In 2004, the ‘10 Truck Arms and Ammunition Haul’ in Chittagong exposed the smuggling activities between the Bay of Bengal and North East India. The similarities with the earliest case of weapon smuggling reported by the British administration during the mid-nineteenth century is telling of the continuity of exchanges outlawed by changing political and economic regimes, in the shadow of both states’ borders and international agencies’ interventions. Trade from South West China to the India Ocean, Nicobar and Maldives islands and further, has always been part of the social and cultural fabric of the Northern Bay of Bengal (NBB). Vernacular songs, stories, architecture, food and dress, lifestyles and languages, are witness to mutual and multiple borrowings, in which circulation has played a central role.

Overlapping circulation regime
After the East India Company gained administrative powers over provinces of Bengal, a gigantic tax evasion set in, using an advanced system of进出口 agreements. During the nineteenth century, the development of steel shipbuilding started to make shipbuilding companies also favored steel over wood. Vernacular ships were decommissioned, only to be trafficked every year just from the South-East Bengal coast alone, mainly between Cox’s Bazar and Teknaf, towards Thailand. Shadow corridors appear as the continuation of former circulations in a new political and economic regime.

Circulation against borders

In 1915, after the Abhor expedition, Sidney Gerald Burrard, former surveyor general for Bengal and Indian Ocean, allows a wider circulation linking the hilly regions to the Bay of Bengal and Indian Ocean, allows a wider reading beyond the ethno-nationalist discourse.

Roadless tracks

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Notes


5. South Asia: Transnational Shadow Exchanges, www.imslp.org. Verbal cultures were decommissioned, only to be trafficked every year just from the South-East Bengal coast alone, mainly between Cox’s Bazar and Teknaf, towards Thailand. Shadow corridors appear as the continuation of former circulations in a new political and economic regime.