁶

The contrary of these assumptions has manifested: over the decades, the Andamans have come to be known as a place of various opportunities with large chunks of ‘free’ land (Mukherjee, 2002, p.74).²⁷ After dropping out of their contracts, many labourers have decided to stay in the islands. Decisive factors include established networks of friendship and kinship, good employment opportunities, a comparatively high level of income and a good quality of life (cf. Dhingra, 2005, p.102). Local interlocutors, who had migrated themselves, told me in retrospect that they had needed several years to establish themselves in the upwardly mobile local society. This social advancement has led them to refuse working for low payment. As a result, contractors have constantly brought in new labourers.

People often moved with their families through networks of chain migration on established routes

from different places; e.g., a considerable number of Andaman fishermen came from particular villages in the Srikakulam district of Andhra Pradesh (Mukhopadhyay, K., 2002, p.24). While some migrants have lost contact with their families on the mainland, the majority has maintained personal links to their *muluk*, or native place; even if they have settled down permanently in the Andamans, they continue to visit their villages once a year, or at least once a decade.²⁸

Others live in the islands only for certain periods of a year; e.g., for seasonal work in tourism or construction, until they return home and come back again. Marital alliances are forged to connect the multiple dimensions of place attachment, too. Circular population movement and multiple forms of belonging distinguish migrants from settlers and pre-42 inhabitants; the pre-42 and most settlers define themselves through their belonging to the Andamans.

Island Multi-Culturalism and the Politics of Community

The politicisation of community in the islands is closely intertwined with categories of settlement that I have described above; migration policies and processes of place-making have contributed to the crystallisation of several separate communities: Local Born, Bhandus, Moplahs, Karen, Bengalis, Malayalis, Tamils, Telugus, Ranchis, Punjabis, Marathis, etc.²⁹ There are, of course, internal divisions within the communities.³⁰ Migration from a locality in the Indian mainland, from a particular village, district or state, functions here as a political identification, a creation of Selves versus Others.³¹

For Andaman people, the community form has become the primary mode to articulate voice vis-a-vis the administration. This voice is most often not directly articulated by subalterns themselves. Subalterns rarely speak for themselves within established frameworks of political representation (Spivak, 2008). Instead, they depend on articulate, and, therefore, educated and well-connected leaders, who know how to speak the language of power. These are civil society actors like ex-government servants, religious leaders,

businessmen, media persons, NGO employees, politicians, and so called 'social workers'. Their role as intermediaries is to articulate voice for numerically large groups of their subaltern 'clients' in public, especially towards those who govern. Their claim to directly represent a strategically unified and decisive subaltern voice serves to underline their political efficacy as 'voice-givers'. This particular way of voicing demands through community leaders can be regarded as functional element of a welfare regime that is based on ethnically framed participation.

The Politics of Ethnicity

Contrary to the harmonising ideal of Mini-India, local welfare policies have become entangled with the local discourse of multi-culturalism. In the following, I demonstrate how the practice of distributing welfare, and of recruiting government servants according to categories of community, has created political conflict in the island society: community leaders aim to strategically appropriate provisions of welfare; they do this by employing the discourse of ethnic difference and sameness; community itself has therefore become the first and foremost vehicle of such conflict. Local Born civil society actors, for example, identify themselves as local Andaman Indians in opposition to mainland migrants. One Local Born gave me a clear definition of how he imagines ethnicity: "What makes the identity of an ethnic group? A common history, a common descent, a common language, and a common culture. That's what we have!"

Similar processes of ethnic identification can be observed among the other two categories of settlement, the rehabilitated settlers and the independent migrants. Political leaders have tried to include new migrants from their respective states, who often came through networks of chain migration, in their 'vote bank'. This emphasis on commonalities, like a vernacular, or the sharing of an imagined 'culture' and history, contributed to the forging of diasporic communities. As a result, in the contemporary island society, collective self-representations vis-a-vis others who do not belong to one's own vernacular group are predominantly framed in such broadly defined cultural identifications.³²

The production of Self and Other is accompanied by the ascription of certain stereotypes to each community. My interlocutors often emphasised primordial and homogeneous forms of belonging to a particular community. When they were emulating political rhetoric, I could not take them at face value; especially, when they attached specific racial, social, and cultural stereotypes to certain ethnicities and furnished them with positive or negative qualities. Malayalis, for example, who are often employed as clerks, are said to be educated, but also deceitful. Tamils, who dominate business and trade, are stereotyped to be arduous, but also scrupulous. The Local Born are depicted as 'criminals' because of their convict ancestors. Bengalis are said to have an affinity for politics, and a love for arts, but are assumed to be lazy. On the contrary, Ranchis, who are mostly landless labourers living on encroachments, are seen as hard-working, docile, and submissive. Due to their indigeneity, they are continuously represented as backward, primitive and dumb, too.

Many of these clichés go back to historical divisions of labour and modes of production in the mainland. These have been reproduced and appropriated to the local context. Such objectifying representations can be regarded as strategic forms of essentialisation.³³ They have to be interpreted as conscious strategies of 'position-making' in a multi-cultural system of political competition.

The most important institutions for processes of ethnic identification have been associations of language groups: the Ranchi association, the Local Born Association, the Andhra Association, the Tamizhar Sangam, the Bengali Association, and the Kerala Samajham, etc. I interviewed influential spokespersons of all these associations. The majority of them emphasised that the associations were formed in order to promote specific language education, to reconstruct (mainland) tradition and culture, and to take over an intermediary function between the people of each language group and the administration or even the government. This form of patronage could be provided for an individual's court case, or for collective aims like the reservation of quota in the education system. The Andhra Association, for example, has nego-

tiated with the Andhra Pradesh government about the reservation of seats for Andaman-based, but 'ethnic' Telugu students.

Furthermore, even if formally defined as non-political organisations, some associations have become vehicles of electoral mobilisation. The general secretary of one important association told me that he had dealt out an alliance with a party candidate and religious leaders before the last parliamentary elections. They were to commonly support the candidate in order to help him be elected as the sole local Member of Parliament. The deal included a promise to mobilise the particular 'ethnic' electorate to vote for the candidate in exchange for future political support of the community. One of the demands was quota reservation under a particular category.

Party politics are also dominated by ethnic mobilisation. Many party politicians seem to have their own ethnic networks of patronage and clientelism organised on the basis of community. There are thus not only branches of the big national parties, Congress and BJP, but also a variety of regional parties such as the Tamiian DMK, the Trinamool Congress from West Bengal, the Telugu Desam Party from Andhra Pradesh, the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha, etc.

In general, voters do not seem to be attached to party ideology or a specific election program; especially in municipal and local government (Panchayat) elections, they are much more focused on a specific personality of a candidate or patron, who is able to give a voice to their demands. During the 1985 elections for the Port Blair municipal council, for example, the Telugu Desam Party won one seat with 81.58 per cent of votes (Biswas, 2002, p.101). This was due to active support of Telugu people in the ward where this community had a majority of voters (ibid, p.96). When I was talking with voters about their party affiliation before the last national parliamentary elections, many displayed their dislike or appreciation of a particular Member of Parliament (MP) candidate. They disliked him because they supposed that, as a Bengali, his 'natural' inclination will be to support his Bengali vote bank. They emphasised that after being elected, each candidate would primarily take interest in the betterment of his own community.

As the numerically largest Andaman community, Bengalis dominate local politics. In the last three decades, every elected MP was a Bengali. This is why people from other communities often blame the former Bengali MP, who was in power for several decades, to have facilitated the migration and settlement of Bengalis in the Andamans in order to increase his vote bank. The electoral dominance of Bengalis also wielded crucial influence on the introduction of Other Backward Classes (OBC) quotas in the Andamans. This example demonstrates the inextricable entanglement of communities' articulation of political voice and their access to sinecures.

The Struggle for OBC

An official notification released by the administration on 12th December 2005 declared the introduction of quota reservation under the Other Backward Classes (OBC) scheme: 38 per cent of government service posts and of seats in higher education have been reserved for identified backward communities.³⁴ This had an outstanding influence on the politicisation of community in the Andamans. The introduction of OBC marked an explicit turn away from official policies that had hitherto declared equality and sameness in secular Mini-India as guiding principles of its cosmopolitan society.

Many interlocutors claimed that such reservation policy has never been necessary because there has never been religious or caste discrimination. Some Local Born have been more satisfied with the older system. They have complained that this decision would not only symbolically undermine the absence of a caste system in the islands; it would also lead to casteism, because other communities started to represent themselves as backward and discriminated in order to obtain reservation. Nonetheless, there has been reservation, and thus, 'positive discrimination' before the introduction of OBC.³⁵ The only difference was that it has not been given on the basis of community, but according to a hierarchy of categories of settlement.³⁶

Only five communities, distinguished on the basis of their migration and settlement, were declared as OBC: the rehabilitated Bengali settlers, as well as the

Local Born, Bhantu, Karen and Moplah, who according to political context, can act loyally as 'pre-42', or as separate communities. This decision was based on recommendations of an OBC Commission that had reviewed social and economic conditions of various island communities and then identified those who were 'educationally and historically backward' (Biswas, 2010, p.133). Apart from the Bengalis, there were no other rehabilitated settler groups like the Tamil, Malayali, and Ranchi settlers. Apparently, Tamils and Malayalis did not appear in front of the Commission. Their leaders, in turn, are claiming that it was a set up political game by the Bengalis and the 'pre-42', in which they were not considered. Ranchi leaders, on the other hand, did not agree to be included under OBC because of their demand for reservation under the category of Scheduled Tribes (ST) (ibid, p.133).

One interlocutor, himself from a disadvantaged community, connected this injustice to a lack of political voice as vote bank caused by their meagre numerical strength. Following the same logic, most other people I talked to have linked the Bengali settlers' success in getting OBC to their population size. Another important factor was the influence of the former MP, who himself belongs to a Bengali family.

The outcome of the decision, i.e. which particular communities have obtained benefits, highlights how local power structures are determined by opportunities to articulate voice. One needs to be heard by the government authorities in order to achieve something. Under the prior reservation system, pre-42 communities and Bengali settlers had already received the majority of seats and government jobs. They can be regarded as comparatively advanced communities with a high proportion of middle class government servants. Due to that, they were able to mobilise the support of many influential intermediaries and politicians. These, in turn, were capable to raise enough voice within dominant political frameworks. When I interviewed several leaders of the benefited communities, I asked them about their opinion as to what the reasons for the final decision about OBC were: their most important and politically viable argument was, that, in opposition to independent migrants,

both groups had been brought to the Andamans by the state; they were historically backward due to poor infrastructure and educational facilities, too; as a consequence, the state would have to take over responsibility for their welfare. These statements point to the extent to which the legacy of migration and social engineering policies continue to shape the actual political landscape.

Further, pre-42 spokespersons instrumentalised genealogical arguments for their cause. This is typical for processes of ethnicisation in nation states (Balibar/Wallerstein, 1990, p.122-23). Accordingly, their ancestors were “freedom fighters” who fought against the British and Japanese regimes. They have argued that contemporary pre-42 people would be qualified to receive governmental support as compensation for the past suffering of their ancestors (Zehmisch, 2011). Another criteria for their supposed eligibility was the ‘*ius soli*’, the territorial principle. One pre-42 interlocutor emphasised that they were the “original colonisers”.³⁷ As the first people who settled ‘upon’ the land, he represented the community as “sons of the Andamanese soil” (see also: Biswas, 2010, p.133; Dhingra, 2005, p.168). Nonetheless, they regard themselves as different from the indigenous peoples, who are perceived to be ‘of the land’ (cf. Ingold, 2000, p.135).

Community leaders of rehabilitated settlers from East Bengal have appropriated quite similar arguments: they have claimed to be historically backward according to their ancestors’ displacement; their isolated settlement in vast jungle areas has contributed to their educational backwardness; life at the frontier was replete with hostile ‘nature’, including dangerous animals and ‘savages’; they have also been deprived of communication and infrastructure.

Like a self-fulfilling prophecy of previous warnings of communalism, the introduction of OBC quota for these two categories has provoked a political ‘chain reaction’ among other communities. Many leaders are now trying to emphasise the ‘backwardness’ of their communities vis-a-vis the administration. Associations of Malayali, Telugu and Tamil ‘settlers’ are demanding equal treatment with Bengalis as OBC. Politicians and other intermediaries, mostly of the lan-

guage associations, also started insisting on reservations as Scheduled Tribes (ST) or Scheduled Castes (SC) in order to appease their clients and to strengthen the unity of their vote bank. Many of these claims are based on reservations given to their communities on the Indian mainland. This goes along with a process of objectification of ethnic and cultural identities connected to a common ‘place of origin’.

Bengali politicians, for example, have demanded an equal entitlement as in West Bengal, when they are claiming SC for large numbers of Bengali settlers, who belong to the Namasudra community; Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), a Dalit party, demands SC reservation for all Dalits in the Andamans on equal terms with reservation policies in the mainland; the Ranchis, on the other hand, do not demand a SC or OBC status; one of their leaders told me that only a ST status like in the mainland would be appropriate for “true *Adi-vasis*”.

The most obvious field, in which such political competition between different communities materialises, is the very discourse about migration. Here, a migrant society debates its own foundation by deducing entitlements from their own migration history. Arguments from the national and the global sphere are central to local discourse. As a result, cultural hybridity, with its emphasis on the incorporation of diversity, is still a much celebrated aspect of social cohesion and conviviality. However, as political competition encompasses the articulation and representation of separate ‘bounded’ and exclusive ethnic groups, this norm is currently under transformation. Whereas the societal set up of Mini-India has been quite easily adaptable to new migrants, the settlement of whole families through networks of chain migration created various forms of political, social, cultural and economic exclusion. This has ramifications for the whole migration discourse, in which the question “Who is a local?” becomes increasingly prevalent.

Migration and the Politics of Locality

Between 1951 and 2011, postcolonial settlement policies and unplanned, independent chain migrations led to an official population increase of around twelve times.³⁸ Such demographic growth was probably neither planned nor expected by the Indian government. It turned out to be a major cost factor for the state, which, due to insufficient agricultural production, has to maintain the supply of its Andaman citizens with subsidised consumer goods from the mainland.³⁹ Broader conceptualisations of migration as a problem for the Andamans emerged in the 1980s. Arguments against migration have been based on Malthusian perceptions of overpopulation and the scarcity of natural resources.⁴⁰ Main participants in this discourse have been civil society actors from the mainland and local spokespersons, especially from the Local Born community.⁴¹

These actors have put political pressure on the administration and the Indian government to stop further immigration.⁴² Scholars and NGOs have critiqued the administration for its “open gate policy of allowing unrestricted migration to the Andamans” (Naidu, 1998, p.240). Harsh critique has also been formulated against the former Bengali Member of Parliament. Accordingly, he had enabled large-scale migrations of Bengalis and supported subsequent regularisations of their encroachments in order to gain their votes. Ongoing discussions about the introduction of an “Inner-Line Permit”, similar to an already existing permit in the Indian Union Territory of Lakshadweep, are a result of populist agitations against internal migration. The objective of an Inner-Line Permit is to stop or severely limit the access of mainlanders to the Andamans by declaring it illegal. In tandem, the ongoing issuance of Islander Identity Cards that officially prove the local belonging of each individual can be regarded as administrative step towards creating an islander identification.

Parallel to this migration discourse, the representation of Mini-India as a ‘melting pot’ model of cultural hybridity has transformed into a ‘container’ model of separated ethnic communities, or objectified ‘cultures’, which are supposed to be essentially

different. Ironically, the cultural creolisation of the Local Born, which can be defined as their ‘ethnic’ characteristic, has turned into a political means of ‘local’ self-definition in opposition to migrant communities. While their incorporation of Otherness into a “composed whole” is formulated as a fundamental value of being local, it is increasingly represented as marker of difference to other diasporic communities.⁴³ Further, many Local Borns distinguish their place attachment by claiming to have “a heart for the islands”. They declare that their feeling of ‘home’ would clearly distinguish them from their political opponents, the so-called “opportunistic migrants”, who have their ‘roots’ in the mainland.⁴⁴ Migrants are suspected to have come to the Andamans for the sole purpose of earning money. Their lack of attachment to the place would then, inevitably, lead them to destroy the fragile islands’ ecosystem.

As a result of such civil society intervention, subaltern migrants have become a scapegoat for environmental degradation. The current *Zeitgeist* of global, or planetary perceptions of climate change has become intertwined with local conservation politics and policies. In the discourse about sustainable protection of the environment, the problematised figure of the migrant/encroacher appears as major obstacle to conservation measures.⁴⁵ Migrants’ ‘hunger for land’ is blamed as causing the destruction of both the island biosphere as well as the protected habitat of the indigenous hunter-gatherers. Indeed, many landless subalterns have encroached forest or revenue land and built houses and gardens. The clearing of rainforest has damaged the ecosystem, brought about erosion and drinking water scarcity, and led to a loss of biodiversity.

Nonetheless, such damage occurred because the whole society is utilising limited resources. Not only migrants, but people from all communities have encroached forest and revenue land. Many felt the need to sustain growing numbers of joint family members or wanted to spatially expand their cash crop plantations. All sorts of settlers and migrants have been using forest resources according to their requirements; they are hunting, gathering, collecting raw materials for houses, etc. Poachers are selling their illegal prey

to customers in Port Blair and shark fins are exported to South East Asia and Japan. A just solution to these problems, therefore, needs to address all stakeholders involved. It requires taking into consideration livelihood issues of 'speechless' subalterns, instead of taking decisions or making politics above their head.

Questions of utility and damage, in which migration has been debated in the Andaman society, have, of course, not only been linked up to environment and conservation issues; they have also been connected to questions of nationalism and security. While the interior frontier is constituted by the 'jungleescape' of tropical Andaman rainforests, the external, maritime frontier is defined by the EEZ, the Exclusive Economic Zone (ranging from 12 until 200 miles off the coastline). In this peripheral zone of the Indian subcontinent, the effectiveness of the nation state itself is at stake. Large parts of local media and the administration, therefore, often connected the sensitive issue of territorial governance with debates about migration (Andaman Sheeka, 2009).

The policing of territorial waters has been justified by fears of foreign military invasions and allied secret service activities. In order to augment the protection of sea borders, local fishermen and the population have increasingly been co-opted as "eyes and ears of the security agencies" (THE DAILY TELEGRAMS, 2012). Moreover, the Indian military has also emphasised its task as protector of the nation; in line with global border policies, it has intensified surveillance activities against illegal poaching, piracy, transnational terrorism, as well as contraband and drug trade (Nayyar, 2005, p.86). This restrictive policy not only relegated foreigners to the role of malevolent 'intruders' into India; it also criminalised different kinds of people moving across the Andaman sea in the Bay of Bengal: Thai, Burmese, Bangladeshi or Sri Lankan fishermen have been captured by the Indian Coast Guard (Krishnaswamy, 2009).

Additionally, the increased policing of borders should hinder illegal migrants from Bangladesh,⁴⁶ Sri Lanka, Thailand or Burma to squat and encroach the islands (Gayatri, 2010). Moreover, there is a debate among the islanders about 'bonded labour' from Bangladesh; it reminds one of discourses about fem-

inised 'flesh trade' and 'human trafficking' of illegalised migrants in the European migration regime. Both discourses are dominated by xenophobic conceptualisations of migration as a threat and its counterpart, the 'benevolent' saving of victimised migrants, who, through their designation as victims, are deprived of their agency. Persistent representations of migration as a 'plague' or 'disease', for which a 'remedy' has to be found (Poddar, 2002, p.113), resemble the migration discourse in Europe.

The fallacy to defend the nation in the Indian Ocean with military power not only undermines independent Andamans' history of migration as a place to where subaltern people from all over South Asia could come and make a living. The stimulation of exclusive feelings of 'us' and 'them' does not remain confined to a context of territorial border defence; equivalent ethnic borders are drawn up in local discourse. While incorporation of Otherness can be regarded as the defining quality of the secular and cosmopolitan idea of the nation in the Andamans, stimulated fears of the Other are threatening to subvert the very idea of Mini-India.

Conclusion

By retelling the history of the Andaman regime of migration, I have depicted specific ideologies and material conditions, which both shaped the life-worlds of the islanders. Labour migration, forced and voluntary, was the major driving force for demographic changes in all periods of settlement. People from all over India, often in search for a better life, have settled in the Andamans. The term Mini-India was first applied to conceptualise the hybrid and heterogeneous Local Born community. They were united by somehow equalising difference into sameness. In the last few decades, Mini-India was increasingly used to conceptualise the whole society.

My analysis of migrant communities has demonstrated that 'multi-culturalist' politics and policies led to intensified processes of ethnicisation. The composition of the society has changed due to the migration process; separate communities have emerged in the political field, and identifications with a *muluk*, a

place of origin or homeland, have become more important. Politically influenced representations of 'contained' communities suppose that groups live side by side to each other instead of with each other. Mini-India as an idea of incorporating difference, gradually transformed into a 'multi-cultural' model of perceiving difference as marker of distinction, or Otherness. As a result, the migratory contexts of these communities have transformed into a source of political mobilisation and conflict evolved on the basis of community identifications. The conflict about OBC quotas is a vivid example for such conflict; it is entirely adverse to the idea and everyday practice of inter-communal cohesion and incorporation.

With demographic growth, migration has increasingly come to be regarded as problem. Thus, the migration discourse, negotiated between communities that were themselves created by migration, has transformed into something that was adverse and competitive. Not acknowledging that labour migration is inextricably linked to the logic of island 'development', and therefore, to the economic survival of the urban middle-class, people from this segment have started to demand various administrative measures against migration.

The transformation of the meaning of Mini-India demonstrates not only its trajectory into the realm of community-based politics of mainland India. It also adds as another example to the global migration discourse. Paralleling other settler societies around the world, many Andamanis have gradually become adverse to the very idea of migration, which led to the constitution of their own society.

Notes

¹An earlier version of this paper titled "A Xerox of India – Policies and Politics of Migration in an overseas Colony" was published in 2012 by the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology, LMU Munich, as Vol.2 of the Department's Working Paper Series. I am grateful to Saveetha Meganathan, Michael Steiner, Frank Heidemann and Martin Sökefeld for their constructive reading of the text.

²I am not going to focus on the southern Nicobar Is-

lands, which, together with the Andamans, constitute a Union Territory of India that comprises more than three hundred islands.

³A particular kind of regional 'shadow existence', marked by economic dependence from the centre and discursive hegemony, have remained a salient feature in the islands since colonial times. Such form of governance has been informed by Indian overseas migrations from the larger British Empire, by discourses in the Indian nation state, and by the transnational sphere, each highlighting an outsider's view on Andaman policies.

⁴The Andaman hunter-gatherers migrated to the islands several thousand years ago. A large body of monographs – like Radcliffe-Brown's anthropological classic "The Andaman Islanders" (1922), but also more recent works, e.g. by Pandya (2009), Sen, S. (2010), Sekhsaria (2003), and Venkateswar (2004) – have been written about them.

⁵After the 2004 Tsunami had hit the islands, the indigenous people were in the focus of global media reports (Venkateswar, 2007, p.2). These represented their 'miraculous' survival – they had saved their lives by following the animals' retreat in anticipation of the waves – as result of their 'proximity to nature'. Despite the availability of detailed knowledge about the indigenous Andaman islanders, many foreign and domestic tourists believe that they are cannibals. Such discrepancy between factual knowledge and Orientalist myth is symptomatic of the postcolonial condition.

⁶For an extended discussion of the reverberations of the anti-colonial struggle in the Andaman Islands, see Zehmisch (2011).

⁷Despite pointing out ethnographic particularities, I regard my study as embedded in larger theoretical debates of migration and place-making. I understand place-making as a cultural practice of settlement that involves a transformation of spaces into places (Gupta/ Ferguson, 1997). In the migration context, place-making connotes not only the process of adaptation to the physical and human environment, but also the exercise of political commitment in that place. This often implies people's inscription in public spaces through "naming, rituals and institutions"

(Pascoe, 1992). In migration contexts like the Andamans, one can observe how migrants literally ‘made’ a place by settling down in a particular setting, establishing social relationships and an attachment to the place, which culminated in political identification and engagement.

⁸A community in the Andamans can be defined in various and overlapping ways: by religious denomination or sect, by ethnicity, caste, class, gender, language or even by certain common experiences related to the migration experience. Institutional channels for membership in such communities are political parties, NGOs (especially language associations), unions, communities defined by sentiment or by practice (such as Tsunami-affected farmers), and religious groups such as temple committees, Haj associations or the various churches. While Andaman communities have been formed due to a large variety of identifications, in this paper, I am going to confine myself to communities defined by categories of settlement, language and an imagined ethnicity.

⁹Most Andaman people have to engage with the system in a pragmatic way, as the state provides the majority of capital and employment. Compared to the Indian mainland, the population enjoys a high standard of life. This is a result of huge annual plan outlays, which are spent for defence establishments, administration, labour, development projects, and for the supply of the population with subsidised consumer goods.

¹⁰Competition for funds and status between different groups, and the resolving of conflicts in the political arena, can be regarded as characteristic of South Asian politics and peoples’ appropriation of democracy (Spencer, 2007).

¹¹I have to point out that my research on the topic has, to a large extent, been influenced by male interlocutors and their gendered perspectives on politics. Women’s voices, especially those in a subaltern position, were often suppressed by male claims on universal representative status.

¹²I define subalternity as a relationship of subordination as well as physical and epistemic violence, experienced by marginal groups in the modern state – women, children, peasants, indigenous people, daily

wage labourers, refugees, etc. However, the condition subalternity cannot be applied on everyone belonging to the ‘lower-class’ section. Being subaltern is characteristic of not ‘speaking’ and, thus, of not being ‘listened’ to within dominant, hegemonic frameworks of representation (Spivak, 2008). This lack of articulated voice inhibits socio-economic mobility of subalterns, but it does not necessarily fix subaltern subjectivity forever: many examples from the Andamans demonstrate that descendants of former convicts or refugees have entered the higher echelons of civil society.

¹³Apart from searching employment, each migrant had multiple other reasons to come to the Andamans; e.g. adventure, love, friendship, evasion from state or kin, land grabbing, religious conversion, etc. This multitude of motivations serves to transcend simplistic conceptualisations of migration, which are prevalent in classical migration studies applying mechanistic push-and-pull factors.

¹⁴In 1904, the German scientist Gustav Fritsch came to the Andamans to study the convicts’ physiognomy. He called the penal colony a “laboratory of Indian humankind”, because the convicts represented such a diversity of races, castes, religions, and classes of India (Anderson, 2004, p.199).

¹⁵The British attempted to order the obscure life-worlds of the colonised with their hardly classifiable multiple belongings through administrative classifications of collective group identity in the ‘ethnographic state’ (Dirks, 2001). This led to the gradual reification of community identifications, as these were fixed in the process of knowledge production. The classificatory differentiation of separate, bounded castes and their politicisation continues to haunt post-colonial relations of power and knowledge. These categorisations can be regarded as an outstanding example of the postcolonial legacy of colonial governance

¹⁶Regarding the purpose of setting up a colony in the Andamans, differing priorities were identified by historians. Satadru Sen’s “Disciplining Punishment” (2000) rests on a Foucauldian argument that the institutionalisation of the penal settlement had the primary purpose to isolate, punish, survey, rehabilitate and reform subversive or ‘criminal’ convicts from the

Indian mainland. In “Imperial Andamans” (2010), Aparna Vaidik accuses Sen of neglecting the spatial and geographical dimensions of insularity. She states that “[t]he establishment of the penal settlement (...) was only a mode of colonisation and not the actual objective as it has come to be represented by historians.” (Vaidik 2010, p.36). According to Vaidik, the primary motive for the colonisation was to gain control over the Bay of Bengal (ibid, p.6).

¹⁷Such statements about the absence of caste are paradoxical for several reasons: in the light of reservation politics, these utterances have to be interpreted as politically motivated representations of internal unity; however, there is an empirical absence of discrimination on the basis of purity rules. Most Local Borns have, indeed, only vague ideas about their caste backgrounds (Mukhopadhyay, K., 2002, p.19). Further, there is lack of conceptual clarity in local parlance; caste is often interchangeably used as a synonym for either ethnic community, religious denomination, category of settlement, or, in its more original sense of indicating hierarchy, as *varna*, *jati* or *gotra*.

¹⁸Total population increase between 1874: 9,217 and 1901: 16,101 (Census report for 1901, R.C.C Temple Collection, MSS Eur/F 98, no.42, IOR, cited in: Vaidik, 2010, p.67)

¹⁹Due to their separate settlement, both Bhantu and Moplah were able to preserve and reconstruct a large variety of traditions from their places on the subcontinent. This, in turn, has led to heightened identifications with their diasporic communities. In the contemporary social substratum of the Andamans, they are regarded as independent communities that have been established in addition to the Local Born community.

²⁰Many Burmese were recruited for the so-called Bush Police. Their task was to fight the indigenous hunter-gatherers of the Jarawa and to track down escaped convicts (Dhingra, 2005, p.161). People also told me that many Burmese were artisans and wage labourers in colonial Port Blair. Until the 1960s, the majority of Andaman Burmese were ‘repatriated’ to Burma.

²¹These had come to India after their exodus from East Bengal, the newly declared East Pakistan. To a large extent, the refugees had moved to Kolkata and

other cities of West Bengal (Chatterjee, 2006, p.54). Because many had squatted available public spaces in and around cities, they were perceived as a ‘threat’ to public order. In later years, the continued violence between Singhalese and Tamils in Sri Lanka had caused an increase of refugees in India, too. The Andamans were seen as a bastion to bring these refugees (Venkateswar, 2004, p.153, Footnote 8).

²²This has determined the relationship with their employers and the larger society, which can be described as one of subalternity. Their discrimination as ‘junglees’ has contributed to their continuous social and political marginalisation in the island society. In spite of their major contributions to the process of colonisation and rehabilitation through clearing of forests and infrastructure development, there were only 197 families rehabilitated as reward for their compliance with the Forest Department (Statistical Outline of Andaman and Nicobar Islands, 1962, cited in: Dhingra, 2005, p.83). As many other Ranchis have not been provided with land to settle down, they have either leased or bought land from settlers. Most have encroached forest land for building houses and gardens, often near their previous places of work. Ranchis, as a community, lack powerful political support that articulates their voice. Not much has been done for peoples’ welfare on encroachments of forest land: schools do function only partially, whereas primary health centres, electricity, and infrastructure are absent. It has been assumed that “they are tribals, and quite happy in the forest.” (Saldhana, 1989, p.14).

²³Due to post-Tsunami rehabilitation funds and the general economic growth, the demand for labour in the construction business has increased in the last years. Contractors have always employed the most precarious and, thus, cheapest labour power. Most of the present contracted labour has come from rural West Bengal. Confirming local rumours, one subcontractor told me that he had transported illegalised Bangladeshis, who had crossed the border to West Bengal.

²⁴Many studies about migrant labour in India stress the aspect of circulation as its main characteristic (Bremen, 1996; Gidwani/ Sivaramakrishnan, 2004). While I acknowledge the validity of these approaches,

my study is locally confined to the Andamans as a place of departure and arrival of people.

²⁵The Ranchis, for example, have always been regarded as circulating labour force. While many, indeed, used to return to the mainland after their tasks were completed, a lot of them have decided to stay back and bring their families. A considerable number has encroached forest or revenue land to build houses and gardens. The second or third generation now lives on these lands. Most of them have never gone to the mainland. They identify themselves as locals.

²⁶This parallels conceptualisations of migration in other parts of the world; e.g., as late as 1998, after several decades of mass migration, the Federal Republic of Germany (BRD) was finally declared as “immigration country”.

²⁷A young owner of an Internet Cafe in Kolkata, who had no personal relationship to the Andamans, told me: “In school, when someone was not good in studying, our teacher made the joke: If you are not successful in school, go to Andaman. There you will get land and everything you need from the government for free. Ketu karo, Khana khao! [PZ: Make agriculture and eat your food!].

²⁸A good example of these transregional connections are trader families from Tamil Nadu. Until today, many families have been able to uphold their connections to the Indian mainland through regular business and holiday visits, the forging of marriage alliances and the ‘import’ of rituals and festivals. One of my interlocutors belonged to an influential Tamil business family from Chennai, where he had married within his caste. In colonial times, his ancestors had come to the Andaman penal settlement to supply the population with consumer goods. Since then, his family has dominated certain segments of trade to and from the islands. As confirmation of their influence and status, he told me that in 1967, his family even managed to bring ‘their’ Murugan temple to Port Blair from Chennai. [PZ: of course, they did not bring the whole temple, but only the *murti*, the statue of the God Murugan!]

²⁹In the Census 1991, the main languages spoken in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands were enumerated as follows: Bengali (64.706), Tamil (53.356),

Hindi/Hindustani/Urdu (50.961) Telugu (32,979), Nicobari (26.142), Malayalam (26,075), Kurukh/Oraon (9253) (Directorate of Statistics, Port Blair, cited in: Dhingra, 2005, p.168)

³⁰The often class-transcending, categorical mingling of subaltern wage labourers, white- and blue-collar employees, and the bourgeoisie in separate ethnic ‘containers’, leads to a political division of those who might otherwise have common class interests.

³¹It is important to mention that I do not assume any primordial attachment of migrants to one of these groups. Instead, I regard subjectivities as products of genealogies of power and knowledge. Subjects are capable to choose between one and several of these different politicised forms of community, in which she or he is often already embedded through life history. I argue, therefore, that belonging to a community is part of a political identification that encompasses other forms of ‘traditional’ loyalty and solidarity from the ‘sending’ contexts such as *jati*, *gotra*, family affiliation, etc. While the latter are often reconstructed as a part of the process of place-making, community identifications can be regarded as products of the specific cultural “theatre” of local politics (Amit/ Rapport 2002, p.7-8). ‘The cultural’ appears here as a permanent battlefield in the fight for recognition of position and status. It can even transform into a ‘culturalism’, when “ethnicities mobilised by or in relation to the practices of the modern nation state...take cultural differences as their conscious object” (Appadurai, 1996, p.146-7).

³²Apart from the social imaginary of diasporic solidarity, these groups are internally divided into different castes, classes, sects, and religions; e.g., two Tamils from different castes might structure their interaction according to reconstructed rules from the mainland. Nevertheless, if claims have to be made via the administration or other ethnic groups, they will strategically assume a diasporic unity as Tamils – as imagined community based on a common language and ‘culture’. On the contrary, a Bengali, who does not know the specific caste names and backgrounds of both Tamils, will not be able to differentiate them without getting to know them better. For him, both will be first and foremost Tamils, or Madrasis. Vice-versa, both Tamils

will not necessarily know that a Bengali named Ram Mandal is from the *Namasudra* caste. Instead, she or he will just be a Bengali for them (cf. Paul, 1994, p.30).

³³I have appropriated Spivak's contention that the Subaltern Studies Collective did strategically essentialise the subaltern in a "scrupulously visible political interest" (Spivak 1988: 15) for my own argument. Here, I am ascribing the political strategy of essentialisation to community actors who represent 'their' own as well as other communities with objectified/ reified/ essentialised stereotypes in order to take political advantage.

³⁴For decades, Indian (federal) states have practised quota reservation of seats in higher education, and of jobs in the state apparatus; for example, in the police or in clerical employment. The intention has been to uplift discriminated and deprived communities. Since then, quota reservation has been probably the most decisive vehicle for class mobility. In independent India, *naukri*, state employment or service, is often a direct result of getting seats in higher educational institutions. *Naukri*, thus, can be regarded as one important means of upwards mobility. It is not only connected with social security in the form of proper salary and pensions, but also with access to the state machinery and its funds.

³⁵The administration, as opposed to central government institutions, has had its own approved guidelines of admission to higher education and clerical jobs; accordingly, bona fide holders of specific 'local certificates' were eligible to get 88 per cent of government jobs under the local administration, while 12 per cent was reserved for the indigenous Scheduled Tribes (ST) (Biswas, 2010, p.132). This reservation practice is still continued by most local institutions such as the polytechnic. It is based on a hierarchy of classifications defined by the duration of settlement.

³⁶If two candidates from different communities are applying for the same job or educational seat, preference will be given to that candidate, who is able to produce a certificate that proves a certain category of settlement: the first category comprises 'old inhabitants' or 'pre-42', the second were 'settlers', i.e. all communities settled by the state under rehabilitation

and colonisation schemes. The third group classified was '10-years category'; i.e. all people, regardless from where they migrated, who were not settled under any scheme; however, it is mandatory for that category to have visited a school in the islands for at least 10 years. Finally, there were 'others', all migrants, who could not produce any proof to have visited an Andaman school for at least 10 years. They had hardly any chance to get an official seat or job.

³⁷One interlocutor presented a particular local identity in the following way: "We were brought here by the British. I am a descendant in the 4th generation. Now there is high pressure by the migrants. In British times we were not very well; under the Japanese, the economy was nearly zero. After the Japanese occupation we started from nothing. My family had 4 acres of land. Whatever has been done here, we did on our own. This is our identity, our contribution and our culture."

³⁸1951: 30.971; 1971: 115.133; 1991: 280.661 (Directorate of Statistics, Port Blair, cited in: Dhingra, 2005, p.168). While the data for 2001 numbered 356.265, the provisional census data of 2011 gives a total population figure of mere 379,944 people (THE DAILY TELEGRAMS, 2011). This increase does not correspond with estimations of many local interlocutors, who believe that the population must number between 500,000 and 600,000 people due to continuous migrations. The local estimations seem to be more realistic, indeed, as official institutions such as the Census and the National Sample Survey (NSS) tend to "underestimate population mobility and labour migration to a significant extent" (Srivastava, 1998, p.584). This gap in enumeration becomes comprehensible by looking at the reliance on survey instruments with which permanent and semi-permanent migration can be primarily covered. It is less effective to assess short duration circular or seasonal migration (Gidwani/ Sivaramakrishnan, 2004, p. 346).

³⁹From a pure economic perspective, it becomes clear that the costs this project of settling subaltern populations has caused, do not outweigh its financial profits. The motivation to populate the islands after independence was clearly strategic; however, the sub-

sides for 500,000 people have become an inevitable necessity of state hegemony. The maintenance of public institutions and the development of the territory have been dictated by the obligation to provide services to the people and their demanding political leaders, contractors, and bureaucrats, who appropriate the largest surpluses for themselves.

⁴⁰ “In the last 20 years, the Andamans have been increasingly ravaged for resources and used as a dumping ground for the landless” (Whitaker and Whitaker, 1984, p.16 cited in: Venkateswar, 2004, p.132)

⁴¹ Hinting at the increasing pollution, population density and depletion of the ‘natural’ environment caused by demographic changes in Port Blair, one Local Born interlocutor told me: “I cannot hear the birds singing any more. I cannot breathe freely. I have to take showers three or four times a day, because it has become so hot. Earlier, we had nine months of rain every year. Now we have only six. It has never been so hot that we needed a fan. It was a paradise for us. Today, everywhere are buildings, it is hot and dirty. The islands are overpopulated and we face drinking water problems. If we don’t stop migration, the islands will become a desert.”

⁴² Several interlocutors told me that an influential study, initiated by the government in 1987, came to the conclusion that the carrying capacity of the islands had already approached its limit of 250,000 people. In 1988, it was officially recommended to control population growth up to a level of 450,000 people in 2011. However, migration has not been stopped since then, probably because local businessmen are in need of a continuous flow of cheap migrant labour for development projects.

⁴³ A Local Born leader told me: “We have a distinct cultural feature: We are a mixture of everything; we never said I am Bihari, Bengali or Tamil..., but now, after the arrival of the migrants everybody says: I am Bengali, I am Ranchi. The migrants, especially from Bengal and Tamil Nadu, have come here and built up water-tight compartments.”

⁴⁴ One Local Born interlocutor polarised the distinction to the migrants in the following way: “We were the real colonisers, when the British left. The islands are our property. After Independence there were

job opportunities and land available. That’s why the migrants came from the mainland. It was a paradise for them.” Such representations of belonging have to be interpreted within the larger context of local politics of recognition. They can be explained with the Local Borns’ gradual loss of political dominance to more numerous communities. Many old inhabitants have expressed fears to become “second-class citizens” and strangers in their ‘own’ homelands (Tamta, 1991, p.122).

⁴⁵ The removal of illegal encroachers had been on the agenda of several parties during election campaign for the Indian Parliament in 2009. Further, there were several legislative and executive debates and measures to remove encroachers in order to protect the biosphere and the indigenous people in recent years. Since ecological consciousness has influenced a Supreme Court Order of 2002 to protect the forests, encroachers are under permanent threat of eviction (Sekhsaria, 2007, p.84-6). Some had been removed from their encroachments, while the majority remain on their lands in a state of insecurity and without perspective to be rehabilitated. These actual political developments cannot be regarded as phenomena that are isolated from the migration discourse; they are entangled with concurrent conceptualisations of migration as a problem.

⁴⁶ People crossing the borders from Bangladesh to India have been continuously termed as ‘illegal aliens’ and represented as “an imminent threat to the health of our healthy nation” (Sen, S., 2003, p.611). Here, the global discourse about ‘Muslim fertility’ as a cause of overpopulation is also getting connected to the nationalist perception of threat.

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