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Uma Kothari

The forced movement of colonised peoples and its impact on development

This paper provides an overview of an ongoing research project, together with Rorden Wilkinson, on the lasting impact of the forced movement of people during the British colonial period on post-independence development in the Indian Ocean region. It builds upon my work on the colonial legacies of development (Kothari 2006) and brings together previous research on transnational migration and the history and development of small island states.

British colonial expansion and rule required movements of populations of slaves, indentured labourers, colonial administrators, skilled workers, planters and traders, amongst others. The form of, and extent to which, these historical movements have had enduring effects beyond the demise of colonial rule, on the societies from and to which people migrated, is now increasingly acknowledged and documented (Cohen 2008). While some of these movements were voluntary, many were the result of the forced movements of people within and between British colonies. In terms of forcible relocations, most research has focused on slavery and indentured labour as examples of large-scale colonial movements, exploring, among other issues, the creation of diasporic cultures and identities and the impact on economic, social and political processes. However, other forms of forced migrations carried out under British colonial rule remain largely under-acknowledged and less well understood. Our current study analyses two under-researched instances of compulsory relocation during the colonial period and examines how they have had an impact upon, and continue to shape, post-independence development in former colonies. These are: the exiling of anti-colonial nationalists and political leaders banished from one part of the empire to another, and the compulsory relocation of colonised populations within and between colonies to make way for the establishment of military bases.

Specifically, we examine the British colonial policy of exiling anti-colonial nationalists and political 'undesirables' from other parts of the empire to the Seychelles. Seychelles was the recipient of large numbers of political exiles during the colonial period. From 1814, British rule brought to the islands many prominent anti-colonial leaders from Egypt, Somaliland, Ethiopia, Gold Coast, Palestine and other colonies. The last political exile was Greek Cypriot leader Archbishop Makarios, who arrived in the Seychelles in 1956. In total, over 400 exiles and their followers were sent to the Seychelles during the colonial period, as the country was considered a good 'dumping ground' to 'resettle' people who challenged the authority of the British Colonial Government. We also explore the use of islands in the region as strategic military bases, focusing on the forcible movement of populations that took place to enable their creation. We examine the lasting consequences of the forcible movement of the 2000 strong population of Diego Garcia to Mauritius and Seychelles, the movement of people from the Farquar, Desroches and Aldabra islands to the Seychelles during the creation of British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT), and those compelled to move from Gan in Addu Atoll in the Maldives to the neighbouring islands of Feydhoo and Maradhoo to make way for a military facility.

With some exceptions (Sznajder/Roniger 2009), little work has been done on these forms of movement; research that does so explores issues of exile, and tends to focus on the contemporary period rather than on the transfer of people during the time of empire. Moreover, little is known about, and few attempts have been made to understand, the historical and present day impact of these movements. These gaps in the literature are all the more pronounced in the context of colonial policy in the Indian Ocean region generally, and the small island states of Seychelles, Mauritius and Maldives in particular. The significance of these islands to the imperial project has not been well documented; and although people were exiled to other parts of the empire, the dense concentration, type and effect of forced movements of people in the region, though not unique, is exceptional and has yet to be fully explained.

Existing work on the compulsory movement of people in this region has focused on slavery and indentured labour (see Campbell 2004). There has been almost no scholarship that discusses the forced movements of political exiles and those displaced to make way for military facilities. However, during our previous research on the impact of increased global competi-

tion on the development of these post-colonial islands, it became apparent that their development trajectories had largely been shaped by external influences. Significant amongst these was the profound and long-term impact of substantial, compulsory movements of exiles and displaced people that had occurred in the region. This is evident in the participation of the forcibly moved in political debates and action leading up to and after independence, the social make-up and identity of the islands through inter-marriage and the exchange of cultural values and ideas that they brought with them about social welfare and education and the economy, both through their participation in the work force and the resources they brought with them.

The research process utilises a combination of methods and activities in the UK and case study countries, including archival work on colonial policies and correspondence, and interviews with those displaced, their families and compatriots as well as with former colonial and government officials and military personnel with knowledge and experience of policies of forced movement. An important part of the research involves gathering more in-depth narratives through the collection of individual life histories and focus group discussions in Mauritius, Maldives and Seychelles.

Initial findings of this ongoing research project have brought to the fore three key areaswhich reflect the continuing impact and consequences of colonial policies of forced movement. Firstly, while experiences of political exile do reinforce national identities, they also have the potential to produce new structures of loyalty and solidarity, with some individuals participating in, and informing struggles for, independence and self-determination in the colonies to which they were sent. Similarly, the forcible relocation of populations within and between states to make way for the establishment of military bases has had an impact on local, national and inter-state politics and on state development. The political influences and resources the displaced brought with them into exile, and how, and with whom these were shared and communicated, contributed to a transnational circulation of ideas and influenced the islands' struggles for independence and post-colonial nation-building as well as their relations with other states.

Secondly, colonial policies of forced movement brought large numbers of colonised people together from across the empire, establishing and maintaining transnational networks (Vertovec 1999) that impacted upon, and continue to influence the development of, former colonies. These networks

of ideas, cultures, resources and politics were significant in connecting these 'remote' islands to other places and cultural and intellectual traditions. Indeed, these networks have in some instances enabled ordinary people to mediate and challenge their marginality and exclusion. As transnational migrants, exiles and displaced people constituted spatially and temporally extended networks and solidarities and altered development trajectories in enduring ways. Thirdly, the relationships between host societies and in-migrants and encounters between people of different intellectual and cultural traditions have had an effect on the social and economic texture of the islands, and have shaped cultural identities, mobilised and supported the establishment of education and welfare systems and made important and lasting contributions to the economy.

The aim of this research is to contribute to historically-informed understandings of contemporary development processes. By systematically analysing the long-term effects of these instances of forced movements of colonised people we explore, simultaneously, political processes, personal and collective identities, transnationalism, and networks and allegiances during the colonial period and thus provide a basis for understanding continuities over time. Adopting a postcolonial approach, we show how representations and articulations of colonial power did not come to an end at the time of decolonisation but continued to be mobilised, reworked and mediated through transnational flows in the post-independence period. Importantly, our research provides understandings of agency from the perspective of the colonised to complement official and dominant versions and uncover personal and collective practices, networks, ideas, and solidarities.

Further Reading

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