UC Berkeley
UC Berkeley Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Title
Economies, Moralities, and State Formations in British Colonial India

Permalink
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0h23p0rv

Author
Wilson, Nicholas Hoover

Publication Date
2012

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation
Economies, Moralities, and State Formations in British Colonial India

By
Nicholas Hoover Wilson

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology in the Graduate Division of the University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:
Professor Ann Swidler, Chair
Professor Neil Fligstein
Professor James Vernon
Professor Dylan Riley

Fall 2012
Abstract

Economies, Moralities, and State Formations in British Colonial India

by

Nicholas Hoover Wilson

Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Ann Swidler, Chair

How is modern power organized? My dissertation explores this question by probing how state, society, and economy became ethically autonomous spheres for colonial administrators. In other words, I ask how officials shifted justifications for their behavior from referring to their immediate peers to the abstract imperatives of markets, the social, and sovereignty.

Corruption scandals were a key cause of this shift. Endemic to the English East India Trading Company's administration in India since its foundation, these scandals generally involved administrative squabbles escalating into appeals to authorities in London. However, while the scandals had a consistent form, the Seven Years War decisively changed their content. The war eroded the insulation protecting the Company's London authorities from Parliament and put a host of new actors who had little knowledge of Indian affairs in a position to influence the Company's behavior. Consequently, when Company officials in India appealed to London, they used the abstract moral language of state, society, and economy to appeal to these new actors for assistance. Moreover, these newly abstract justifications were then used by the succeeding class of senior Company administrators as resources to shape reforms of the Colonial State in India.

The analysis in this dissertation is based on archival research at the India Office Records of the British Library in London and at Cambridge University. It analyzes and compares scandals in each of the Company's three major administrative units in India. In Bengal, the ejection of William Bolts and the impeachment of Warren Hastings generated arguments supporting the state's sovereignty. In the 1790s, Charles Cornwallis deployed these arguments to reform administrative conduct and ratify the development of an extremely powerful state apparatus. In Madras, meanwhile, the Nawab of Arcot's debts scandal precipitated the wholesale reformation of that region's administration in the 1790s and 1800s. Whereas Bengal's development ratified the state, in Madras administrative conflict centered on notions of defending Indian society. Accordingly, Madras officials justified their policy decisions by invoking “society” as an autonomous sphere with its own moral logics. Finally, in Bombay in the 1810s, the impeachment and ejection of a senior civil servant for alleged corruption led to debates in which free market principles were invoked as the foundation for administrative action.
Acknowledgments

This dissertation has been helped by innumerable people, and while I remain responsible for its flaws and defects, it literally would not exist without the care, stimulation, and support I have received from others over the last decade.

I have been lucky to work with a tremendously supportive and encouraging dissertation committee at Berkeley. Above all, Ann Swidler, my chair, has stood behind me with support, critical engagement, and faith as I turned from a scruffy prospective graduate student chatting with her about AIDS policy in Africa after colloquium in the Blumer conference room to a scruffy Postdoctoral Associate chatting with her about Malawian gin across Bancroft avenue at Free House. Through it all, she has gently reminded me when I most needed it that kindness is no enemy of insight, and that the most profound ideas can also be expressed most clearly. I owe what virtues there are in this dissertation to her and her ecumenical sociological knowledge.

Along with Ann, Neil Fligstein has been a tireless supporter of me and my research. From an office-hours meeting with him during my first year as a graduate student, Neil has seen beyond all my unclear statements, wild tangents, and digressions to recognize the value in studying 18th century imperialism. Moreover, he has continually provided me with material support—in the form of an office and space to grow a lime tree on the roof of the Institute for Research into Labor and Employment—and an intellectual home—in the form of his ongoing workshop series in the Center for Culture, Organizations, and Politics. I have learned an enormous amount about how to look at institutions and the social world from Neil.

In addition to Ann and Neil, I’ve also have the privilege of working with Dylan Riley. Perhaps embarrassingly, I have been at Berkeley longer than Dylan has, and he has not only been hired but also tenured over the course of my studies. Yet from the moment he asked me what I meant by “governance” in his comparative-historical methods class to the moment recently when he advised me on how to best organize my own version of that course for my new position, Dylan has been a model of analytical rigor, intellectual insight, and empirical precision that I hope to emulate.

Last, but hardly least, my committee was complimented and completed by James Vernon. Like Ann, Neil, and Dylan, James’ intellectual and personal influence has been profound. Though I could be counted on to ask bizarre questions, James welcomed me into the community of British historians working at Berkeley, first in his class on the “Making of Modern Britain,” and later through Berkeley’s Center for British Studies. I still remember how nervous I was to ask him to be on my committee, and I remained humbled that he agreed. James’ knowledge of the British empire and his intellectual encouragement loom large over this work.

One of Berkeley’s greatest virtues is that its faculty gives its time generously and widely. Thus I have many more faculty to thank, all of whom (sometimes unwittingly) aided and abetted this
project: Vicki Bonnell, Claude Fischer, Marion Fourcade, Heather Haveman, John Lie, Kristin Luker, Dawne Moon, Loïc Wacquant, Margaret Weir, and Robb Willer. Outside of Berkeley, I’ve received essential feedback from Julian Go, George Steinmetz, and Phil Stern.

Beyond Berkeley’s walls, I have also been privileged to enjoy a second intellectual home at Yale’s sociology department, where Julia Adams has mentored and supported me during a visiting studentship and soon as a Postdoctoral Associate. Additionally, I have learned a tremendous amount from the faculty there, including Steven Pincus, Phil Gorski, Emily Erikson, Peter Stamatov, and Jonathan Wyrtzen. I also had the benefit of getting to know and receiving valuable feedback and intellectual engagement from the wonderfully collegial graduate students and postdocs, among whom Annette Fasang, Andy Junker, Sam Nelson, Matt Norton, and Xiaohong Xu stood out especially.

During a critical nine-month archival visit to Britain, I was also welcomed by Pembroke College, Cambridge, and benefited greatly from the welcome and intellectual stimulation of my supervisor, Professor Sir Christopher Bayly. I also benefited from conversations with David Washbrook and Jon Wilson. The department of social sciences at Cambridge also provided me with office space and friendship from the wonderful graduate students there, particularly Irene Daily, Frens Kroeger, and Inga Schowengerdt.

Refreshing and stimulating though these trips may have been, I could always rely in Berkeley on my fellow graduate students and postdocs for support, encouragement, and feedback. For consistently showing me what an intellectual community could be, I have Nick Adams, Rachel Best, Dariush Bozorgmehri, Jonah Stuart Brundage, Ryan Calder, Chris Chambers-Ju, Siri Colom, Sarah Cowan, Luke Dauter, Cyrus Dioun, Peter Dixon, Dawn Dow, Charlie Eaton, Michel Estefan, Desmond Fitzgibbon, Trevor Gardner, Joanna Guldi, Grahame Foreman, Eric Gianella, Jacob Habiniek, Kimberly Kay Hoang, Naomi Hsu, Penny Ismay, Alex Janus, Jenn Jones, Riyad Koya, Abby Larson, Roi Livne, Sarah Macdonald, Ellis Monk, Ben Moodie, Freeden Oeur, Marcel Paret, Tianna Paschel, Alina Polyakova, Jennifer Randles, Erendira Rueda, Caroline Shaw, Stephen Smith, and Manuel Vallee to thank.

I have been especially fortunate, though, to have even closer intellectual engagements with students who have become friends in addition to being colleagues. Among these people, Laura Mangels, Sarah Garrett, Kristen Gray, Luke Dauter, Sarah Quinn, Adam Slez, and Josh Pacewicz stand out. What’s more, the spouses and partners of these wonderful folks, including Jesse, Sofie, and Brian, have endured my oddities with good humor. But a troika of close friends have stamped themselves on my life like no others: Barry Eidlin, whose tirelessness in his research and intellectual precision have inspired me; Brian Lande, whose theoretical knowledge, courageous research, and compassion have supported me when I needed it; and Damon Mayrl, whose insight, encouragement, and friendship have sustained and educated me over many pitchers.

Of course, none of this would have been possible but for the support of my family. My father, Gary, has taught me how to write, and also the similarities between the writer’s and sociologist’s eye. My mother, Modena, instilled her love of science, knowledge, and trying to make the world
a better place by combining the two as she provided a professional model I am still learning from. My brother, Christopher, has led the way, along most every path I have walked, as only a big brother can. My sister-in-law, Steffie, has demonstrated unstoppable energy, enthusiasm, kindness, and wisdom while somehow juggling family and career. My niece Maddy, too, has shown me (as she enters her climbing phase) that even the most daunting peaks (like the backs of chairs) can be summited. Beyond these nuclear bounds, my extended family has often provided words of encouragement and welcome breaks from work, so thanks too to Emily, Alison, Andrew, JulieK, Matt, Ryan, Sara, Tom, Marsha, Stewart, Karen, Marlin, and Mary Nell. Miriam (a.k.a. Mumsy) has patiently waited for me to graduate, and will now get to see it during her 94th year.

Each of the people I have named here (and so many more) have lent a hand as I have researched and written this dissertation. But two last people stand out even above this superlative crowd. First, Wilbur Hoover, my grandfather. Although he has passed away, his faith in goodness, his love of knowledge, and his discipline married with joy and kindness live on. And second, Julie Huang. Over these past years, through her bravery, her support, and her infinite care, she has taught me how to grow.

I also would like to gratefully acknowledge financial support from the National Science Foundation, the Center for British Studies, the Berkeley Department of Sociology, and the Graduate Division at Berkeley.
# Table of Contents

Introduction........................................................................................................................................ 1

Chapter 1: “The Most Complete Lesson of Self-Command”.............................................................. 16
  East India Politics and Elite Sociability in 18th Century Britain

Chapter 2: “To Guard the Public in These Circumstances”................................................................. 32
  Society as a Regime of Moral Order in Madras

Chapter 3: “The Corruption is Not Among Ourselves”........................................................................ 56
  Strange Roots of the State as an Administrative Order in Bengal

Chapter 4: Missing the Modern Economy.......................................................................................... 84
  The Failed Institutionalization of Laissez-Faire in Bombay

Conclusion........................................................................................................................................... 97

Archives Consulted.............................................................................................................................. 101

Bibliography........................................................................................................................................ 101

Appendix A: Source Methods.............................................................................................................. 117

Appendix B: Maps............................................................................................................................... 120

Appendix C: Diagrams........................................................................................................................ 122
Introduction: Empire and the Differentiation of Regimes of Moral Order

Introduction

In 1763, Robert Clive wrote to the English East India Company’s Court of Proprietors to defend himself. Clive had led the Company’s victorious forces at the battle of Plassey in 1757 in Bengal, and afterwards accepted a prebendal annuity, called a *jagir*, along with gifts of cash and diamonds from the new Nawab of Bengal.\(^1\) But after returning to England, Clive backed the losing faction in the 1763 East India Company Director’s election, and he soon found himself accused of corruption and subject to a parliamentary inquiry for accepting the “Black Jagir.” Indignant and convinced he had done nothing wrong, Clive described why he accepted the gift:

> The Nabob, then, agreeable to the known and usual custom of Eastern princes, made presents, both to those of his own court, and to such of the English who, by the their rank and abilities, had been instrumental in the happy success of so hazardous an enterprise, suitable to the rank and dignity of a great prince. I was one, amongst the many, who benefited by his favor. I never sought to conceal it; but declared publicly, in my letter to the Secret Committee of the India Directors, that the Nabob’s generosity had made my fortune easy, and the Company’s welfare was now my only motive for staying in India…what injunction was I under to refuse a present from him, who had the power to make me one, as the reward of honourable services? I know of none” (Anon. 1764:153).

Although cleared of wrongdoing by the parliamentary inquiry, Clive committed suicide in 1774.

One hundred years later, another Company servant defended his service in India. Charles Trevelyan began his career as a writer in the East India Company and achieved a reputation as a crusader against corruption.\(^2\) Thereafter he served in the British Exchequer, where he authored the Northcote-Trevelyan report, which was a cornerstone of the reform of the British Civil Service along modern bureaucratic lines (Osborne 1994). But upon returning to India as Governor of Madras in 1858, Trevelyan was frustrated by the pace at which the government was pursuing tax reforms in the aftermath of the Sepoy rebellion. When he leaked administrative minutes between Madras and Calcutta to the press, Trevelyan was recalled to London under a cloud. To justify himself, Trevelyan published a pamphlet where he explained his motivations:

> As the people of England have thought right to take the government of India out of the hands of those who so long administered it, they are bound to make themselves acquainted with the interests of their important charge. When it was announced that great and hazardous changes were to be made in the short space of two months, I saw that, at all risks to myself, and at any amount of personal sacrifice, I ought to secure for the Government and Parliament of England time to con-

---

\(^1\) For an overview of the politics of Clive’s *jagir*, see Lenman and Lawson (1983).

\(^2\) As Assistant Resident at Dehli early in his career, Trevelyan reported his superior for accepting bribes (Prior, Brennan, and Haines 2001).
sider and express their opinion upon the proposed taxes before they became law...I shall...avoid as far as possible controverted topics, and confine myself to such plain and undoubted facts as are necessary for my justification (1860:2).

Both Clive and Trevelyan wrote at key moments in the English East India Company’s (hereafter EIC or Company) history. Clive wrote as the EIC began its transition from a mercantile trading company to the territorial sovereign of the Indian subcontinent. And Trevelyan wrote as the EIC was being formally incorporated into the British state after the Company’s own Indian forces had risen in widespread rebellion.

At their respective moments at the opening and closing of the EIC’s territorial power in India, both men also told stories about the motives that explained and justified their action. They did so, however, in radically different ways. Clive made careful reference to indigenous custom (“the known and usual custom of Eastern princes”) and to the other Englishmen (“I was one amongst the many”) who also took emoluments. His claim to be acting in the EIC’s best interests rested on his fortune already having been made, and the only legitimate restraint he could imagine was an injunction from one “who had the power to make me one.” Trevelyan, meanwhile, aimed his appeal to “the people of England” as a whole and reduced Clive’s signal reference to indigenous customs to a need “to make themselves acquainted with the interests of their important charge.” While Clive’s agency on behalf of the Company existed so long as it was compatible with his fortune, Trevelyan claimed willingness to act for “the Government and Parliament of England” “at all risks to myself, and at any amount of personal sacrifice” with no mention of remuneration at all. Finally, Trevelyan believed, clearly, that his case could be made through a neutral appeal to the “plain and undoubted facts” rather than Clive’s insistence on a hierarchy of duties and the importance of local practices.

The contrast between how Clive and Trevelyan describe their behavior—and the senses of duty that each justification implies—illustrates a crucial shift in the EIC’s regimes of moral order in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. By “regimes of moral order,” I mean both the vocabularies of motive (Mills 1940) colonial officials used to describe and justify their action as well as the meaningful logic which organized the Company’s structures they inhabited. As I will show, the heart of this shift was a process of abstraction: EIC officials stopped referencing their Anglo-Indian peers’ behavior, and started making much more general justifications for what they were doing, and by extension, how the colonial state in India ought to be arranged and behave. In other words, Clive’s justification was deeply embedded in his immediate social structure and relied on the behavior of his peers; Trevelyan’s, on the other hand, derived its force from an abstract set of principles which derived from seemingly natural moral requirements.

When officials began referencing these abstract principles to justify their behavior, then, they took their moral worlds out of their immediate context in colonial India and rested them on claims they said were objective and natural. This was more than just a formal shift—it implied a change in officials’ moral action, or the way they they organized their own lives and struggles within the Company's administration around these new moral regimes. The moral behavior of a man like Clive, deeply contextualized as he was, could change in ways that looked protean to outsiders; that of a man like Trevelyan, because he claimed to be acting as the mouthpiece for
unchanging, objective natural rules—his “plain and undoubted facts”—could not. The shift in moral regimes described here thus also meant the rise of officials’ moral consistency over time and across social settings as a crucial stake in their struggles with one another.

If regimes of moral order came to be abstract sets of principles that were (at least imagined to be) universal and capable of motivating consistent moral behavior by colonial officials in the EIC, what was their content? Put differently, in the service of what ideals was a Company administrator’s behavior supposed to be morally consistent? As regimes of moral order grew increasingly abstract over the course of the late 18th century, officials in India grasped at utopian ideas articulated by Enlightenment intellectuals—of a disembodied, independent “state,” “society,” and “economy” (see Figure 1). Because EIC administration in India was divided into relatively self-contained regions, called “Presidencies,” moreover, each Presidency experienced its own struggle within the Company’s administration over which of these disembodied entities would predominate. In Bengal, the state became relatively paramount (winning out over society and the economy), whereas society was most important in Madras and Bombay (though in Bombay the economy was briefly ascendant and the notion of society blended with that of the state).

In sum, studying shifts in regimes of moral order in British Colonial India sheds light on a set of important problems. It highlights the role of colonialism in state formation, how institutional transformation occurs within complex organizations, how social fields originate and persist, and the links between the moral demands of abstract sets of social principles and the treatment of state, society, and economy as objective, thing-like entities standing above the struggles of particular, concrete people.

To develop and explanation for the shifts I have described, in the remainder of this introduction I first present a brief general history of the EIC. I then describe what the EIC is a case of—the differentiation of disembodied social spaces in modernity—and I present a model explaining the shift in regimes described above centering around the role of corruption discourse and intra-organizational politics. Next, I discuss why I selected the EIC to study this phenomenon and close by outlining the structure of the dissertation’s substantive chapters.

A Brief History of the EIC

The Company of Merchants Trading to the East Indies (commonly referred to as the “East India Company”) was founded in 1600 as a joint-stock organization aimed at exchanging bullion exported from England for textiles, spices and tea in India, China, and Indonesia and marketing them in Britain. Though it initially tried (and failed) to compete with the Dutch East Indies company for a toehold in the Java spice trade, the EIC negotiated rights with the Mughal emperor in India for trading rights along the west coast of the subcontinent at Surat in 1612. By 1700, the British had expanded their Indian establishment to three main factories: Bombay, along the west coast; Fort Saint George in Madras along the southeastern tip of the subcontinent; and Fort

---

3 This section synthesizes a variety of sources, chief among them Lawson (1993) and the multiple publications by H.V. Bowen and P. J. Marshall cited in the bibliography.
William (later Calcutta) in the Bay of Bengal. Each factory was a trading post with limited sovereignty and restricted trading privileges in the Indian interior. The EIC broadly aimed to exploit stable trade based on statutes granted ultimately from the Mughal emperor.

The English crown briefly deregulated trade with India in the late 17th century but the Company was granted a new monopoly charter in 1709. The charter’s terms demanded that the EIC float all of its liquid capital as a loan to the British state, meaning that the Company had to turn to public debt financing for its operations. EIC bonds, in addition to stock in the company, subsequently became a foundational investment for British capital markets.

The EIC’s factories were staffed by merchants. By 1751, they were at least 16 years old when entering the service, were drawn from a combination of merchant and lower-tier aristocratic second-sons—though more educated Scotsmen and children of clergy began to appear over the 18th century—and received basic training in mathematics and accounting. They were, however, expected to gain most of their experience in apprenticeship as “writers” in India and were confined to a rigid hierarchy of promotion by seniority. Mortality was extremely high; of those who joined between 1747 and 1756, almost three-quarters died before returning to Britain (Marshall 1997).

EIC servants were poorly paid until the administrative reforms at the end of the 18th century, but were encouraged to supplement their income by “country trade.” The EIC’s monopoly was essentially one of shipping—it controlled the movements of goods back to England and restricted shipping of private cargoes back to London—but its servants were free to trade anywhere East of the Cape of Good Hope and to invest money through local agents, and doing so became an assumed part of their remuneration. The country trade became a key inducement for Europeans to serve in India, and Indian appointments formed a key node in the network of political patronage that dominated British domestic politics throughout the 18th century and well into the 19th.

In the second half of the 18th century, the Company gained sovereignty over enormous territory (see Maps 1 and 2) in India and consequently experienced a major transformation in its organizational structure and relationship to the British state. The causes for the Company’s territorial expansion are complicated, but they amount to the intertwining of four processes: (1) commercial competition among European trading companies escalating because of (2) the seven years’ war and colliding with (3) territorial competition among indigenous Indian states resulting from (4) the long-term political destabilization of the Mughal empire. Thus, in 1756, goaded by the French, a loose vassal of the Mughal emperor, the Nawab of Bengal, captured Calcutta and expelled the British. The governor of Bengal subsequently defeated the Nawab at the battle of Plassey in 1757 and replaced him with a friendly ruler. After the battle of Buxar in 1764, the Mughal emperor granted the *diwani*, or legal right to collect taxes and de facto sovereignty, to the EIC for the whole province of Bengal. Meanwhile, in South India competition with the French through proxy Indian states likewise led to the subordination of the Nizam of Hyderabad.

---

4 This position was akin to a clerk; writers literally copied out the Company’s voluminous correspondence in triplicate for record-keeping and to guarantee that messages got through.
as a client to the EIC in 1761 and a similar relationship with the Nawab of Arcot. By 1765, therefore, the EIC ruled over substantial portions of the Southern and Eastern India. EIC territorial expansion accelerated after the diwani, in spite of orders to the contrary from London, because the Company was drawn to an even greater degree into complicated interstate relationships that characterized late 18th century India.

The EIC’s new territorial possessions were enormous. Bengal, for example, had 20 million people and yielded an estimated 3 million pounds in revenue. (By contrast, the population of the British Isles in 1750 is estimated at about 10 million.) By 1818, when the British defeated its last Indian state competitor, EIC revenues in India were estimated at 15 million pounds per year, equivalent to a quarter of the domestic British states’ at the time.

The new territorial possessions did not, however, return a financial windfall to Company shareholders. Instead, a complex fiscal crisis began in India and telegraphed back to London through the EIC’s complex international credit network. Fiscal crisis was compounded by increased civil administrative and military expenses in India as well as the costs of the Seven Years and Napoleonic wars. Consequently, the Company repeatedly defaulted on payments to the British state beginning in the 1770s and was bailed out to avoid a general bond failure.

The EIC’s actions in India and its financial health thus became an increasing object of public and government scrutiny beginning in the second half of the 18th century. Parliament investigated the EIC’s administration of India through rival committees, both of which explored and publicized the “unjust” government practiced by EIC officials and portrayed them as rapacious scoundrels bent on personal gain at the expense of Indian peasants. These investigations culminated in Pitt’s India Act of 1784, which established a Board of Control, appointed by parliament, with veto power over decisions and correspondence between the EIC and administrators in India. The EIC’s Court of Directors retained power to appoint policy-level Indian administrators, but in practice they could only veto of the Board’s personnel choices. Moreover, there were significant civil service reforms after 1784, including bureaucratization measures, anti-corruption campaigns, and the founding of a Civil Service training college at Haileybury in England. The Directors, however, controlled patronage over lower-level civil service and military appointments until the 1850s.

After its reorganization, the EIC retained commercial monopoly in India until 1813 and in China until 1834. It continued military operations and territorial expansion throughout the subcontinent. However, after the Sepoy rebellion of 1857, in which Indian soldiers, or sepoys, employed by the EIC rebelled and attempted to reinstall the Mughal emperor, the EIC was formally disbanded and its administrative functions were taken over by the British state in 1858.

**Differentiated Social Spheres as Regimes of Moral Order**

Classical social theorists saw the emergence of differentiated social spheres as a central feature of western capitalist modernity. For Weber (Weber 1978:I, 578), “the increasing systematization
and rationalization of social relationships and of their substantive contents” characteristic of modernity drove the rise of autonomous “value spheres” which increasingly conflicted with the ethic of universalistic religion. Durkheim and Simmel, meanwhile, each worked out the consequences of an increasingly complex division of labor: this process either transformed the basis for social solidarity from a “mechanical” to an “organic” foundation (Durkheim 1997), or its concomitant urbanization inaugurated new tension between people’s impulses towards conformity or individuality (Simmel 1971). Marx and Engels, finally, saw the dialectic of class conflict as generating alternative ideological frameworks rooted in bourgeois and proletarian relationships to the means of production (Tucker 1989:726).

Contemporary social scientists have largely turned away from such totalizing explanations for modernity, however, and instead have begun to ask how “local social orders” (Fligstein 2001:108) emerge. At this level, the question asked by classical social theorists—where do differentiated social spheres come from?—has become “how do institutions and social fields order social life”? These social orders, usually seen to have been inherited from past social conventions or constructed by institutional “entrepreneurs” in the macro-context of exogenous social shocks and locally-disordered social spaces (Bourdieu 1996; Dimaggio 1982), turn out to have profound consequences for a variety of outcomes. They structure economic development (Acemoglu, Johnson, and Robinson 2001; Greif 2006; North 1981), political regimes (Esping-Anderson 1990; Steinmo 1993; Steinmo, Thelen, and Longstreth 1992), and even aesthetic judgment (Bourdieu 1984).

Although there are many subtle and careful explanations for why institutional orders emerge in the way they do, there are three broad classes of explanation. The first envisions social orders emerging spontaneously from actors’ conscious or unconscious competition with one another (Bourdieu 1996; White 2008). By this view, when interaction among actors becomes sufficiently dense, they begin sharing a common structuring principle when then stratifies their social interactions.5 The second envisions autonomous social spaces as the result of conscious ideological projects, perhaps most famously of the economy as an autonomous space in the 19 century (K. Polanyi 1944:141–157). In this case, forms of social order that begin as ideological projects are successfully implemented or not according to their proponents’ ability to successfully marshal the political forces necessary to realize them. The third class of explanation gives an “eventful” account, showing how actors re-make institutional orders at moments of crisis and uncertainty (Lieberman 2003; Sewell 2005b). Here the emphasis is on how short periods of social conflict lead to enduring institutional legacies.

My dissertation builds on and extends each of these three types of explanation. With the first strand of explanation, it focuses on the emergence of deeply-seated and sometimes uncon-

5 For example, Bourdieu describes (1996:68) the new, autonomous principles of the literary field and how it stratifies social relations among its members: “The calls to order and the sanctions...are the automatic product of the competition that particularly pits the consecrated authors, those most exposed to the seduction of worldly compromises and temporal honours which are always suspected of being compensations for renunciations or repudiations, against the newly arrived, who by their position are less subject to solicitations of the outside world, and who tend to contest established authorities in the same of values (disinterestedness, purity, etc.) which the latter proclaim, or are called on to impose.”
sciously acting moral worldviews, which Bourdieu has called *doxa*. But with the second perspective, it also attempts to grasp how these worldviews become systematized ideological projects, and indeed, what effects result from that transformation. Finally, it also seeks to delve into the concrete moments of social uncertainty and political struggle in which actors creatively remade the institutions they inhabited. Throughout, by virtue of the empirical setting of its analysis, it strives to keep the emergence of recognizably modern social orders in view.

*What Are Regimes of Moral Order?*

Regimes of moral order are the social institutions that actors use to judge the propriety of their action and of the organizations they inhabit. Like other institutions, they are durable patterns of behavior that individual actors experience as “social facts” (Durkheim 1982) which have “a being independent of our own volition” (Berger and Luckmann 1967:1). But unlike more formal institutions like written laws, contracts, or regulations, regimes of moral order are a particularly “deep” kind of informal institution (Taylor 1985:23) because they compose a critical element of the social background that structures actors’ perceptions of what is interesting and valuable in a given social setting (Biernacki 2005; Brubaker 1992; Dobbin 1994). As a consequence, they imply models of agency (Adams 1999; Meyer and Jepperson 2000) and shape the forms of organizations that rely on them for legitimacy (Meyer and Rowan 1977).

Regimes of moral order are defined not only by their institutional depth, but also their substance. They are composed of what Charles Taylor calls “strong evaluations”: judgments concerning “the quality of our motivations…[they are] concerned with the qualitative worth of different desires” (Taylor 1985:16). Strong evaluations form both moral self-understandings—telling us who we are as actors and what we find valuable—and provide means of evaluating decisions for which there is no possibility of finding common ground but which still imply judgments of value and worth (Taylor 1985:24–25). Moreover, actors incorporate these strong evaluations into vocabularies of motive (Mills 1940) to articulate justifications for their behavior to one another. Because these justifications provide more-or-less stable forecasts of future behavior, they serve as a means to coordinate action in groups.

Vocabularies of motive would seem arbitrary to actors were it not for another important characteristic of regimes of moral order: to the extent that they are effective, they seem to describe deep truths about how the world is in both a factual and moral sense. That is, when incorporated into a regime of moral order, objects feel at once deeply affective yet still part of the external world (Geertz 1973:127). Two of the most important characteristics of modernity are the proliferation of a multitude of various “sub-universes,” each with its own apparent facticity; and modern efforts to rationally systematize the laws governing these objective spaces of social life (Berger and Luckmann 1967:82–92). But even given the knowledge that multiple regimes of moral

---

6 Of the numerous definitions of the term “institution,” I employ Berger and Luckmann’s (1967:54) broad but unusually jargonistic one: “reciprocal typifications of habitualized actions by types of actors.” This has the virtue of avoiding tautologous definitions like Thelen and Steinmo’s (1992:2): “the whole range of state and societal institutions that shape how political actors define their interests and that structure their relations of power to other groups.”
order may exist (Taylor 2007), the existence of any particular regime that is “live” for a given person implies the duality of it at once being moral and factual (James 1897).

Schemas Into Resources: Vocabularies to Regimes in Imperial Administration

If regimes of moral order are crucial institutions that shape how actors view themselves, how they view the world around them, and provide vocabularies of motive actors use to communicate, how do they change? Again like other institutions, regimes of moral order transform because of actors entrepreneurial behavior in the face of both long-term and abrupt structural change (Thelen 2003). Using their social skill to manipulate these opportunities (Fligstein 2001), actors creatively transpose and make use of cultural schemas and frameworks in new settings to develop novel forms of organization and institutional frames (Biernacki 2005).

Yet at the same time that regimes of moral order coordinate action among actors, they also serve as a terrain for political struggle. Indeed, to borrow Sewell’s vocabulary (Sewell 2005a:131–133), the institutionalization of moral understandings into regimes of moral order can be thought of as a transformation from schemas—generalizable and transposable frameworks actors use to understand the social world—into resources—natural and social objects that actors use “to enhance and maintain power.” Conceptualized this way, the question becomes: how do vocabularies of motive come to behave as objectified social resources, like other material instruments of power?

Preparing to answer this question in the context of British India means delving more deeply into colonialism as a form of state organization. Although there are multiple elaborations of this minimal definition, colonial rules consists of the projection of power from one polity, usually called the metropole, over another, usually called the colony (Doyle 1986). As such, the characteristic organizational problem of imperial rule is the presence of physical and social distance. The literal, physical distance between colony and metropole (in the 18 century, it took an average of a year round trip to communicate between Britain and India) meant that rules could only hope to loosely control colonial administrators, usually in the form of retrospective censure. Moreover, it also meant that positive prescriptions issued from the metropole could only take the form of general principles, and hence had to be interpreted and elaborated by officials in the colonies. Thus, at core colonialism required rulers to delegate authority to agent who tended to function with a wide latitude and whose punishment for disobedience could only be meted out well after the fact.

The tension in colonial administration is an extreme form of the principle-agent dilemma inherent in all bureaucracies (Adams 1996). And like other forms of bureaucratic rule, colonial officials develop forms of specialized knowledge inherent in their remoteness from metropolitan authorities. These forms of personal knowledge (M. Polanyi 1962; Schutz 1970:81) in colonial

7 Although Sewell is skeptical of language’s power on this count (2005a:147–148), he also argues that when codified language can function as a resource (2005a:131).
8 Since there is no agreement about the meaning of the labels “colonialism” and “imperialism,” I use both terms and their cognates for the sake of linguistic variety.
settings typically comprise claims to specialized knowledge of the colonial societies being governed (Said 1979; Steinmetz 2008) but also derive from the structural parochialization of administrators’ careers into particular groups and regions (Anderson 1991). The most extreme variant of this tension over the knowledge of indigenous societies appears in the imperial form of indirect rule, in which colonial rulers themselves attempt to co-opt local elites into the colonial apparatus (thus gaining agents who appear extremely knowledgeable about colonial societies) at the cost of control over the specifics of their behavior and the internal details of colonial policy.

Because they are organizationally suspended between the metropolitan authorities they serve and the colonial societies they attempt to govern, colonial administrators have a distinctive style of administrative conflict (See Figure 2). Their conflicts tend to take the shape of appeal to metropolitan authorities, since those authorities hold the power of retrospective censure and even recall (Go 2000). As with political conflicts more generally, when particular factions of colonial administrators lose a round of conflict with local competitors, they attempt to escalate the conflict by attempting to mobilize sympathetic elements of the metropolitan authorities (Schattschneider 1975; Snow, Rochford, and Worden 1986). If the original, losing colonial faction’s attempts to appeal to the metropole are successfully quashed or go unanswered, the conflict remains locally confined. But if they successfully mobilize allies to their aid, then their local opponents themselves will seek to escalate the conflict further.

The two core elements of this model of escalating colonial administrative conflicts are who colonial officials try to appeal to, and what kinds of claims they make to attempt to mobilize observers to the conflict to their side. There is a relationship between these two elements. When colonial officials communicate their grievances to metropolitan authorities, they use vocabularies of motive to communicate the reasons behind their behavior and ascribe motives to their opponents. These vocabularies, as suggested above in the discussion of regimes of moral order, can either be experiential, relying on references to the behavior of peers, or they can be abstract, referring to moral principles from transcendent sources (Berger and Luckmann 1967:34–46). For example, recall the contrast between Clive and Trevelyan’s vocabularies of motive: Clive justified himself in terms of his peers behavior in India, while Trevelyan referenced the abstract “government and parliament of England.” In other words, in their appeals to London, Indian officials could frame the propriety of their behavior in terms of moral understandings based on shared concrete experience, or in terms of abstract ethical principles.

Experiential and abstract forms of moral claims depend for their success or failure on who they are addressed to. When the addressee shares similar experiences with the claimant, or at least the local social order the claimant inhabits is intelligible to the addressee, an experiential claim will make success more likely, because it will draw the claimant and addressee into closer identity. However, when the addressee does not share a well of experience with the claimant, abstract claims are more likely to successfully mobilize them, especially since they form a crucial bridge that aids in making the claimant’s behavior intelligible. Thus as the composition of relevant metropolitan observers to colonial political struggles changes to include those with no previous colonial experience, it becomes more likely that (1) colonial officials will address observers using abstract vocabularies of motive, and (2) that their attempted claims will be recognized.
If escalation of political conflict to the metropole is successful, it can have unpredictable consequences. This is for two main reasons. First, because the claims being made by colonial administrators are received by actors interested in metropolitan politics, they can be enrolled by the receiving actors and put to metropolitan political uses quite different from those intended by the colonial officials themselves. But second, long-term structural changes in the composition of metropolitan politics can change the balance of observers of colonial administrative struggles. This changed balance, in turn, alters the context of escalation to the metropole and can result in significantly different outcomes to the same activity by colonial administrators.

But if the effects of moral claims on metropolitan dynamics are unpredictable from the standpoint of colonial officials, so too are the way those metropolitan dynamics reverberate back to the colonies. As noted, one outcome that was frequently practiced was to simply recall the relevant claimants and promote others from within the colonial setting. But another, more radical solution was to send out a new set of senior administrative agents who, while strongly empowered by metropolitan authorities, were alien to the colonial social world they encountered. In this case, one of their likely courses of action would be to attempt to institutionalize the moral claims that had effectively mobilized metropolitan observers, and to use them as principles of governance that their staffs would have to respond to.

Thus this model specifies how regimes of moral order can emerge out of the circulation of moral claims in the context of administrative conflicts escalating from colonies to involve metropolitan authorities. It has emphasized how this results from the increasing involvement of “inexperienced” metropolitan observers to whom abstract moral claims were more likely to be successful than experiential ones. But it also shows how, because of the two points of agency in both metropolitan (where claims are enrolled into metropolitan political struggles) and colonial settings (where the abstracted claims are used by new administrators as resources in local struggles), the specific contents of the regimes of moral order and their regional colonial locations is contingent.

**Specifying the Model: Empirical and Historiographical Settings**

This model of the emergence of regimes of moral order can be profitably brought to bear on the history of the English East India Company in India. My analysis begins in the 17th century, when the English East India Company operated a few tiny coastal trading posts in the shadow of the Mughal empire. It follows the course of the Company’s increasing territorial and military presence in the middle of the 18th century, and concludes in the middle of the 19th, when as unchallenged territorial hegemon but in the aftermath of a momentous rebellion of its own indigenous military forces, the Company was formally incorporated into the British state.

My analysis concentrates on three facets of this two-and-a-half century history. First, in keeping with the outcome of the model developed above, it traces changes in Indian administrators’ vocabularies of motive before and after the company became a territorial power. I find that in the aftermath of contention in Bombay and Edgar Winter’s coup in Madras in 1665, the Com-
pany institutionalized a regime of moral order centered around the patrimonial example of the Governor’s “publick table” by which the Governor was supposed to model moral virtue to his settlement’s junior inhabitants via his personal conduct. Moreover, even after the growth of Company settlements forbade practically gathering the English community together in a single place, officials in India continued to judge the moral propriety of action in terms of peers close to them in social space.

As the 18th century wore on, however, increasingly disruptive corruption scandals including William Bolts’ deportation from Bengal and the recall and censure of Warren Hastings as well as the Nawab of Arcots’ debts scandal in Madras including the impeachment and death of the governor, Lord Pigot, saw the proliferation of new vocabularies of motive. Instead of asserting the propriety of action by reference to moral examples of peers, these vocabularies instead offered abstract moral foundations for behavior, rooted in economic logic, the logic of sovereignty, or that of an abstract conceptualization of society. In turn, the governors of Bengal, Madras and Bombay used these new vocabularies of motive as resources to construct regimes of moral order and to guide the organizational development of the colonial state after Pitt’s India Act reorganized Company administration in 1784.

Thus the key moment in the emergence of new regimes of moral order in colonial India appears to be the late 18th century, when administrators offered new vocabularies of motive during corruption scandals (see Figure 3 for a summary). I argue that at least since the late 17th century, cross accusations of corruption had been a common tactic among Company administrators engaged in commercial and personal disputes, and that it was also commonplace for these disputes to be referred to London. However, until the latter 18th century, when Company territorialization in India drew increasing attention from the British state itself, the Company was able to keep the escalation of such corruption scandals contained within its organizational apparatus. After the 1760s and 1770s, however, this was no longer possible, and plaintiffs in Indian scandals could and did appeal to the British political community at large. I argue that this decisively changed the nature of the vocabularies of motive they used to describe their own behavior and ascribe morals to others. Unlike the Company’s organizational apparatus, the British political community was not composed of people with direct Indian experience, and as a consequence plaintiffs in corruption scandals were forced to appeal to abstract moral grounds in their vocabularies of motive to attempt to mobilize support.

The changing significance of escalating corruption scandals and the reorganization of Company administration after 1784 connects to changes in the backgrounds of Company officials. Until the 1750s, Company administrators were largely drawn from mercantile classes and it was quite common for officials to move throughout India over the course of their careers. However, as appointments grew increasingly lucrative after the 1750s, the East India Company Directors’ patronage became an important metropolitan political object, and consequently Company writerships and cadetships became sought-after landings not only for the offspring of more prosperous merchant families, but also for the second sons of the gentry and even relatives of the aristocracy. In the mean time, the demands of expanding territorial responsibilities in Madras, Bombay, and Bengal meant that it was increasingly likely that officials would rotate throughout the whole of
India. Instead, after the 1770s they tended to spend their careers in a single presidency. Finally, Pitt’s India Act also had consequences for Indian officials, since it placed the selection of regional Governors and the Governor General in the hands of the newly-formed Government Board of Control. Because of this shift in the Company’s patronage structure, the first governors and governors-general selected under the new system were strangers to India.

Thus my historical analysis explains changes in officials vocabularies of motive and the consequent emergence of regional regimes of moral order in Colonial India in terms of (1) the changing significance of the escalation of colonial corruption scandals and (2) changing backgrounds of colonial officials and the regionalization of their careers. According to the explanation I offer, officials’ vocabularies of motive became abstract because as corruption scandals escalated in the late 18th century, Indian administrators had to explain themselves to those who had never been in India and hence could not understand the propriety of officials’ action in terms of peer behavior. Moreover, these new vocabularies were carried back to India by Governors and Governors-General who themselves had no Indian experience, and consequently used the abstract vocabularies as resources in subsequent administrative struggles. These abstract vocabularies thus were used to construct regimes of moral order, justifying not only the course of policy in different regions of India but also the motivations and behavior of administrators themselves.

This dissertation’s historical analysis takes place in the context of two historiographical debates. The first is over the origin of institutional change within colonial administrations. One camp views colonies as laboratories used to experiment and develop policies and institutional arrangements for late implementation in metropolitan settings (Stokes 1989). In this imagery, institutional innovations began as metropolitan ideological projects radiate out to colonies where they then are either implemented directly or modified to fit local circumstances. Another view, however, sees the development of British colonial institutions as far less ideologically motivated, arguing instead that the apparatus of British rule emerged as officials adopted and modified the local forms of rule they encountered (e.g., Frykenberg 1965). This dissertation aligns with a third strand of this debate, which finds the origins of colonial institutions in the dialogue among colonial administrators themselves, as they sought to make sense of “strange” colonial societies and justify themselves to distant metropolitan authorities (Irschick 1994; J. E. Wilson 2011).

The role of ideological motivation and justification among administrators connects to a second important historiographical debate this dissertation informs. One arm of this debate, geared mostly towards the analysis of political philosophy and economy, insists on ideologies’ influence on imperialism. One strand of this work tends to emphasize the coherence of colonial ideology, if only within the work of particular thinkers struggling to make sense of ongoing political events (Mantena 2007, 2010; Pitts 2005). In this form, ideological systems act as devises of retrospective sense-making, trailing events and attempting to draw them into coherent frameworks. Another view of the importance of ideology embeds it much more deeply in administrative struggles and emphasizes the existence of competing alternatives at the same historical moments, arguing that ideologies also served to motivate the development of particular policies and drove officials’ behavior (Dewey 1993; Guha 1982; Metcalf 1994; Travers 2007). Here ideology serves much more actively to motivate administrative action and government policies, yet at the
same time can be highly fragmented. A second arm of this debate, however, is much more skeptical of the role of ideas than both these lines of work. Mostly focused on the economic and political dimensions of imperialism, this strain usually views ideologies as a whole as a byproduct of economic extraction or the balance-of-power (Cain and Hopkins 1993; Ingram 1992), and on the level of individual administrators tends to view ideological justifications as cynical cover for self-interest (Marshall 1976, 1987).

Of course, this dissertation holds the influence of ideas, and particularly moral judgements, as a central analytic focus. I hope that this focus helps informs the debate about the role of ideology in empire by first specifying concretely what ideology itself means. I hope to show that “ideology,” broadly equivalent to a system of ideas and loosely synonymous with discourse, needs to be decomposed into its constituent elements. Moreover, as I hope my claim that administrators’ vocabularies of motive were systematized into regimes of moral order demonstrates, groups of ideas can be more or less systematic, and symbolic orders can have different foundational references. Indeed, the claim that these variations in the constitution of systems of ideas is enormously consequential for the possible organizational formations of colonialism lies at the very heart of my analysis.

Case Justification

From the standpoint of traditional macro-historical sociology, this dissertation’s focus on a single case appears unorthodox. If the objective is to establish general sociological knowledge from the study of historical processes and events, how can this be done with a case that (to my knowledge) is historically incomparable?

The basic strategy I pursued sought to turn this very uniqueness into an advantage. This strategy has two parts. First, Company colonialism and its transformation as a whole in the late 18th and early 19th century can be analyzed and considered as a whole. Colonial India was one of the first places that an imperial crisis provoked Britain to consider just what it meant to govern “well” after the Glorious revolution in 1688, so it provides a useful terrain to ask what particular stresses and strains of colonial rule and administration generated such anxiety. As such, it stands in comparison to the political apparatus of and elite self-representations within the domestic British (and here, primarily English) state. Thus, like Adams (2007), the goal is to use a unique historical case to expose sociological phenomena that might otherwise remain obscure.

Beyond simple exposure of phenomena, the second goal of selecting the EIC for study is to develop an analytical model. My argument is that the differentiation of the state, society, and economy as ethically objective spheres in colonial India resulted from administrators embroiled in corruption scandals trying to make their positions legible to outsiders. These claims were successful or unsuccessful depending on the Company’s domestic organizational position, which

---

9 While it is of course true that a huge number of empires have existed, and also true that almost all European states pursued some strategy of chartering “merchant empires,” the unique blend of territorial power, commercial imperative, and rule over a populous, well-developed colony prior to military industrialization was unique. This is especially true when the legal and intellectual context of this enterprise are considered.
was indirectly transformed by the Seven Years War. To substantiate this model, I decomposed “Colonial India” into its regional parts—its presidencies, which were the substantive, organizational, and logical units at the time. Furthermore, within each of the presidencies, I compared the way corruption scandals and organizational contention worked out both before and after the Company’s shift in domestic position. In other words, I used subsidiary parts (the presidencies) of my larger case (EIC colonialism in India) to substantiate the elements of my analytical model (of the differentiation of ethical spheres).

Roadmap

As it unfolds, the analysis outlined above follows this course. Chapter 1 begins by examining the metropolitan context of Company administration. It argues that 18 century Britain was governed by an elite for whom politeness was the signal means of judging the propriety of action. Originally proffered by Shaftesbury as a solution to the political fallout of the Glorious Revolution, politeness as a moral sensibility depended for judgment on proximate actors in social space. This perspective, adopted by moral philosophers including Adam Smith in the form of the “impartial spectator,” was the core vocabulary of motive among 18th century English elites.

This analysis of vocabularies of motive in 18th Century England is coupled with an examination of the EIC’s structural position. Over the course of the 18th century, increasing numbers of people with no Indian experience became financially and political interested in the Company’s well-being. Moreover, those with Indian experience were perceived as an insurgent political threat through the figure of the “nabob” invading parliament, while the EIC became increasingly intertwined with domestic British state finances. In the aftermath of corruption scandals within the Indian administration, Pitt’s India Act of 1784 decisively changed the relationship between state and Company. Decisions over political matters were placed under the supervision of the British state and new administrators without Indian experience were sent to senior posts in Bengal, Madras, and Bombay.

Each of the following chapters traces how these structural changes in the Company’s domestic position transformed the “impartial spectator” in each of the Company’s three administrative regions. In Chapter 2, I trace how Madras was rocked by an ongoing corruption scandal from the late 1760s until the 1780s. Here corruption involved the duality of officials’ private and public roles, and it took the form of colonial administrators loaning money in a private capacity to indigenous Company rivals, especially the Nawab of Arcot, Muhammad Ali Khan al Walajah. The so-called “Nawab of Arcot’s Debts” scandal saw the Governor of Madras, George Pigot deposed and dying while under house arrest, and as would be the case in Bengal, the escalation of the scandal to London. But in Madras the abstract moral foundations offered by the plaintiffs were between the state and “society,” construed as the rights-endowed English community in Madras. After the scandal, succeeding Governors of the presidency—especially George Macartney—established a regime of moral order that made ethical demands on administrators and founded an organizational regime for the colonial state.
I next turn to Bengal in Chapter 3. After the *diwani* from the Mughal emperor granted the British administrative responsibilities in 1765, two major corruption scandals grew from Company servants’ ambiguous roles as private traders or as public officials. First, William Bolts was deported from Bengal, subsequently suing the Governor, Harry Verelst, in London. Second, and more famously, Warren Hastings, the first Governor-General of India, was recalled and impeached for abuse of his power. While Verelst, Bolts, and Hastings clearly judged the propriety of their action by reference to their peers while in India, over the course of the corruption scandals they offered vocabularies of motive based on the state and the economy as abstract moral sources. Moreover, I show how the abstract notion of sovereignty was carried back to Bengal by Hastings’ successors, including Charles Cornwallis and especially Richard Wellesley, and used as a justification not only for official discipline, but also for the construction of a powerful colonial state apparatus.

In Chapter 4, I contrast the cases of Bengal and Madras with Bombay. Whereas Madras and Bengal experience wrenching corruption scandals between the 1760s and 1780s, Bombay was a comparative administrative backwater until the 1790s and early 1800s. The chapter focuses on the controversy between Robert Rickards, a junior member of the Bombay council, and Jonathan Duncan, the Governor and former protégé of Charles Cornwallis. Their increasingly acrimonious relationship led to Rickards being indicted for corruption and recalled in 1811, but his success at mobilizing metropolitan support during the campaigns for the 1813 Charter Act ratified his position. In the aftermath of Rickards’ triumph and Duncan’s death, Bombay’s economic policy and its administrators’ vocabularies of motive briefly reflected laissez-faire principles under Sir Evan Nepean, but this course was reversed in favor of a blend of state and society by Mountstuart Elphinstone.

In the conclusion, I summarize the dissertation’s argument and then reflect on its contribution to historiography and sociological understandings of state formation, the emergence of fields, and the link between culture, knowledge, and moral action.
Chapter 1: “The Most Complete Lesson of Self-Command”
East India Politics and Elite Sociability in 18th Century Britain

I believe Man (besides Skin, Flesh, Bones, &c. that are obvious to the Eye) to be a Compound of various Passions, that all of them, as they are provoked and come uppermost, govern him by turns, whether he will or no.


The man within the breast, the abstract and ideal spectator of our sentiments and conduct, requires often to be awakened and put in mind of his duty, by the presence of the real spectator: and it is always from that spectator, from whom we can expect the least sympathy and indulgence, that we are likely to learn the most complete lesson of self-command.


Introduction

This essay works backwards from a puzzle about the confusion East India Company administrators experienced in the late 18th Century to propose how the wider world of 18th century British power, patronage, and policy was knit together. The initial puzzle is that in the 1780s, increasing government intervention into the affairs of the East India Company brought a class of “new men” to India. Increasingly drawn from the middle and even upper reaches of the gentry, well-educated, and ambitious, these men struggled with older Company servants to establish control over the fate of Company policy as they undertook administrative reforms. Matters of principle were certainly at stake, but these conflicts were also animated by accusations of duplicity, corruption, and even cowardice. Why?

This seemingly straightforward question quickly grows complicated. Most answers fall into two categories: either Indian administration represented a ground for large-scale ideological conflict (Guha 1982) or the passion of the conflict is explained as a result of private interest. Both of these perspectives grasp part of the reality of late-18 century administrative conflict within the Company, but I attempt to steer between them. Drawing from institutional perspectives on the relationship between ideas and policy (Katznelson 2003; Weir and Skocpol 1985), I stress the conflict among officials’ styles of engaging with the Company—and British state’s—network of power and patronage. The advantage of this focus is that it can simultaneously capture not only how ideas become policy and how administrative conflict affects these outcomes, but also how the world of administrative conflict in India was both embedded within and different from the wider frame of British imperial administration (Bayly 1989; Marshall 2005; Travers 2007).10

10 For two social-scientific perspectives on these links, see Go (2000) and Steinmetz (2007).
Concretely, this means asking how administrators judged the propriety of their own and others' behavior. These judgments were a crucial foundation and background to the ideological conflicts and administrative politics in the Company, and two connected aspects of them concern us here. How the judgments were presented to people was critical, because they constituted administrators' self-presentation, and hence the ways in which they attempted to appeal to others for both personal and professional support (Goffman 1974; McLean 2007). But it is no less important to what these judgments referred. Modernity is characterized by the rise of disentangled, abstract, and foundational spheres of judgment, yet the rise of these spheres, especially ones that implied the existence of a stable, transposable self thought to provide the authentic motivation for behavior, was a fraught, long-term process (Taylor 1989, 2004). Thus one of this chapter's motivating claims is that the conflict among Company administrators in the late 18th century represented, at least in part, the collision of two different kinds of moral judgment: an older one, which was based on a heavily contextualized sense of moral propriety and which rested on (at least apparent) behavioral conformity; and a newer sense of propriety that rested on the judgment of an “impartial spectator” who resided, as Adam Smith noted, simultaneously in the gaze of credible observers and “the man in the breast.”

The genealogy of this struggle between understandings of moral propriety is complex, and stretches from India back through Britain's long 18th century. In this chapter, I attempt to understand how this struggle pulled together important aspects Britain's elite society: the patronage network that spanned church, government, and the East India Company; the self-representation of social elites who sought and disposed of patronage; and both high- and low-intellectual efforts to grapple with the understandings of moral propriety and senses of self that these self-presentations represented.

Over the course of the 18th century, these aspects of elite society came together into two constellations. The first constellation, which ran broadly from the aftermath of the Glorious Revolution to the dissolution of Whig hegemony in the 1750s and 1760s, managed the connection between patronage, self-presentation, and moral self-understanding in terms of “politeness” which—even in its antipodal formulation of “vice”—presumed that the propriety of action was derived from the shared assumptions of proximate actors in social space. Not only was this view characteristic of the way the EIC attempted to manage its administrators into the 18th century and what we know of the self-presentations of those Anglo-Indian adventurers who moved through the permeable membrane between company service and Indigenous- and self-interest, but this kind of assumption about people's informal institutions of moral judgment also underwrote solutions to the “problem of order” of enormous intellectual concern.

This nexus began to crumble, though, when subjected to pressure from a number of directions. In England, increasing pressure from the press, politics conducted “out of doors,” and the decline of the ruling faction of Whigs during the 1750s and 1760s at transformed the system of patronage and disordered elite perceptions of conduct. This crisis, though, ran parallel to efforts in moral philosophy to remake the foundations of judgment. This reformulation emphasized the foundation of judgment in man's “natural,” universal moral sense and proposed the unity of
moral authenticity across domains of agency. Yet at the same time, these developments did not abandon contextual judgment; indeed, they culminated in Smith's “impartial spectator,” who drew judgments from both the gaze of legitimate, disinterested observers and the “man in the breast.” Thus, the possibility of autonomous moral foundation to political action was introduced to the world of 18th Century British and Indian administrative struggle.

The First Constellation: The Career of Politeness

British elites constructed their moral self-understandings and self-presentations as part of a broader effort to reconstitute a political order that seemed shattered after the 17th century's religious and political conflict. Uncertainty also stemmed from economic instability.

Political uncertainty, of course, began in the decades immediately following the Glorious Revolution of 1688, “a coup d’état undertaken by an adventurous foreign prince [William of Orange] and his mercenary army, supported by local aristocracies” (Hayton 2002:36). Against the lingering shadow of the passionate religious sectarianism that had partly motivated the English Civil War (Clark 2000:43–66) and internal military threats from Catholic Jacobites (which culminated in unsuccessful rebellions in 1715, 1719, and 1745), the Whigs (who had supported the Glorious Revolution) and the Tories (who had opposed it) sought to justify their participating in a new political order which centralized parliamentary sovereignty counterbalancing the monarchy. The Tories gravitated into the orbit of Bolingbroke, who struggled to justify supporting for Hanoverian regime, while the Whigs thought, according to one of their chief propagandists, Anthony Ashley Cooper, the third earl of Shaftesbury, that the Glorious Revolution had removed “the Credit of a Court” and “the Awfulness of a Church” as sources of legitimate order (quoted in Klein 1996:48; also see Colley 1992:196–204). Moreover, while many made claims to the Glorious Revolution's had definitively installed liberty and property as the governing principles of British politics, in reality the restoration of monarchy, and particularly the Hannoverian accession in 1714, represented an effort to sidestep not only clarity on the precise nature of parliamentary relationship to the crown (since there was no constitution) and thus avoid the most radical implications of 1688 (Owen 1976:94–96). Indeed, both Whig and Tory used the language of liberty and property to very different purposes over the first half of the 18 century even as concrete differences between the two groups were supplanted by the more vital cleavage of those with and without access to the crown (Brewer 1976).

These anxieties over the foundations of legitimate social order was compounded by the perceived erosion of the lesser gentry’s social and economic position. In the first half of the 18th century, land taxes levied for war caused steady consolidation of landed estates into larger and larger units, piquing the anxiety of largely Catholic gentry shut out of the emerging English fiscal-military state (Bourne 1986; Brewer 1990; Kramnick 1968:Ch. 3). The lesser gentry vented anxiety in two directions: towards the wasteful luxury that beneficiaries of wartime spending exhibited, thus driving up the cost of competitive consumption and, through mercantilist reasoning, deflating the value of land; and the new fiscal relations that moved the locus of capital from land to the Bank of England, public debt, and joint-stock companies (Kramnick 1968:63–83;
But in the face of these anxieties, after the Hannoverian succession the whigs installed a political order that endured for nearly 50 years. Based around upholding the ill-defined “principles of 1688” and defending a constitution whose content no one could agree, this order rested on whig ministers' ability to convince the king that Jacobitism was a real threat to his rule and “manage” parliament through a vast network of state-provided offices and pensions (Black 1990:48–51; Perkin 1969:38–56). Though the extent that this practice of management actually influenced voting on specific policies is dubious (Namier 1957; O’Gorman 1989; Owen 1976:Ch. 5; Plumb 1967), there is little doubt that all members of parliament sought at least some preference from their seats. Elections, after all, were expensive even though rarely contested, and a stint in the commons was an expected vocation for the eldest sons of the British political and social elite (Namier 1957:2–4; Owen 1976). But the patronage network extended well beyond parliament, linking British elites together both horizontally and vertically. Horizontally, it bound British merchant, church, military and political elites together because it was common for siblings in the same families to occupy patronage positions in each domain. For example, a wealthy gentleman could send his younger sons into church, army, and East India Company positions while his eldest inherited the family’s estate (R. Porter 1990:56). And likewise, a sitting member of parliament was likely to have extended family members occupying military, ecclesiastical, or colonial positions. Vertically, it linked elites to social subordinates via petty positions the elites controlled, and occupants of powerful positions could expect to be bombarded with supplicating requests from “friends.”

Thus although British elites in the first half of the 18 century faced multiple economic, political, and social uncertainties, they created a fragile yet stable political order bound together by the defense of property and an extensive patronage network. But what kind of self-presentations held the system together as elites traversed the diverse domains of politics, military service, church, and merchant occupations as they attempted to navigate the anxieties of their age? The dominant answer in the 18th century was “politeness.”

As it was to be understood in the 18th century, politeness began as an explicitly political attempt to justify Whig participation in government in the aftermath of the glorious revolution and to knit together the ideological strands of elite society into some cohesive form. Along with mainstream Whigs such as Addison and Steele, politeness was most articulately advocated by Shaftesbury. Shaftesbury unified two seemingly opposed sources: the courtly “manners” discourse traditionally associated with French politesse; and the ruggedly independent civic humanism characteristic of the “country” opposition (consisting of both Tories and opposition Whigs) to the new Whig

---

11 Langford notes that this disagreement remained within the bounds of a discourse on liberty and property; what was at stake was the kind of property that best secured Elites' political independence and virtue.

12 For example, Edmund Burke's cousin William served briefly in India and acted as an agent in London on behalf of the Rajah of Tanjore (see E. Burke 1981:5–11).

13 The depth that this patronage network reached was evident during the “massacre of the Pelhamite innocents” (an administrative purge in 1762 discussed below), which showed that the Duke of Newcastle's patronage extended down to the official position of “Hawker and Pedlar,” occupied by a Mr. Coates in Sussex (see Namier 1961:408). For examples of incessant requests for patronage, see (Namier 1957:402–425).
regime—as he paradoxical declared, “all politeness is owing to liberty” (Klein 1989).

This reconciliation between two competing impulses—individual liberty and behavioral conformity to social norms—was justified in Shaftesbury's mind because people were naturally sociable, and by consequence creating the conditions for sociable, pleasant interaction took priority over the pursuit of individual urges and passions. Politeness therefore stressed the “art of pleasing in company,” and argued that moderate, urbane discourse would lead to social order, intellectual creativity, and the realization of human virtue. As Shaftesbury put the point,

We polish one another, and rub off our Corners and rough Sides by a sort of amicable Collision. To restrain this, is inevitably to bring a Rust upon Mens Understandings. 'Tis a destroying of Civility, Good Breeding, and even Charity itself, under pretence of maintaining it (quoted in Klein 1996:48).

Formulated in this way, politeness privileged form over content and contextual sociability over what Shaftesbury criticized as the abstract egoism characteristic of Locke and Hobbes' natural law perspectives. But perhaps because of its protean formalism, politeness became an organizing metaphor for a wide swath of elite cultural behavior in the first half of the 18 century in Britain, touching literature, artistic production, philosophy and science, and even architecture.

But although politeness' relational quality escapes easy substantive definition, the fact that in the 18 century it generally came to mean “that je ne sais quoi which distinguished the innate gentleman’s understanding of what made for civilized conduct” (Langford 1992:71) gave it advantages. For one thing, it left the definition of precisely who was and was not a gentleman to a matter of performance and behavior, meaning that anyone who could behave politely could gain admittance to Britain's 18 century elite social structure, constructed around a nearly infinite gradation of hierarchical ranks in which the members of one rank attempted to emulate those above them (in the hopes of joining them) and exclude those below them (Clark 2000:53–54, 37–42; Thompson 1991; cf. Wahrman 1992; Langford 1992:3). In this kind of organization, marks of status that could be learned and enacted were of an immense advantage. And as a consequence of this advantage, the education of “politeness” became a key component of any education that pretended to prepare children to be members of the elite (e.g., Carter 2002).

But while politeness might have been the dominant mode of self-understanding and self-presentation among British elites in the first half of the 18 century, it was not without critics. These included a marginal rump of back-country gentry squires who disliked the refinement and civility demanded by polite discourse, but the far more important challenge came from emergent urban merchant classes. Indeed, one of the most important came from the Dutchman Bernard Mandeville, who published The Fable of the Bees for the first time in 1705 while working as a physician in London.

---

14 This break with Locke is especially noteworthy given that Locke had been Shaftesbury's tutor and remained a correspondent.

15 Politeness and manners have been the subject of important studies in historical sociology. See Elias (2000) and Arditi (1998); but cf. Burke (1999).
The core purpose of the *Fable* was communicated by its subtitle, “Private Vices, Publick Bene-
fits,” and its main target was Shaftesbury, whom Mandeville counted among a group of “saga-
cious Moralists.” To Mandeville, these moralists made two mistakes: in seeking to extinguish vice, they neglected the public good, such as economic growth, that it could produce; and in assuming that people were basically sociable, they mistook both the substance and structure of human nature. The Mandevillian self was “A Compound of Various Passions,” each of which could only “be subdued by a passion of greater violence” (1970:337) rather than rational reflection on appropriate, virtuous behavior. The core passion was self-love, and it could be put to social ends by the “dextrous management of a skillful politician” (Mandeville 1970:371); thus governance was a matter of deploying flattery, a “bewitching Engine” (Mandeville 1970:85), to accomplish the ends of state. Likewise, politeness itself could be seen as nothing more than one form of this artful management, that combined both flattery and shame to enforce conformity to social norms at cost of encouraging hypocrisy and dissembling. As Mandeville sarcastically noted:

> It is Shame and Education that contain the Seeds of all Politeness, and he that has neither, and offer to speak the Truth of his Heart, and what he feels within, is the most contemptible Creature upon Earth, tho' he committed no other Fault (1970:105).

Thus Mandeville mounted a sustained attack on the supposedly natural foundations of politeness, arguing instead that it stemmed from a wrongheaded, political attempt to manipulate a coerce proper behavior. In so doing, he put his finger on a key tension in the formulation of politeness as articulated by Shaftesbury and others in the early 18 century. For while Shaftesbury himself strongly argued that politeness expressed man's “natural” virtue (although he himself struggled with this formulation and diluted its formulations over the course of his life), especially in its vulgar forms what polite behavior represented was deeply ambiguous. Was it an authentic expression of virtue or simply a callous manipulation of social convention to gain status in a group? One of the better-known contemporary definitions of politeness, after all, was “a dextrous management of our Words and Actions, whereby we make other people have better Opinion of us and themselves” (LaRouchefoucauld, by way of Boyer, quoted in Klein 1984:190). The risk that politeness would deteriorate into superficial “dextrous management” was especially high when gentlemen supplicated themselves before patrons (Carter 2002:341), and this strategy was explicitly advised, for example, by Lord Chesterfield to his illegitimate son in 1748:

> I need not (I believe) advise you to adapt your conversation to the people you are conversing with: for I suppose you would not, without this caution, have talked upon the same subject, and in the same manner, to a minister of state, a bishop, a philosopher, a captain, and a woman. A man of the world must, like the Cameleon [sic], be able to take every different hue; which is by no means a criminal or abject, but a necessary complaisance; for it relates only to manners, and not to morals (Stanhope 1992:106).

---

16 Mandeville thought that Shaftesbury and others had simply posited the existence of a unitary, universal, virtuous actor while neglecting how people really behaved: “Thus Sagacious Moralists draw Men like Angels, in hopes that the pride at least of some will put 'em upon copying after the beautiful Originals which they are represented to be” (1970:88).

17 To Mandeville, “the Moral Virtues are the Political Offspring which Flattery begot upon Pride,” (1970:88).
Chesterfield may have weakly gestured to the fact that the social manipulation he advised was no matter of morals, yet he so strongly emphasized the importance of social context that the expression of authentic, individual motives and desires—core concerns of the expression of virtue—was erased. Indeed, although they disagree about the relative importance of virtue and vice, those advocating a Mandevillian approach to social relations and those who favored politeness privileged drawing people into harmony with one another over the “authentic” expression of a unitary, interior moral personality. Indeed, both relied on social, meaningful contexts to provide for social order—for Mandeville, it was the art of political management, while for Shaftesbury and other advocates of politeness, it was the force of the moral community composing “polite company.”

To sum up, in the first half of the eighteenth century, elite political order rested on politeness as a way to judge the propriety of action. Politeness was rooted in an explicit attempt to reconcile political oppositions in the aftermath of the glorious revolution, and was diffused throughout the British elite. Moreover, both politeness and its discursive opponent, vice, relied on the “ancien régime of the self” (Wahrman 2004), and neither demanded a unity to a person's identity or assumed that a person's behavior and moral judgments stemmed from an authentic representation of that identity. However, as we shall see in the following section, as British elite life grew disordered in the second half of the 18th century, the judgment of moral propriety would find new foundations.

The Second Constellation: The Impartial Spectator

While the first constellation's links among elite politics, patronage, and politeness proved a robust means of maintaining social order in Britain during the first half of the 18th century, after 1760 it was severely strained and transformed. From one angle, it was ironic that 1760—the date of George III's accession to the throne—would mark the beginning of the end for the first constellation. A final Jacobite uprising centered in Scotland had been crushed in 1745, and the seven-year's-war (1756-1763), though extremely expensive (Brewer 1990:114–126), not only increased the universe of available patronage positions within the British state (Owen 1976) but also marked the extension of British power in both India and the Americas (Marshall 2005:Chs. 3–4). Moreover, increasingly robust economic growth seemed to vindicate the Whig focus on commerce at the same time that it threw up a new “middling sort”—a petty, urban commercial class who was an increasingly important cultural, political, and social force and held aspirations to gentility and politeness (Langford 1992:3).

But even given these seemingly favorable circumstances, George III’s accession marked the beginning of a significant reorganization of Britain's ruling structure for two key reasons. He was deeply, personally hostile to the Whig oligarchy that had ruled Britain for nearly 50 years, and consequently attempted (and failed) to rule via his ineffectual favorite the Earl of Bute.

---

18 Of the advocates of politeness, Shaftesbury had perhaps the strongest articulation of politeness as reflecting an interior, coherent form of personal virtue. But he struggled with the way that this foundation was to be laid, and his attempted “inner discourse” in his notebooks strongly resembles a kind of interior emotional “dextrous management” which Mandeville advocated for rulers (see Klein 1994:Chs. 4–5, esp. pp. 84–86).
Moreover, George refused to acknowledge the trumped-up threat of Tory disloyalty that had been used by the Whigs to maintain the favor of George's predecessors and welcomed Tories into the government. Combined, these moves dissolved the old distinction between Whig and Tory (after 1768, no Tories stood for election to the commons) but drove the “Old Corps” of Whigs—including the Duke of Newcastle and Marquis of Rockingham—and their “new” followers into the unfamiliar territory of opposition to government.¹⁹

Thus driven into opposition, this groups of Whigs found the spigots of patronage shut off and no natural patron of their own to organize their opposition. Newcastle's departure from the ministry was accompanied by the “massacre of the Pelhamite innocents,” a wide-ranging and unprecedented administrative purge of the even low-level officials whom Newcastle had patronized for their support during the administration of Henry Pelham (Namier 1961:403–415). Not only did this grossly antagonize the outgoing Whigs, but it also meant that political instability ramified throughout elite patronage networks for the first time since the Hannoverian succession (Brewer 1976:44). Moreover, because George III had no mature, politically active heir at the time of the Old Corps' exit, they could not organize around the Prince of Wales and his smaller, yet still significant, font of patronage at Leicester house. The men who benefitted from the patronage system that had underwritten Whig rule in the first half of the 18 century were thus placed in the difficult position of following Newcastle out of their secure positions or remaining at the cost of abandoning their patron (Namier 1961:412–413).

The behavior of these Whigs—soon to be called, after their younger leader, the “Rockingham” whigs with the breakdown of the earlier whig/tory distinction—in opposition had lasting consequences for the structure of politics and elite's moral self-presentations. Drawing from the complex early-18th century political discourse which emphasized the efforts of independent, “Country” (as opposed to the power center of the Court) opposition to defend the hard-won liberties of 1688 and was deeply hostile to the acrimonious faction of party politics, the Rockingham Whigs ironically constructed a justification for a permanent parliamentary opposition as necessary for the very defense of liberty itself (Brewer 1976:4). This permanent opposition was justified as a reflection of the “honorable connections” among men who were “united in principle, concurring in sentiment, and bound together by affection” (Lord John Cavendish, quoted in Brewer 1976:71) and its requirement of united principles lent it an unprecedented ideological uniformity as a basis for party organization; as Edmund Burke, the Rockingham's chief ideologue, noted, this form of opposition party structure was needed to put “the great strong-holds of government in well-united hands, in order the secure the predominance of right and uniform principles” (quoted in Brewer 1976:93). To such organized, principled opposition members the greatest political sin once could commit was to appear to have been bought out by the crown at the cost of one's principles. Thus the opposition mounted a sustained attack on the corrupting influence of the King's patronage, and the elder Pitt was hounded for his acceptance of a peerage and lucrative pension. The attacks on Pitt centered around his outward conformity to the rhetoric of oppositional patriotism without authentic commitment. As a sarcastic newspaper advertisement lam-pooned Pitt:

---

¹⁹ For these events, the three best narratives are Brewer (1976), Namier (1961), and Owen (1976:169–234).
Lost supposed to be Stolen by a SCOTCHMAN [The Earl of Bute]. A PATRIOTIC MASK, decorated with many fine flowers of Rhetoric, and set round with Tropes, long sounding Words and Similes. Whoever shall find it and bring it undamaged, to a qoundam Great Commoner [Pitt], so that he may wear it again, shall receive a Gouty Shoe and an old pair of Crutches for his Pains (quoted in Brewer 1976:108).

Thus three changes occurred after 1760 in the nature of British elite politics: institutionalized, oppositional party conflict emerged as a feature of political life, elite patronage networks consequently fractured, and opposition ideologues began to criticize the practice of patronage itself as “corrupting.” Combined with the radical voices of politics out-of-doors (Brewer 1976:Chs. 8–9 and 11), strained colonial relations (Pocock 1985:97–99), and rising provincial and commercial centers in the British Isles (K. Wilson 1995), politeness as a means of judging moral propriety—and supplying a language of elite sociability that could underwrite social order and grease the wheels of patronage—suffered enormous strain. In search of a new answer to how the judge the propriety of action in the face of this combined instability, British elites reformulated strands of moral philosophy which emphasized different elements of the whig inheritance of 1688.

The core of this reformulation took place as part of the “scottish enlightenment,” which was rooted in 1707's act of union that merged the Scottish and British parliaments and opened the English economy to Scotland but accelerated after the final defeat of Jacobitism in 1745. A prominent figure of the Scottish enlightenment (and, indeed, of the European Enlightenment as a whole), David Hume adopted the discourse of politeness' view of humans as basically sociable and a deep hostility to Walpole's oligarchical patronage politics (Phillipson 1989:Ch. 2). Hume, however, worried that advocates of politeness had little way to guarantee that discourse did not decay into factional disputes driven by irrational “enthusiasm” (Phillipson 1989:29). To rectify this flaw, Hume grounded his claim that man was naturally sociable even more strongly than Shaftesbury had, discarding any latent claim to the expression of a quasi-christian virtuous essences and instead rooting the drive for sociability in epistemological skepticism. For Hume, the foundations of moral philosophy had to be grounded in an empirical account of how people actually related to one another, and this account in turn had to be founded on a analysis of people's direct experience of the world around them (Phillipson 1989:Ch. 3). This direct experience, noted Hume, included people's feelings of empathy and sympathy for others, and it was those natural, innate structures of approbation and disapprobation of others that constituted the judgment of action's propriety. In other words, considering "willful murder,"

...the vice entirely escapes you, as long as you consider the object. You never can find it, till you turn your reflexion into your own breast, and find a sentiment of disapprobation, which arises in you, towards this action. Here is a matter of fact; but 'tis the object of feeling, not of reason. It lies in yourself, not in the object..Vice and virtue, therefore, may be compared to sounds, colours, heat and cold...Nothing can be more real, or concern us more, than our own sentiments of pleasure and uneasiness (p. 330 B&N Edition).

Thus, although he shared some concerns with the earlier debates on politeness and vice, he took elements of both to refashion the foundations of his moral philosophy in a way that would prove profoundly influential. From advocates of politeness, he took a concern for how moderation and restraint could supply the interpersonal fabric of social order (Carter 2002:345–346). But to
explain how this moderation took place, Hume drew from the Mandevillian tradition that viewed actors as composed of competing passions. Hume demoted the role of reason and promoted sensibility, but for our purposes a crucial aspect of his work is that at the center of his thought lies and individual relying on his or her own perceptions to judge right and wrong.

Although picked up by many Scottish enlightenment moral philosophers, the question of how to best adapt politeness to the needs of a dynamic commercial society was most forcefully and systematically taken up by Hume's famous friend and correspondent Adam Smith in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. First published in 1754 and revised repeatedly until 1790, the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* was typical of the Scottish enlightenment in that it was meant both as a theoretical model of human behavior and “a...casuistical armoury to instruct young men of middling rank in their duties as men and as citizens of a modern commercial society” (Phillipson 1983:179). Indeed, like the *Wealth of Nations*, the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* was an elaboration of Smith's lectures in moral philosophy at the University of Glasgow (A. Smith 2002:Introduction).

The central question of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* asks how people decide whether actions are good or bad. Smith built his answer to this question from Hume's foundation, namely that that people arrive at these judgments through the experience of feelings of approval or disapproval of other's actions, which Smith called *sympathy*. Smith thought that this sympathy was rooted in people's literal identification with those around them, as “when we see a stroke aimed and just ready to fall upon the leg or arm of another person, we naturally shrink and draw back our own leg or our own arm” (A. Smith 2002:12). But though rooted in these physical sensations and sentimental passions, sympathy for others was actually an act of imagination, in which identification with others is achieved “by conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation” (A. Smith 2002:11; Raphael 2007:Chs. 2–3). The next step in this imagination, and the core of Smith's theory, was the impartial spectator. This spectator was made when people “endeavour to examine [their] own conduct as [they] imagine any other fair and impartial spectator would examine it” (A. Smith 2002:129). This spectator was at once “real” in the sense that he represented the sum of the experience of actual spectators and real judgments a person had had over the course of their lives but was also an “abstract man” located “within the breast” (A. Smith 2002:150) representing how the person would judge themselves if they observed their own action as an unbiased spectator. As Smith summarized it,

I divide myself, as it were, into two persons; and that I, the examiner and judge, represent a different character from that other I, the person whose conduct is examined into a judge of. The first is the spectator, whose sentiments with regard to my own conduct I endeavour to enter into, by placing myself in his situation, and by considering how it would appear to me, when seen from that particular point of view. The second is the agent, the person whom I properly call myself, and of whose conduct, under the character of a spectator, I was endeavouring to form some opinion. The first is the judge; the second the person judged of (A. Smith 2002:131).

Smith wove the impartial spectator and a sympathetic concern for others together into a forceful prescriptive model of how people judged the propriety of action in uncertain times:

The man of real constancy and firmness, the wise and just man who has been thoroughly bred in
the great school of self-command, in the bustle and business of the world, exposed, perhaps, to the violence and injustice of faction, and to the hardships and hazards of war, maintain this control of his passive feelings upon all occasions; and whether in solitude or in society, wears nearly the same countenance, and is affected in very nearly in the same manner...He has never dared to forget for one moment the judgment which the impartial spectator would pass upon his sentiments and conduct. He has never dared to suffer the man within the breast to be absent on moment from his attention...[170] He does not merely affect the sentiment of the impartial spectator. He really adopts them. He almost identifies himself with, he almost becomes himself that impartial spectator, and scarce even feels but as that great arbiter of his conduct directs him to feel (A. Smith 2002:169–170).

Thus Smith both summarized and proposed a subtle yet profound transformation of the judgment of the propriety of action. The “bustle and business of the world” experienced by the gentry was one riven by “the violence and injustice of faction” and “the hardships and hazards of war.” In the face of this, and like earlier advocates of politeness, Smith recommended above all moderation and control of passions. This control was to be learned in “the great school of self-command” and actuated through constant attention to the impartial spectator's judgment. But this constant attention meant a new depth to the self that underlay behavior; this control of emotions was meant to extend across social domains, “whether in solitude or in society,” and the impartial spectator's voice was meant to be so strong that it could shape the structure of people emotions and passions, such that one listening to him “scarce even feels as that great arbiter of his conduct directs him to feel.”

The voice of the impartial spectator as proposed by Smith was extremely strong, and so too was the “great school of self-command” which trained it. This school was made up of socialization by a community of like-minded people, and it began in early childhood:

A very young child has no self-command; but, whatever are its emotions, whether fear, or grief, or anger, it endeavours always, by the violence of its outcries, to alarm, as much as it can, the attention of its nurse, or its parents...When it is old enough to go to school, or mix with its equals, it soon finds that they have no such indulgent partiality. It naturally wishes to gain their favour, and to avoid their hatred or contempt. Regard even to its own safety teaches it to do so; and is soon finds that it can do so in no other way than by moderating, not only its anger, but all its other passions, to the degree which its play-fellows and companions are likely to be pleased with. It thus enter into the great school of self-command, it studies to be more and more master of itself, and begins to exercise over its own feelings a discipline which the practice of the longest life is very seldom sufficient to bring to complete perfection (A. Smith 2002:167–168).

Smith's articulation of progressive self-mastery through socialization—indeed, through the natural process of sociability playing out in the structure of the self—is remarkable for two reasons. First, it deftly combined the various strands of debate over moral propriety together. Following Shaftesbury, it viewed people as naturally sociable—after all, each lesson of self-command above is learned through a “natural” discourse with others from whom one seeks approbation. Yet it drew the mechanism that makes such lessons salient for people from Mandeville (and more proximately Hume); it is self-regard, the desire “to gain favor and avoid hatred and contempt of others” that teaches people to subordinate their passions. Thus combined, the impartial spectator was simultaneously the residue of other people's judgment left in a person's conscience and a universal figure of “reason, principle, and conscience” with “a voice capable of astonishing the
most presumptuous of our passions” and reminding us “that we are but one of the multitude” (A. Smith 2002:158).

Smith's discussion, however, is also remarkable for the silence it continues. For while characterizing the impartial spectator's voice as simultaneously one of quasi-universal reason and accrued social experience with others, any significant discussion of the substance of the impartial spectator's injunctions is curiously absent. In other words, Smith gives the impartial spectator a strong voice, but one struggles to find any reference in The Theory of Moral Sentiments to what the impartial spectator says about the propriety of action. While this omission is shocking to our eyes for a prescriptive text like this one—and has led to misconceptions of Smith as a proto-modern virtue theorist—it makes a little more sense when placed in Smith's intellectual and social context. Intellectually, Smith was still responding to the Humean turn in moral philosophy, shifting his emphasis from the ends people pursue to an empirical account of how people make moral judgments (Phillipson 1983:181). Second, considering his target audience, and his own experience, the reference group forming the impartial spectator must have seemed obvious to Smith. His lowland Scotland was the upright, sober, and rapidly commercializing and urbanizing world populated by friendly, urbane associational clubs (Phillipson 1983:198–202). Thus for Smith the impartial spectator represented a mechanism through which people adopted and internalized the directives of an audience whose views could be safely assumed.

Smith's moral philosophy may have depended on its embeddedness in the world of Scottish enlightenment “polite” society, and it's core mechanism of judging moral propriety may have been a systematization and extension of Hume's skeptical turn. But when considered as practical advice to university students—those of the “middling sort” who composed an important part of British elite society—and placed in contrast with previous formulations of politeness, Smith's impartial spectator takes on a new significance. The spectator was meant to stabilize and reinforce the experience of approval and disapproval people collected over the course of their lives, but in order for the spectator to speak with a coherent voice it also assumed a fundamental unity to the self. Rather than the “cameleon”-like conformity suggested by some advocates of politeness or the fractured, multiplicitous self that Mandeville saw, the impartial spectator was supposed to speak in the same way across social domains and circumstances. Hence while the two models look similar when both were embedded in 18 century elite British society, they carried with them striking different underlying assumptions about the role of the self in the judgment of moral propriety. Politeness' focus was on the conformity of behavior to shared social norms, but the impartial spectator carried the potential for the foundation of at least locally autonomous moral judgments.

This section articulated a second way for British elites to evaluate the propriety of behavior. Whereas politeness emphasized conformity to social norms, in the second half of the 18th century the impartial spectator emphasized the dual grounding of propriety both in external opinion and internal conscience. As a consequence, it proposed a much stronger underlying unity of the self and the notion that moral judgment was supposed to reflect an underlying, authentic, unified self. While both the impartial spectator and politeness remained important means for judging propriety, those to whom the former was targeted—the “middling sort” who still wished to mark them-
selves as gentlemen yet faced a factional, changing elite landscape—increasingly appeared within the ranks of the East India Company.

A Transmission Belt: East India Patronage

The East India Company's patronage network was a function of its political position in Britain. The EIC had been an important object of political struggle in England at the beginning of 18th century, as its regular charter renewal usually presented an excuse to extract money to pay for military adventures. Yet as it was integrated as one of the “cogs” in the Whig political machine’s dominance of 18-century England, the Company’s internal affairs were left relatively undisturbed. In particular, the Court of Directors maintained control over patronage via appointments to both foreign and domestic administrative positions within the Company, and by consequence contested elections were extremely rare and an appointment to the Directorate came to be a de facto lifetime appointment (Sutherland 1952:18–19).

These conditions changed radically over the course of the seven years’ war (1756-1763). The outbreak of hostilities accelerated the militarization of Company policy in India as the Mughal empire’s power waned and French mercantilist ambitions waxed. Responding to the exigencies of local circumstances and often exceeding their instructions from London, Company officials won a major military victory at the battle of Plassey in 1757, and eventually gained administrative responsibility for territory (though complex legal arrangements with indigenous rulers) in Bengal and Madras beginning in 1765 (Marshall 1987, 2005). The seven years war also drew the British state into much more direct military and diplomatic participation in affairs in India, and as a result indigenous rulers began lobbying the British crown directly in their political disputes with the Company (Nightingale 1985; Sutherland 1952:77–79).

The Company’s new territorial holdings, and how these holdings pulled the Company into regional politics, also had consequences for how the Company operated internally. Those Englishmen and Scotsmen serving in local factories or on presidency councils who supported a successful indigenous claimant in a succession dispute now stood to gain enormous fortunes through the “presents” or favorable commercial concessions they received (Lenman and P. Lawson 1983; Marshall 1976). Local factional disputes among Company officials broke out over how such emoluments were to be divided, and these disputes were carried back to London as

---

20 For example, in 1744 the EIC loaned the British State £1,000,000 during the War of Austrian Succession in exchange for a longer charter renewal (Sutherland 1952:30).

21 The character of the decline of Mughal control has been subject to repeated historiographical revision. Originally described—in terms that legitimated eventual European domination—as a period of anarchy, the early-to-mid 18th century has more recently been evaluated as a period of relative economic prosperity and social dynamism in indigenous society (Burton Stein and Arnold 2010:196–198). Another important scholarly thrust evaluates the period as a distinct phase of competing “fiscal-military” states (Gordon 1994).

22 The company had attempted military adventures in Bombay in the 17th century, only to be embarrassed at the hands of the Mughal empire, and had been embroiled in its first serious military engagement during the war of Austrian succession, when the French Governor Dupleix, marching from Pondicherry near Madras, Captured the city in 1746.
returning “nabobs”\textsuperscript{23} began bitterly contesting elections in the Directorate to protect their gains (Sutherland 1952:Chs. 4–5). These contests energized and politicized the Company’s Court of Proprietors and drew increasing attention and interference from parliament, whose members were also individually increasingly implicated.\textsuperscript{24} This new, bitter political contention over the policies the Company was pursuing resulted in repeated parliamentary investigation into Indian administration, especially as guaranteed Company dividends of 12.5% played a role in a complex fiscal crisis in the Company which threatened the health of British capital markets themselves (Bowen 1991:Ch. 8).

The newfound celebrity of Company factional struggles in London brought widespread hostility to returned “nabobs” (P. Lawson and Phillips 1984) and forced Parliament to intervene in the Company’s internal politics (Lenman and P. Lawson 1983:810–812), yet it did so with little detailed understanding of the issues at stake. Despite fears of growing Anglo-Indian influence in parliament, in 1768 only 19 members had ever been to India (Bowen 1991:30–32), and few others had anything beyond a superficial acquaintance with the subject (Bowen 1998:536). However, this did not prevent parliament, despite fits and starts, one of which was the proximate cause of the Fox-North coalition in 1783, from drawing the Company under increasingly tight oversight beginning in the late 1760s. This culminated in the passage of Pitt's India Act, which established a Government Board of Control to monitor the Company's foreign policy and established tighter administrative control among the Company's subsidiary “presidencies” in India under the charge of a Governor-General.\textsuperscript{25}

The company's increasingly prominent geopolitical position, as well as the concomitant increase in the British state's attention to its affairs, brought significant changes to the way it staffed its emerging Indian empire. Commercial “writers” and military “cadets” had long been appointed by the Court of Directors, but because of high mortality in India and poor pay, these appointments were generally not sought after, and it was not unheard of for Company servants to arrive in India as free agents and gain employment with the Company there, expecting their appointments to be later ratified in London (Sutherland 1952:60). But as hostilities escalated in India in the 1740s and especially after the personal fortunes won with the Company's new territory after 1757, competition for appointments exploded and the directors instituted a strict rotation of their patronage. Appointments as writers were most prized, as cadets and assistant surgeons relatively less so.\textsuperscript{26} Moreover, the Board of Control also participated in the disposition of patronage after

\textsuperscript{23} The term “nabob” was an Anglicization of the Urdu \textit{nawab} (usually used to refer to a native prince) and became a pejorative for returning, wealthy former East India officials (Holzman 1926).

\textsuperscript{24} It is especially noteworthy that, following Bowen (1989a:192), “…campaigns for the reinstatement of dismissed Company servants became a common occurrence in General Court politics…[as] a steady stream of discontented ex-Company servants returned to Britain from India. They all sought redress of various grievances in the General Court, and virtually all of them endeavoured to regain access to the source of the newly acquired wealth through reappointment to the Company’s service.”

\textsuperscript{25} The political causes of these shifts are quite complex, and covered in detail by Sutherland (1952), Bowen (1991), and Philips (1961). Although the post of Governor-General had existed since 1773, Pitt's act and subsequent legislation strengthened the Governor-General's hold over his subsidiary presidencies.

\textsuperscript{26} This is evident not only because writerships were openly advertised for sale, but also because Directors’ own patronage notebooks declare the priority: David Scott was asked to nominate Samuel Martin's nephew to a cadetship “in case he should not be able to get a Bombay writership” (IOR/MSS EUR/D 1087).
1784, and the appointment of Governors, Governors-General, and senior military officials in each presidency lay with the government despite being nominally approved by the directors (Philips 1961:14–16).

As was the case for members of parliament and state officials, East India Directors found themselves at the center of a web of supplicants asking for appointments. The Directors preferred their close kin most prominently (awarding them lucrative postings to the Company’s commercial station at Canton; see Philips 1961:14 n. 6) followed by more distant relatives and political supporters both inside and outside the Company's Court of Proprietors (responsible for electing the directors; see Bourne 1977:83–108). As the Court and the Board of Control fell into the hands of two Scotsmen, David Scott and Henry Dundas, the locus of patronage also shifted appreciably towards Scotland at the turn of the 19th century (e.g.,McGilvary 2008). East India patronage therefore sent men to India who represented, in Bernard Cohn's words, “a very restricted group in Indian society and drawn from banking and commercial families and landed groups in Scotland and the southeast of England” (Cohn 1987:520). Or as Bourne, more forcefully puts the point, East India servants were comprised of a class of “pseudo-gentry” who aspired to the distinction and markers of the gentleman but in reality came from “the ranks of successful husbandmen, yeomen and trasemen and from the landless descendants of earlier landed families” (Bourne 1986:89). In sum, as the Company was drawn into closer connection with and placed under increasing supervision by the British state, its servants were increasingly drawn from the tranche of the British petty elite who aspired to gentility and carried with them to India the complex legacy of judging the moral propriety of action that had been so salient over the course of the 18th century.

**Conclusion**

This essay aimed to contextualize the passionate conflict that occurred within the East India Company's administration in the last third of the 18th century. It did so by tracing changes in the British elite judgments of moral propriety over the course of the 18th century—from politeness to the impartial spectator, it analyzed the movement from a fragmentary to a more unitary structure of the underlying self and proposed the potential consequences for the way people carrying these assumptions might behave during political conflict. Finally, it also proposed that the patronage network of the East India Company, embedded as it was within the wider web of 18th century British elite patronage, funneled holders of both views about the judgment of the propriety of action to India. Thus the passion and, at times, frank incomprehension among Indian administrators struggling over policy reforms in India can at least partly be seen as the confrontation of two radically different styles of self, each of which was equipped to call on different resources as a part of that struggle. Those employing politeness relied on personal connections and appeal to multiple audiences, while those hearing the impartial spectator anchored their arguments in the authentic reflection of inner convictions.

27 This turn in the Company's patronage practice led to a so-called “scottish school” of imperial administration.
28 See also Cohn's "The British in Benares" (1962), particularly Table II on p. 175 revealing a similar breakdown of collectors and judges in the Benares district from 1795 to 1850.
It is, of course, important not to overestimate the importance of these conflicting styles to the emergence of “modern” colonial Indian administration at the turn of the 19th century. Indian administrators almost all made arguments in terms of logical costs and benefits to Indians and the British. Yet at the same time, emphasizing the judgment of the propriety of action has advantages. It reveals how the emergence of very different spheres of policy, both in India and in Britain, may have resulted from the transposition of similar styles of self into radically different contexts. And moreover, it also helps reveal the ways in which British “factual” arguments about the nature of Indian society and the effectiveness of their proposed policies rested on a foundation of moral judgment.
Chapter 2: “To Guard the Public in These Circumstances”
Society as a Regime of Moral Order in Madras

A man who has not been in India knows Mankind but by halves;
and he who has been in India knows Mankind alas! but too well.
—Lord Macartney to John Macpherson, 20 Jan 178

Introduction

Just after he retired in 1858 from the Madras Civil Service after thirty years in southern India, Patrick Boyle Smollett penned a scathing attack on the Company’s policies in Madras. He aimed primarily at the ryotwari system of land revenue administration, which collected yearly-assessed agricultural taxes from ryots, or individual cultivators. In a practice that amounted to “crushing the ancient native families of Southern India” (Smollett 1858:81), Smollett accused British officials administering the ryotwari system of deliberately driving large landholders, called zemindars, into default on their tax payments and then leasing their estates at auction. But while the many flaws of such practices were manifest in Smollett’s view, he gained little support for his views in the Madras administration. Indeed, he was deeply frustrated by “the existing regime at the presidency,” which “pretended that this course of policy is called for, from consideration of the interests of the people, and for the protection of the oppressed cultivators of the soil” (Smollett 1858:73). Or, as Smollett seems to have found even more inexplicable when articulated by the Madras Torture Commission in 1855, such policies were pursued “to guard the natives against themselves” (Smollett 1858:17).

This chapter seeks the origins of the regime in Madras that Smollett found so vexing and intrinsigent. This regime began as a moral order founded in the aftermath of a scandal in the late 17th century, shortly after the presidency’s founding. It focused on a patrimonial organization of administrator’s vocabularies of motive, representing them as integrated into a family in the Company’s household. In this context, the moral propriety of officials’ action was to be exemplified by the “father” of the settlement—personified by the Governor or Agent—and was meant to be demonstrated to all Company officials. Even as the presidency expanded over the course of the 18th century and its social order was stressed by war, trade, and factionalism, this mechanism of proximate moral judgment remained the core means of justifying and motivating government action.

This moral order, however, was decisively disrupted by and transformed in the aftermath of the Nawab of Arcot’s debts scandal. This saga, whose origins lay in the Madras settlement’s changing geopolitical position in Southern India in the aftermath of the Seven Years War (1756-1763), saw the impeachment and overthrow of the Governor in 1776 and his death under house arrest. It also witnessed, as the implicated parties sought to justify themselves to London, the prolifera-
tion of new vocabularies of motive, predicated on state, society, and economy as justificatory spheres independent of the example of proximate actors in social space. In the aftermath of the scandal, the new Governor of the settlement, George Macartney, attached the vocabulary of motive predicated on society to his behavior as Governor, transforming the possibilities for administrative action in Madras and the ways in which policies could be understood there. Finally, this concern for society was transposed by subsequent governors, and particularly Thomas Munro, onto Indian society as a concern and veneration for existing Indian social institutions. Thus “to guard the natives against themselves” as a means of understanding administrator’s motivations and of justifying policies in the colonial state began as a means to interpret events that left a Governor dead and the Company’s moral order a shambles.

“A Publick Table”: Madras and the Perambulation of Streynsham Master

Like the Company’s other major Indian factories at Surat and Bombay on the west coast, in 1640 Madras was founded at the Court of Director’s behest as a commercial venture. Madras was settled in order to escape the taxes levied on the Company at its base at Masulipatam, and although their envoys were rebuffed by the Dutch at their settlement at Pulicat, the Company was warmly welcomed by the remaining Portuguese merchants at Madraspatnam. Sir Francis Day, the EIC envoy, managed built on land along the Coromandel Coast granted by the local Raja (of Chبلغگرگهی), and the Company’s primary operations were soon relocated there. And indeed, at least until its inhabitants began to participate in south Indian territorial politics during the War of Austrian Succession (1740-1744), it remained largely a trading post meant to deal primarily in textiles with Indian weavers.

Company servants in Madras worked both for themselves and the Company. Like other mercantile trading posts of the era, the settlement was essentially a warehouse, collecting trade goods (at this time mainly calicoes and pepper) from local Indian producers (usually negotiated as production contracts by local Indian merchants) in exchange for bullion shipped in from England and minted into local coins called “pagodas” on site. The goods were then shipped back to England and auctioned. The heart of this commercial model was the Company’s statutory monopoly on all goods shipped past the Cape of Good Hope, and it appears to have been strictly enforced.29

This kind of direct trade between London and India was what was reflected in the Company’s profits and losses, and hence was also the most direct object of metropolitan political contention for most of the 17th and 18th centuries.30 But there was another kind of trade that had organizationally important consequences for the Company’s administration. This was the so-called “country trade,” and it emerged as a way to remunerate poorly-paid Company servants. Originally the Company claimed a monopoly on both trade between England and India and trade within India, but as it found that it could neither control its merchants private trading effectively nor leverage this local Indian trade for its profit, in 1667 the Directors relented and allowed its

29 These two paragraphs of description are drawn from Penny (1900), Wheeler (1996), and Furber (1948).
30 For example, the impetus behind chartering a competing, “new” East India Company at the turn of the 18th century was to allow excluded merchants in London access to the trading monopoly with India.
servants to trade all goods except pepper and calico in India (Marshall 1976:19). The country trade was brokered by Indian “dubashes,” who acted as business partners to Company merchants and generally invested in the transport and sale of goods throughout the Indian ocean. Thus Madras was a hub of two significantly different kinds of commercial activity: it was a node in the trade network connecting England and India; but it also was a hotbed of regional trade conducted by partnerships among English Company servants in their “private” capacities and Indian businessmen whose connections stretched into the courts of local Indian rulers.

While the Company acquiesced to the country trade in the hopes of protecting its profits, the practice disordered the administration of its Indian settlements. Indeed, when personal business partnerships among Company officials soured, they would often complain to allies on the Court of Directors, insinuating that the private trade of their enemies in Madras was damaging the Company’s commercial interests (Penny 1900:21). These appeals usually gained purchase in the Court of Directors—since many of the Directors still maintained extensive private business dealings in India—yet rarely echoed further. But the appeals also rested on the basic ambiguity of the country trade. As Penny puts it:

> with regard to the inland trade in the East and the traffic in the Eastern and Southern seas, what constituted legitimate trade could only be a matter of opinion, and it was impossible to draw a hard and fast line between it and contraband dealing (1900:23).

The Court’s own efforts to control the disorder of the country trade ironically demonstrate its dynamics. Frustrated by Madras’ chaotic commercial administration in the 1650s, the Directors empowered Edward Winter as the new Governor in 1661 and granted him “despotic powers to examine the whole question” of the country trade (Penny 1900:24). Winter initially antagonized his subordinates, who complained to allies on the Court that Winter himself was embezzling money (Penny 1900:24). In disgust and exhaustion, Winter resigned and the Directors...
appointed George Foxcroft to succeed him. Foxcroft sailed for Madras with his son Nathaniel, arriving in 1665. In the meantime, however, Winter had “made good friends with his colleagues” and no longer wished to resign (Penny 1900:24). Consequently, while he handed over power to Foxcroft and was offered the second in Council, Winter awaited his opportunity and watched his enemy. [Foxcroft] was an uncompromising old Puritan; and it was not long before he expressed opinions about the King and his debauched court in words which were nothing less than treasonable in those days. Sir Edward was ready; he denounced the astounded President and his son, who had come out with him, as traitors. The Garrison and the majority of the merchants were on Winter's side, and an attempt was made to arrest the Foxcrofts. The resisted, aided by a few friends, and there was a fight between the two parties, in which one man was killed. The Foxcrofts were overpowered and imprisoned, and Sir Edward Winter once more resumed the reins of government (Penny 1900:25).

Both sides sent justifications back to London, and Winter went so far as to write both the King and Archbishop of Canterbury with his explanation (Penny 1900:25). The Directors, however, became convinced that sedition was widespread in Madras, and dispatched Commissioners in force, prepared to blockade the port; they were able, however, to negotiate the peaceful handoff of the fort back to Foxcroft and allowed Winter to wrap up his commercial affairs before returning to London (also see Hedges 1887:II, pp. cclxvii–cclxxxi; Penny 1900:25–26).

Winter’s overthrow of Foxcroft’s authority as governor of Madras is significant for three reasons. In the first place, it revealed the extent of malefeasance in India in commercial matters as well as political. As part of their investigation of the overthrow, the Court discovered corruption by the Chief as Masulipatnam. They dismissed him in writing in 1669 that

And for as much as wee are informed, that Mr. William Jearsey hath contemned our Orders, and permitted grosse prophanes, and scandalous vices to be practized in our Factories at Mesulapatam, to the dishonour of GOD, and discredit of the Protestant religion, and hath carried on a private trade not in INDIA only, but promoted the same, out and home, overrating our Goods, and making use of our Stock, for his own private advantage, and finding that he hath made verie short returns of what is come to his hands, and hath neglected to send us his accompts, or any Advices of his proceedings, We have and doe hereby discharge him from his Chiefship (Hedges 1887:cxcix).

In the second place, the conflict between Foxcroft and Winter also revealed how closely the moral frames of reference used in administrative conflicts in India were linked to England. Foxcroft could be criticized for sedition, and Winter could defend his actions directly as an effort to defend sovereign prerogatives. Indeed, the depositions sworn by Winter’s faction in the conflict repeatedly referenced Nathaniel Foxcroft’s sedition in terms that would be directly comprehensible in England. But equally important, the Court of Directors, likely to prevent the conflict

was re-admitted into the Company’s service, and probably lived to feel grateful for the means taken to reform his life.” Leighton also notes that “Even Winter, though he recovered the money, retained it for his own use.”

37 Leighton (1902:9) describes him as “a Roundhead, as were probably many of the younger servants of the Company, for the City of London, whence they were drawn, had been solidly Parliamentarian.” Foxcroft had no Indian experience at the time he sailed for Madras (Watson 2004).

38 Leighton describes this incident as evidence of Winter’s “Masterfulness” (1902:9).

39 For example, Joseph Ffarley’s deposition swore that “the said GEORGE FFOXCROFT Agent, did assert after that his son NATHANIELL FFOXCROFT had maintained that the present Kind of ENGLAND had no other
from spilling beyond its borders, refused to acknowledge these terms of the conflict, writing coldly in their recall orders that “for what concerns personal controversies, we forbear to write anything, for that [the commissioners] will find out the truth thereof by examination upon the place” (Hedges 1887:cclxxxi).

Finally, the Foxcroft’s overthrow was also significant because of its aftermath; the reforms of the Company’s social and moral order in Madras persisted for nearly a hundred years. The Court of Directors, however, followed the Foxcroft-Winter incident by sending out another representative, Streynsham Master, in 1675 (Master 1911:I). Like Winter, Master had long experience in India, particularly at the Company’s Bombay factory, and had devised a new accounting system he was sent to institute on India’s East coast (Ogborn 2006). Master was also to succeed William Langhorne as Governor of Madras after conducting an inspection of the Company’s satellite factories at Masulipatam and in Bengal. Master was not only to inquire about the state of the Company’s commercial interests and further them however he could, but also told to

```
informe your Selfe concerning our Severall Factors, Writers and Servants in those respective places [that the Company controlled in Eastern India], both as to their abilities for Our Service and their behaviour in Conversation…you are also to inquire into the Causes of the Quarrells and differences among any of them, and to exhort them to peaceable and quiet comportment amongst themselves that So Our Affaires may not be prejudiced by their Divisions (Master 1911:I, p. 204).
```

The Directors had clearly drawn a connection between the social disorder in their settlements and the profitability of their trade, and they consequently widely empowered Master to conduct their affairs. When he arrived and began his tour, Master was not encouraged by what he found, either in Madras itself or its factories. The commercial accounts for several years were hopelessly garbled at Masulipatam by lax practices (and likely deliberate fraud) by its commercial chiefs (Master 1911:I, pp. 8–9) while Master’s predecessor as Governor of Madras, William Langhorne, complained that factionalism in the city showed “emulation envy & backbiting so much in use…that we tax poore Machiavelly” (Ogborn 2006:141). Moreover, at nearly every station he visited, Master confronted Company servants disputing the authority of their superiors and engaging in

---

40 As the Directors put it: “…Wee thinke it convenient that you Voyadge on Our Ships to Metchlepatnam [Masulipatam] and the Bay to take an inspection into all Our Affaires and to regulate and set in Order what you shall find amiss” (Master 1911:I, p. 202).

41 Master could suspend Company service members at will (Master 1911:I, p. 209) though this was checked by appeal to the Directors, and was appointed with powers superordinate to the Company’s administration in Madras. Oddly, however, the Directors also seem to have disliked and feared Masters. For example, his imperative tone seems to have angered them, as they wrote that “Wee shal encrease noe Sallaries [of servants in India], nor make any further allowance to Our Servants then Wee have done. The late Agent Masters haveing so burthened us with motions of that Kinde, that he hath turned our Stomacks against them.” The Court also seems to have worried that Masters would refuse his eventual dismissal (in 1681), writing “Altho’ we doubt not but our late Agent Master [sic] did give due obedience to the King’s orders and our for resigning…to prevent the worst that Mad men may do, We have ordered our ships to deliver no letters on Shore, till they are Satisfied that our affairs there are under that Management and regulation which Wee appointed by our last years letters” (both quotations from Hedges 1887:ccxlvii).
open insubordination. To remedy these perceived ills, at each station he visited and in Madras proper, Master undertook two reforms. First, he instituted his reformed “Surat” method of accounting, required Company merchants to standardize their commercial practices, and enjoined them to submit regular reports to Madras to be forwarded to London. In addition to these new commercial policies, however, Master also embarked on an ambitious line of social reforms to the company settlements. Master demanded the public printing and strict enforcement of a set of regulations of social conduct that forbade such practices as profanity and lying (Wheeler 1996:688) as well as junior Company officials inflating their status by having parasols carried for them by servants (Master 1911:I, p. 11). But all of Master’s social reforms all revolved around a core idea about the source of disorder, best signified by the Directors’ instructions that Master was to “oblidge all persons that serve Us to Live together in Our house” (Master 1911:I, p. 262).

The Directors desire to house the Company servants together was derived from their model of how the moral propriety of action was established. Take their response to Master’s suggestion that they require communal dining among Company servants:

> We have againe Seriously considered what you write about keeping of a Publick Table, and do adudge It both most honourable and Convenient to have it mayntayned; and the Sitting of the youths at the same Table with you can no way abridge you of any freedome; and Suratt and Bombay Our President practices the Same; and We are Sure it must be of great advantage to the Youthes by enjoying So good an example and preventing them from keeping ill Company (Master 1911:I, p. 247).

For Master and the Directors, the key to a harmonious social order in Company settlements was the virtuous moral example personified by the governor and diffused by the servants’ proximity to him. This seems to have been rooted in a patrimonial view of the social order that justified not only Master’s strict social regulations but also embedded servants in an ordered hierarchy within the Company’s administration. As William Longhorne put it: “when the chief is in place and power, who is at the head & heart of all, is as he ought to be, the whole body can hardly be out of tune, and so the contrary” (Ogborn 2006:143).

While Master’s reforms may have stabilized the administrative hierarchy within Madras, problems remained at its most senior levels. Indeed, at virtually every turning of the City’s mercantile/political administration, the outgoing Governor-general seems to have left under a cloud of accusations of abuse (physical, social, and economic) and insinuations of using his office for private gain (whether of personal glory or economic riches). For example, Thomas Pitt, the governor from 1698 to 1709, was accused of stealing a giant diamond (listed variously between 140 and 280 carats) upon leaving office (C. Lawson 1905:Ch. 2), and in less spectacular fashion, upon his retirement as governor Elihu Yale was detained in Madras under threat of arrest for nine years while financial entanglements with his dubash were worked out (Mines 2001:43).

---

42 For example, see the case of Joseph Call, summarized in Master (1911:I, pp. 165–174) (1911:I, pp. 165–174).
But even as the senior levels of Company management cycled through Governors who pushed private gain as far as they could, the settlement as a whole seems to have subscribed to Master’s standards of propriety. When Pitt stood accused of corruption by members of his own council, for example, his successor as Governor, William Fraser,

Exhorted the gentlemen of the Council to forget and forgive whatever hitherto had given cause and occasion to the difference that had formerly happened amongst them, and that all such piques might for ever be buried in oblivion, and that they might henceforward agree amongst themselves in the Unity of Love and firm Friendship, with all reciprocal respect to each other, in testimony of which they were desired to shake hands all of them, which was accordingly done with all promises of sincerity to the performance of the promises (C. Lawson 1905:35–36).

Likewise, the keeping of the public table appears to have continued as the core means to promote a “Unity of Love and firm Friendship,” even if such evidence is only offered by a fight among Company servants recorded in Madras’ consultation books:

Monday, 30th June, 1712—Several disorders having been committed at the General Table, which we find to be partly occasioned by the absence of those persons in the Service, that are of a superior standing and might awe the young ones into better behavior;—we have thought fit to appoint Joseph Smart, Head Searcher, and five others, to take their turns, either weekly, or monthly, or as they shall agree among themselves, to be present at the Table, and to take care that no indecencies or disorders are committed (quoted in Wheeler 1996:319).

Thus a clear precedent and a basic moral order had been established in Madras. The Governor-in-council (that is, the Governor as ratified by a majority vote of his council) held extraordinary power within the boundaries of Madraspatnam, or Madras city, such that “‘government’ was concerned in nearly every aspect of European activity” as late as 1787 (Furber 1948:27). With that power, the Governor was meant not only to regulate the behavior and mores of the settlement through his personal example at the head of the Company’s “Publick Table,” but also to ensure that servants’ country trade did not disrupt Company profits or the peace of the settlement. Even after Madras began expanding rapidly in the mid-eighteenth century (beyond its total European population of around 150 prior to that; see Spear 1963:29 for the estimate in 1740) and the “promiscuous hospitality” of the Governor’s table had been disbanded (Spear 1963:44), the moral order of Company administration in India remained deeply rooted in the particularistic relationships among servants sitting at a common table.

War and After: Madras’ Loss, Expansion, and Changing Contexts of Judgment

As discussed in the previous section, after Streynsham Master’s perambulation, the Company’s administration in Madras was governed by relatively stable vocabularies of motive rooted, on the one hand, in the proximate relationships among Company servants in the settlement; and on the other hand, in the personal, virtuous example supposed demonstrated by the Company’s senior factors on site. But while this institutional logic persisted throughout much of the 18th century, even as Madras grew larger, radical changes in the EIC’s regional political position (and its geopolitical behavior) created the conditions for that logic to be transformed.
The regional political field the EIC faced in South India was shaped by the decline of the Mughal empire. The empire had reached its apotheosis under Akbar at the turn of the 18th century, but after he died in 1710, subsequent emperors rapidly lost control over their satraps throughout the subcontinent. This process of imperial contraction was especially pronounced south of the Deccan Plateau, where Mughal power had only recently—and fleetingly—been exerted. (The rulers of the area immediately surrounding Madras had only sworn fealty to the Mughals in 1693). However brief its presence, however, the Mughal empire’s withdraw left an arena of small, competitive, and militarized Hindu and Muslim states in its wake. The mid-sized states with Muslim rulers—the Nizamat of Hyderabad in the Deccan plateau, the Nawabi of Arcot (after 1749), and the Sultanate of Mysore (after 1763)—each sought to subordinate semi-feudal Hindu vassals each of whom occasionally claimed independence and had to be forcibly subdued. Most significantly for regional politics, these rulers included the Rajahs of Travancore and Tanjore, as well as smaller agrarian elites called *poligars* living in the southern reaches of the Nizamat of Hyderabad (which was an area that would be called the “Ceded Districts” when it came under the control of the British in 1801).

This pattern of fiscal-military competition increasing as a hegemonic empire loses control of a region is typical in world-history, but in southern India this process was amplified by the presence of European merchant empires. The French had important settlements at Pondicherry and Mahe, the Dutch at Negapatam, and the English at Masulipatam, Ft. St. David, and Madras. Each of these settlements was chartered by the local Indian ruler (whether Muslim or Hindu, and whether a petty magnate or larger ruler), and each was thus at least nominally subservient to the ruler’s will.

As relations among the European powers represented in India grew more contentious, however, the relative quiescence enjoyed by the Companies deteriorated. Starting with the War of Austrian Succession (1740-44), relations between the French and English East India Companies became increasingly contentious. The English issued letters of marque against French shipping in the Indian Ocean, and the French trained an army of Indian sepoys (soldiers) and marched on Madras itself, capturing it in 1746 over the objections of the Nawab of the Carnatic. Most importantly, the French defeated the Nawab’s army, commanded by his son and charged with forcing an end to hostilities among the European powers, at the battle of St. Thome in 1746.

The battle of St. Thome was significant for two reasons. First, it inaugurated an era of both direct and indirect conflict between the French and English in southern India, which would end only with the death of the French proxy Tipu Sultan in 1799. But more immediately, St. Thome also signaled a further escalation of military conflict south of the Deccan—and for the first time, a European-style army armed with muskets and modern artillery had defeated a vastly larger Indian force armed with flintlocks and ineffective cannon. Indian rulers predictably rushed to equip their armies with modern weapons and recruit European mercenaries to train them in Western tactics, and both the French and English Companies, eager to compete with one another by proxy, aided them in this effort.
The consequences of this further escalation of the cost of military competition in South India were complicated, both for the European Companies and Indian rulers. Indian rulers faced a common fiscal dilemma: European-style armies were professional armies that could no longer be raised or equipped through a feudal ban, and thus the question became how best to raise the money to pay for them. Some rulers, like the Sultan of Mysore, sought increased revenues from his subjects by radically centralizing and bureaucratizing his tax administration (Perlin 1985; B. Stein 1985), while others, like the Nawab of Arcot, greedily eyed rich territories around them (Phillips 1985). These fiscal concerns were redoubled, moreover, by promises the ruler made to European companies for military and financial support during succession disputes.

These fiscal questions were no less pressing for the Europeans. The Companies themselves, after all, served both “mars and mammon” (Peers 1995) in the sense that after the middle of the 18th century they were required to raise and maintain armies while returning profits to shareholders at home. On the one hand, aiding Indian rulers and successfully defeating competing European companies was good for business, since the supported rulers were likely to grant favorable terms of trade and prices would be better in the absence of competing buyers. On the other hand, however, war meant the disruption of production, trade routes, capital flows, and shipping. In this sense, it damaged commerce.

Beyond concerns of commercial profitability, Indian fiscal-military competition also had important consequences for European Company servants in their private capacities. Some, like Claude Martin in Awadh and George Paterson in Madras, abandoned their Companies altogether and found employment at the courts of Indian rulers, serving as political liaisons with the European powers and even training troops. Others, such as Paul Benfield (of whom much will be said later in this chapter), began speculating in Indian rulers’ bond debt from the relative safety of Madras and a position as a Company contractor. But even those who remained in officials positions in the Companies had stakes in the outcomes of Indian fiscal matters. Successfully supporting a claimant to the throne of Arcot or Hyderabad meant “presents” (in the form of cash and jewels), and almost all officials in Madras held at least some Indian debt bonds. But above all, if the Company army was loaned out to an Indian ruler (which happened increasingly as the 18th century wore on), its operating costs must be paid for by that ruler.

Thus the question of land revenues lay at the heart of many competing interests. Indigenous rulers were in a bind: to pay down debts accrued as they fought for their thrones, they had to extract more money from the land they had or conquer new territories; but to conquer new territories took even more money. Desperate to survive and maintain independence from European powers even as they fought against recalcitrant vassals, some rulers (especially Arcot and Hyderabad) chose to begin directly mortgaging territories to the English. According to deals signed in the early 1760s by Arcot and Hyderabad, the English were promised the whole revenues of Indian territories, and in some cases were drawn into direct administration and collection of revenues (at least down to the district level where they dealt with local tax officials, or amildars.)

These new fiscal arrangements were consequential not only because they drew the English EIC out of of Madras and into the Indian mofussil (hinterland) in a recognizably state-like capacity.
As the following sections will show in more detail, the way these arrangements mixed Company servants’ “public” and “private” financial interests also touched off a conflict that would decisively transform the institutional logic of government in Madras and its new territorial holdings.

The Proximate Cause: The Nawab of Arcot’s Debts and the Country Trade

By the middle of the 18th century, South India was a cauldron of fiscal-military competition. In this way, it represented a common pattern of proto-state formation (resembling, for example, Western Europe and the Chinese “warring states” period; see Hui 2005), yet the conflicts among Indian rulers was overshadowed by the presence of European merchant trading companies which, because of conflicts with each other, had militarized. As discussed in the last section, this combination of fiscal pressure and readily-available military might for hire led to a cycle of increasing indebtedness.

One of the analytically clearest examples of this dynamic was also one of the most empirically fateful for the institutional logic of Madras administration. This was the Nawab of Arcot (and nominal ruler of the whole Carnatic region), Muhammad Ali Khan al-Walajah, who ascended to the throne over a French-backed rival in 1749 with the assistance of the British (Henry Dodwell 1920). Muhammad Ali succeeded his father’s five-year reign, and while he technically was connected by a chain of vassalage that stretched through the Nizam of Hyderabad back to the Mughal emperor, in reality he ruled over an independent state (Gurney 1968:1–2, 9).

When he rose to the throne, Khan had firm control over only Arcot itself, via a network of fortified towns. He faced vassal rajas in Kalahastri, Turaiyur, Ariyalur, Warriarpollam, Venkatgiri, and Pudukkotai who were reluctant to pay revenues; rival claimants from the Muslim Navaits whom his father had replaced (Gurney 1968:4); and restless poligars in Trichinopoly, Tinnevelly, and Madura could only be violently subdued only with British assistance beginning in the 1750s (Phillips 1985:368–370). Moreover, the Nawab endured rebellions by his own military commanders and succession intrigues by his two sons.

If these challenges vexed the Nawab from below, his relationship with the British Company proved even more difficult. Beginning with his succession in 1749, but especially with the Peace of Paris in 1763, moreover, the Nawab came to be seen as a direct feudal Lord to the poligars and his subsidiary rajas. At the same time that it inflated his own ambitions for rule over the whole Carnatic, the terms of the peace also exaggerated British estimations of his suzerainty and expectations that he would be able to collect the full 3 million pagodas (approximately 300,000 pounds) thought to be the potential tax revenues of the region (Gurney 1968:28).

But these revenues were never realized, mainly because of the extraordinary pressure placed on the Nawab’s revenue administration by the demands of repaying the Company for the army used in his ascension struggle (Phillips 1985:375ff). The size of the initial debts was large, estimated at 1.2 million pagodas or 120,000 pounds in 1756-7 (Gurney 1968:33), and to finance them, the Nawab was forced to rely on Gujarati moneylenders (called sarkars) and eventually (in 1763) on
mortgaging the lands immediate around Madras—called the Company’s *jagir*—until the loans were repaid (Gurney 1968:31–32).

Rather than diminishing, however, the Nawab’s debts spiraled. To the Company alone in 1761-62, they totaled 2.6 million pagodas, or 260,000 pounds (Gurney 1968:33), forcing the Nawab to rely increasingly on sarkars, from whom he borrowed 1.1 million pagodas (110,000 pounds) between 1758-9 and 1766 (Gurney 1968:36). When he exhausted these creditors, the Nawab turned, fatefully, to European creditors, and began issuing interest-bearing bonds on his debt in the early 1760s (Gurney 1968:37). Guaranteeing a 3-4% compounding monthly interest rate (Gurney 1968:45), the bonds proved a popular way for Europeans to invest their salaries, through their dubashes, since the country trade had been depressed by incessant warfare in the Carnatic (Gurney 1968:37–45). As more and more Europeans clamored to purchase bonds, they also began lending to the Nawab’s amlildars, who in turn used the advances to pay the Nawab but who promised interest out of future revenue returns (Gurney 1968:52). These debts were compounded, finally, in the mid 1760s when expensive military campaigns against Ramnad and Tanjore led to the Nawab to grant his customary “presents” to Company officers in the form of bonds carrying 20% monthly compounding interest. Between 1763 and 1766, for example, the Nawab is estimated to have granted 929,355 pagodas, or about 92,000 pounds, in these bonds (Gurney 1968:56).

The Court of Directors had gotten wind of the Nawab’s escalating debts by 1766, and dispatched a letter ordering a reduction of all outstanding loans to 10% annual interest (Gurney 1968:64), but by this time the genie was out of the bottle. Nearly everyone in Madras owned at least some of the debt, and “the inner group of leading creditors were in effect the Board” of Madras (Gurney 1968:66). Over the rest of the 1760s and into the early 1770s, moreover, Junior company servants who arrived in Madras demanded even higher interest for their loans to the Nawabs, and an active bond market developed containing complicated financial instruments issued on the Nawab’s debt and managed primarily by Paul Benfield, a sometime architect and victualler for the Company’s army who soon abandoned EIC employment for a fiscal and political career (Gurney 1968:67–93; on Benfield, see Moles 2000).

Given the extensive debts the Nawab had to the Company as an official body and to its servants in their private capacities, the risk that the Nawab would be unable to repay his loans began influencing the Company’s policy in South India. Since the Nawab’s prime source of revenues was from land taxes, he turned to the province of Tanjore, one of the richest in all of the Carnatic (as it was composed of rich riverine farmland) and ruled over by the Nawab’s nominal Hindu vassal (according to the Treaty of Paris in 1763). The Nawab sought to subdue the Rajah of Tanjore by force, even though the Rajah was himself a treaty ally of the Company, and in this ambition the Nawab was supported by many of his creditors (who made up a majority on the Madras council) and saw Tanjore as the means to have their private debts repaid. By consequence, the Company’s army marched on Tanjore on the Nawab’s behalf in 1772 and 1773, and its revenues were subsequently assigned to the Nawab.

To sum up, by the late 1760s the fiscal demands placed on the Nawab of Arcot by the costs of his
ascension and ongoing military conflict in South Asia had produced a ballooning debt. Part of this debt was owed to the Company as an organization, but another part was owed to EIC servants in their private capacities. As the debt grew unmanageably large during the 1760s, efforts to ensure the Nawab’s ability to pay by solidifying his hold over nominal vassals like the Rajah of Tanjore became a piece (though a contentious and, by some interpretations, illegal) aspect of the Company’s military policy in Madras. Thus, Madras now resembled a powder keg of debt, dubious administration, and desperation to recover fortunes now tied up in the politics of land taxation, even while the institutional logic of governance remained rooted in the particular relations among Company officials.

The Set Piece: Pigot’s Downfall

This was the tense environment that Lord Pigot, former governor and hero of Madras’ resistance against the French in the 1760s, returned to from London in 1775. He immediately clashed with his subordinates on the Madras council over Tanjore. Though a 1762 treaty between the Company and the Rajah had guaranteed his autonomy, the Nawab of Arcot had been given the territory after the EIC conquered it in 1773. Of course, the EIC administrators’ ulterior motive was that it would have been nearly impossible for the Nawab to repay his debt to them without the Tanjore revenues. Beyond following the EIC’s treaty obligations, Pigot also followed the Court of Directors’ instructions when he moved to prioritize the Nawab's debts to the Company over those owed to EIC administrators.

These matters came to a head in June 1776, when Pigot moved that members of the Madras council be suspended for insubordination over the appointment of an administrative representative to the court of the Rajah. This led to motions and countermotions which quickly ground the council to a halt. When dissenting members of the council began circulating their objections to the wider public, including military officers in the garrison, Pigot attempted to arrest them. The commander of the British forces, Colonel Stuart, instead arrested Pigot in August 1776. The Governor-General in Bengal, Warren Hastings, refused to intervene on Pigot’s behalf, and the Bengal supreme court (thought to be the supreme English legal institution in India) also refused to issue an opinion on the legality of the Council's action. His appeal to his nominal superiors to Bengal denied, Pigot then snuck appeals to the Directors in London out through supporters in Madras. Frightened, the Madras council wrote to London in September 1776, attempting to explain their actions and including depositions from both sides. It took almost a year—until August 1777—for the response to come. Pigot was to be reinstated but immediately recalled, along with Benfield and other dissenting members of the council. But by the time the news arrived, Pigot had fallen ill and died while gardening under house arrest.

Immediately after Pigot died, his allies in Madras convened a coroner's inquest which returned a verdict of murder against the architects of the “revolution.” The findings, however, were invali-

---

43 Philips (1983) and Love (1988:II, 82–122) are good summaries of this complicated episode. The controlling, though curiously unpublished, source for the Nawab's perspective is Gurney (1968), and the diaries of the Nawab's English secretary provide more perspective (Nightingale 1985).
dated by the Bengal supreme court. Upon the conspirators' return to London, the death of Lord Pigot and the broader issue of the “Nawab of Arcot's debts” influenced British political consciousness throughout the late 1770s and early 1780s. Pamphlets containing accusations, defenses, and counter-accusations were published by returning participants and their defenders. Pigot's narrative of the events was also published posthumously, as were the depositions taken immediately after the incident and by the coroner's inquest and the correspondence within the company surrounding his impeachment. But perhaps most famously, the issue was taken up by Edmund Burke against Paul Benfield in a 1785 speech before parliament (E. Burke 1981).

While the incident was rhetorically important, and certainly dramatized the issue of political control of the EIC's administration that was eventually placed on firmer footing with Lord North's Regulating Act of 1784, the consequences for the conspirators themselves were comparatively muted. Four of the civil conspirators, including Stratton, were eventually convicted of misdemeanors in England and fined £1000 each. Benfield returned to India as a member of parliament, and though permanently ejected from India in 1788, eventually became an important member of the London finance sector (Marshall 2004a; Moles 2000). Most importantly, William Pitt's ministry decided in the 1784 India Act that all of the Nawab's debts, including private ones, would be rationalized and repaid (Philips 1961:36–41).

Examining the content of the claims made by both parties in the “revolution” in Madras is difficult. This is partially because the surviving justifications and arguments are fragmentary. Unfortunately (from the perspective of this analysis) neither side produced sweeping, coherent justifications of their behavior. Rather, to understand their arguments' logic one must piece together perspectives from statements and actions scattered among several documents. But when this is done, a coherent picture of the problem and sources of social order emerges. Both sides of the debate agreed that corruption was eating away at the effectiveness of EIC administration in India, but they disagreed about the sources of that corruption and consequently the origins of the forces that would stabilize it. Those recalled for overthrowing Pigot argued that they acted in the name of constitutional checks against Pigot's corrupt, dictatorial government, and as such were creating just administration from the stable source of a society autonomous from Government.

The language of constitutional defense against tyranny—from the majority's perspective—and the forces of disorder—from Pigot's perspective—are clear from the beginning of the episode. The specific order Pigot produced during council indicted dissenting members of council for “an act subversive of the authority of government and tending to introduce anarchy” (Dalrymple 1776:8). For Pigot, the Governor had direct and unmediated authority to directly legislate in Madras, and that, given the language of his orders from the Court of Directors in London, “the name of the President [of the Madras council; i.e., the Governor] was necessary to make an act of Government” (Dalrymple 1776:7; emphasis original). Consequently, the decision by the dissenting members of council—who formed a slim majority—to appoint their candidate to the residency of Tanjore anyway formed, in Pigot's mind, an insubordinate act by servants.

44 Indeed, East India servants were permitted to simultaneously hold seats in parliament while on duty until 1830 (Philips 1961:260 n. 4).

45 Benfield's fortunes waned, however, and he died in France in hiding from his creditors.
This was likewise how Pigot viewed British military officers as he attempted to move aggressively against the dissenting members of his council. As soon as the dissenting members of council began circulating critical materials throughout the town, Pigot called Colonel Stuart, the commander-in-chief of military forces in the settlement, ordering him to arrest the two leaders of the dissenting faction. Stuart, however,

...wanted to see all the proceedings, that he might judge as an honest man, and a free agent. It was replied by one of the Council, that this doctrine, of a military officer's being a free agent, and entitled to know on what grounds orders were given, could not be admitted; that a military officer was bound to obey the legal orders he received from the proper authority issued in due form, and had no claim to know whether those orders were for good reasons or not (Dalrymple 1776:13; emphasis original).

Pigot thus seems to have found Stuart's assertion that he was acting as a “free agent”, capable of making decisions about orders outside the authority of the governor, particularly galling. Indeed, his diagnosis of the problem, which implies his means of stabilizing the administration, was to recognize what he considered to be the Governor's traditional power and authority within the presidency, both over its military and civilian branches (Dalrymple 1776:17). (His impeachment occurred in part because Pigot already interpreted his powers in such terms, but his clear desire was to have them affirmed and ratified either by the Governor-General in Bengal or the Court of Directors in London.)

Of course, this was not how the majority justified itself to other members of the Madras community or to the Company in London. The letter circulated by the conspirators in Madras, which originally led to Pigot's move to arrest them, stated their case in strongly constitutionalist language. They complained of Pigot's

...the unexampled outrage offered to the constitution, and arbitrary behavior towards two of our members, by an illegal attempt to suspend them...the public safety is in danger by the conduct of Lord Pigot, and you gentlemen, who have supported, and by every person, who shall continue to support such measures; and we shall hold you therefore responsible for all the consequences that may ensue. We the majority of the board to consider ourselves as the only legal representatives of the Honourable Company under this presidency, and as such we have no doubt but all the servants of the Company will regard us (Dalrymple 1776:9; emphasis original).

The majority of the council amplified this assertion in a proclamation to Madras town after arresting Pigot. They argued that Pigot's “arbitrary behavior” stemmed from his attempts to overturn the will of his Council. They imagined an unlikely scenario, but one that nevertheless reveals the basis of their argument:

...if an enemy invaded this settlement, and the President chose to oppose preparations for the public defense, it is evident, that the loss of the settlement might attend such power in the hands of an ill-disposed President; and further, if such as system was supported, and that a President, vested with such powers, was detected in sacrificing the public interest to his own, it is clear, that no measure of detection or punishment could be carried out against him (Dalrymple 1776:21).
This passage is interesting because the bugaboo of a power-mad tyrant acting in his own interest against the community’s captures two pieces of the disorder of the Madras administration. For the majority, the danger seemed to be both that Pigot carried tyrannical powers and that he himself was corrupt.\(^{46}\) They justified their actions as a defense of the community against tyrannical behavior, but in the process they transformed the English community of Madras from an administration subordinate to the will of a hierarchical leadership into a quasi-constitutional polity capable of overthrowing its rulers. After arresting Pigot, Colonel Stuart summarized the majority’s justification:

\[
\text{I cannot close this narrative without adding my satisfaction at having had an opportunity...to declare my Sentiments upon the nature of a free Government under the Auspices of the British Constitution, that it consisted in the due Subordination of the Military to the Civil Power...[Stuart’s toast at a public banquet held shortly after Pigot's arrest was] 'Justice to the Army while Subordinate to the Civil Power' (Love 1988:93).}
\]

For Pigot, meanwhile, the diagnosis was the same—corrupted, insolent administrators acting out of their own interest—but the source of order could not be any kind of polity in Madras outside of the government. This is obvious in his reasoning rejecting the majority’s claim to legitimacy in his absence, since they, having not been ratified by his presence, as Governor in council, “were incapable of any public act, and could be nothing but mere private individuals” (Dalrymple 1776:25). Order was only possible, according to Pigot, with his personal representation of authority capable of bringing his unruly servants to heel. However, in Madras Pigot’s “servants” portrayed themselves as fellow citizens.

Of course, such a claim—to being a citizen before a servant of the Company—was a peculiar one to make, and certainly was only one part of the majority’s defense in deposing Pigot. But it is also an important and interesting one, because it highlights a possible source of social order in the growing British empire in India. Like those defending themselves against corruption charges in Bengal (as discussed in Chapter 4), the conspirators in Madras seem to have believe that only if the Indian empire could be more tightly integrated into the British state—only if, that is, Company servants or Europeans in Company territory could be granted protections similar to what they thought they deserved at home—the scourge of corruption—which they took to mean tyrannical government—could be expunged.

But beyond the content of the claims being made by Pigot and the majority in Madras, the scandal over the Nawab of Arcot’s debts laid the groundwork for a transformation in the Company’s governance structure. In the near term, little seemed to have changed. The events in Madras between 1775 and 1777 demonstrated how deeply Company administration blended private and public activity, and the fragility of Madras’ senior administrative structure in the face of discord and autonomous moral claims showed how much administrators still relied on personal ties and the sense of moral propriety generated therefrom. The initial response from London, moreover, seemed to show that relatively little had changed. As the Nawab’s debts worsened, the Directors chose an old India hand in Pigot to reform administration, and after he was deposed and died, many of the key members of the Majority and holders of the Nawab’s debts were only slapped

---

\(^{46}\) Critics argued that Pigot had received large gifts from the Nawab after his succession (Marshall 2004b).
on the wrist, Benfield was allowed to return to Madras, and Macpherson became a serious candidate to be Governor-General in the 1780s. However, while Pigot’s overthrow and death thus resembled the multitude of corruption scandals that had churned Madras administration over the past hundred years, in fact it began the transformation of the presidency’s institutional logic, as the following section details.

The Fallout: Macartney and the Emergence of the Social

The “revolution” in Madras reflected both continuity and change in Company administration. Pigot’s downfall and death drew the attention of Parliament, the Crown, and the British public to the “Nawab of Arcot’s Debts” and gave spectacular ammunition to the Company’s domestic political opponents. When combined with the British state’s first serious intervention into Company affairs with the 1773 Regulating Act, increasingly intense political struggles surrounding the Company as it sought its charter renewal, and the Company’s own internal factional conflict between Laurence Sulivan and his many opponents, this attention meant that a new class of senior administrators sailed for Madras beginning in the 1780s. These new men, especially George Macartney, were drawn from the larger British imperial patronage network, and although they arrived in Madras confident in their abilities to reform the administration, both encountered obstacles that had persisted through the Pigot scandal. Southern India remained a arena for multi-lateral military strife between Mughal successor states, to say nothing of French intrigues (whether real or imagined). Moreover, since the Company’s purge of the Madras administration had been half-hearted and unsuccessful, Macartney also dealt with the same recalcitrant men who had deposed and imprisoned Pigot.

Faced with these challenges, Macartney revolutionized the institutional logic of Madras administration. Though he first tried to operate within the personalistic and patrimonial politics of Madras administration, Macartney soon repudiated references to local peers, angering his cohorts in Madras. Macartney sought new foundations to justify his moral stances again the administration, and eventually settled on an autonomous, if unsteady, foundation in an authentic, consistent representation of himself across social settings. In other words, he used the story of his own life and past actions, combined with a claim to their consistency, as political ammunition against his own staff in Madras during administrative struggles.

In the aftermath of Pigot’s death, the first governor sent to replace him was another quintessential Company man, Sir Thomas Rumbold. The son of a former council member at Tellicherry and nephew of the former attorney of the Mayor’s Court of Madras, Thomas Rumbold joined the Company’s civil service in India in 1752, eventually rising to sit on the Council in Bengal between 1766 and 1769. Rumbold then returned to England and seats in both Parliament and the Company’s Court of Directors, but sailed back out to Madras in 1778 at the Court’s behest (Kuiters 2004). Though his administration was a personal financial success—Rumbold returned to England in 1780 with around three quarters of a million pounds in investment profits, salary, and bribes from the Nawab of Arcot (Phillips 1988:82)—it was a political failure in both Madras and London. In India, Rumbold struck out at the French, capturing Pondicherry from the French
in October 1778 and Mahé in 1779, but he irritated both the Nizam of Hyderabad and the Company’s nominally superordinate council in Bengal by leasing the Northern Circars to the Nawab of Arcot in lieu of the Nizam’s brother, and likewise aggravated relations with Hyder Ali by violating Mysore’s treaty protecting Mahé. Even when he returned to England, Rumbold’s political fate was no better. He had been elected an MP for Shaftesbury in absentia, but was unseated by petition and returned a few days later from Yarmouth, Isle of Wight. He also was dismissed from the Court of Directors and sued in Chancery for 60,000 pounds, in part because he was now acting directly as the London political agent for the Nawab of Arcot. Moreover, Rumbold was even prosecuted in parliament under a constitutionally-unusual bill of pains and penalties for his conduct as Governor. And though it failed on technical and political grounds, Rumbold’s prosecution drew more unwelcome attention to Madras administration from parliament and the British public. This attention was compounded, moreover, because Rumbold has clearly done little to settle the Madras administration: since Rumbold’s departure, the Governor pro tem, John Whitehill, had been suspended and recalled for incompetence and fled England under suspicion of supporting piracy (Love 1988:III, p. 195), and three more senior Company servants became embroiled in a public trial displaying Madras’ factional infighting to an audience in London (see Anon 1793). In sum, the Company’s efforts to contain the scandal of Madras administration in the aftermath of Pigot’s death using its own personnel proved an abject failure.

Part of the reason for this failure was that the Company’s London politics had been deeply unsettled through most of the 1770s. The Court of Proprietors had repeatedly fought to install Directors who were hostile to the British government and who favored guaranteeing profits at the cost of Company stability, while the government had sought to directly manipulate the Company’s internal affairs (Sutherland 1952:240–290). But in the Company election of 1780, the North ministry forked the Company’s internal opposition by coopting Laurence Sullivan, with whom they forged a “curious alliance” (H. Dodwell 1925:376) and began to collaborate on appointments for the Governors of the presidencies while leaving lower-level appointments in the Directors’ hands (Sutherland 1952:351, 279). The first fruit of this collaboration on appointments was to send George Macartney, the “notoriously penniless” (Sutherland 1975:524) former Governor of Grenada (until it was captured by the French) and special Crown envoy to Russia, and

48 A Bill of Pains and Penalties was a special class of parliamentary act that allowed extraordinary prosecution for behavior that was not technically illegal but deemed morally or politically outrageous. In other words, it was a means for parliament to retroactively legislate. Members of parliament were concerned that prosecuting Rumbold in this way would expose them to similar prosecution for corruption and worried about the constitutional propriety of parliament acting as both judge and jury. Moreover, Rumbold’s prosecution stretched until the fall of the Rockingham ministry in 1782, and the succeeding Shelburne ministry was much closer to Laurence Sullivan and Robert Palk (a former Madras governor) and hence was less eager to pursue the prosecution. For Rumbold’s fate in London after his return, see Phillips (1988).
49 Dodwell describes the coalition this way: “They were a curiously mixed body of men. Some, like Pechell or Palk [long-standing Company Directors], were respectable enough; others, like Laurence Sullivan or Paul Benfield, were men whose ideas of policy were deeply coloured by financial interests of various kinds...” (1925:376). It was especially unusual for North’s ministry to ally with Sullivan, since it had spent five years (between 1773 and 1778) trying to exclude Sullivan from the Directorate (Sutherland 1952:346).
50 Sutherland suggests elsewhere that this political coalition was brokered by none other than John Macpherson, who had “close links [with] his friend and collaborator James Macpherson (North’s ablest political pamphleteer) and John Robinson [the treasury official who was North’s liason to the treasury]” (Sutherland 1975:526).
former Chief Secretary for Ireland, to replace Rumbold as Governor of Madras in 1780. Even though he was already in Irish peer, handsome, a skilled speaker, and embedded in the British elite (having married a daughter of the Earl of Bute and friend of Edmund Burke’s), Macartney owed his appointment largely to the political disorder caused by Pigot’s overthrow and the consequent political toxicity of his primary internal competitors, John Call and Claud Russell (Sutherland 1975:530). In other words, the first Governor of a Company presidency to take office without prior Indian experience was appointed, on the one hand, because of an awkward political coalition meant to stabilize the metropolitan relationship between the British state and the Company, and on the other hand, by an unusually favorable set of political circumstances caused by the Company’s colonial disorder. The fact that Macartney lacked Indian experience before his appointment is important. For a man like Rumbold, Macartney’s predecessor as Governor, Madras represented a well-known feature of the Company’s internal political landscape, its administration filled with known actors and its institutions relatively familiar. For Macartney, by contrast (and like Cornwallis, who would become Governor-General of Bengal over Macartney’s candidacy in 1786), Madras was yet another stop on the perambulation of lower-tier British diplomatic-cum-military elites who circulated throughout the British empire in the late 18th century.

Though he knew his status as an outside would pique the jealousies of Company administrators, Macartney appears to have tried to turn that very status into an advantage. For example, he pitched himself in his letter of application to the directors as one would not have applied “had not several of my friends [within the Company], men of high character and large property, perfectly versed and deeply interested in Indian concerns, expressed a strong opinion that the situation on the Coromandel Coast would probably require at this particular juncture the appointment of one totally unconnected with any of the contending interests there, and absolutely free from local passion or prepossession” (quoted in Sutherland 1975:524–525). Likewise, Lushington’s motion in the Court of Proprietors for Macartney’s appointment declared, in part, “that integrity unshaken by the example of plunder and corruption, a character to lose and consequently one to save by shunning the faults of former governors, were to be considered as the fittest qualifications in their new governor of Madras” (quoted in Barrow and Macartney 1807:69). Above all, Macartney promised to turn this very lack of local knowledge into a tool for disinterested administration in Madras:

51 For Macartney’s friendship with Burke, see e.g., Barrow (Barrow and Macartney 1807:414ff). Burke also told Macartney that “no man wishes your success more cordially than I do” (Robbins 1908:126).
52 Sutherland also notes (1975:528) that for all his complaints about Indian corruption and oppression connected to the Nawab of Arcot’s debts, Edmund Burke supported Claude Russell’s candidacy, evidently because he had married one of Lord Pigot’s daughters. Pigot’s brother was Admiral Hugh Pigot, a prominent member of the Rockingham Whigs, with whom Burke was strongly associated.
53 As Macartney wrote to a friend prior to his departure, “Most of the [Anglo-]Indians declare against an interloper, as they term me, and are trying to form a strong opposition to my appointment” (quoted in Robbins 1908:120).
54 Both of these statements—as well as Barrow’s own evaluation of Macartney as “totally unconnected with the contending factions or interests of any part of Hindostan” (1807:74)—are belied by how quickly Macartney became entangled with both Macpherson and Benfield, the latter of whom loaned him 6,000 pounds in travel costs (Sutherland 1975:527).
Macartney was aware, he said, of the popular and interested objection of his want of local knowledge [as voiced in the Court by a motion by General Smith]...He found that prudence and integrity, temper and perseverance seldom failed to surmount the difficulties of public stations, and those difficulties for which they are established; that local knowledge, which is necessary to men in eminent offices, is indeed either quickly acquired or easily supplied by inferior persons on the spot; not the report of an individual, but compared and collected from many. Any one man’s local knowledge must be so corrected, or it will be found both lame and blind. The public man becomes the impartial judge, who gathers from the witnesses of the facts, the truth of the evidence (Barrow and Macartney 1807:75–76).

Thus Macartney portrayed himself to the Court of Directors as a figure that closely mirrored Adam Smith’s ideal of the impartial spectator.\(^{55}\) While he provided essentially no details of what policies he would pursue, nor of the substantive principles that would guide his conduct, Macartney instead offered a strong formal description of how he would broker and synthesize competing sources of local knowledge, acting with “prudence and integrity” as an “impartial judge” to obtain the “truth of the evidence.”

Since his avowed role as Governor of Madras was thus to balance competing political actions within the administration on the basis of his own objective distance from the stakes of the conflicts, Macartney claimed he was well-suited to the task due to his affable personality and the consequent “independence” it afforded him. Barrow emphasized how Macartney’s personality, for example, made him one of the few men who “could temper the impetuous eloquence” and “silence the wild and democratic effusions” of parliamentary opponents while Chief Secretary of Ireland (1807:46), and as Macartney himself told the Court of Proprietors during his election campaign for the Governorship, he hoped to apply these skills in India:

[He declared himself] possessed of the friendship and good opinion of all parties, but resolutely fixed on continuing unconnected with any party...You do not, I hope, suppose that enormous wealth alone can warrant independence. That happy spirit proceeds from a disposition of the mind, which is not governed by the accidents of life; and, I hope, I have what is the surest pledge of honorable independence, the independence of honest and moderate desires. My aim will ever be so to conduct myself, on all occasions, as to be able to appear before you in this court, on my return from India, with as little necessity of apology for any part of my proceedings there in your employ, as I have ever had in those other stations with which I have had elsewhere the honor to be entrusted (quoted in Barrow and Macartney 1807:79–80).

Macartney, indeed, appears to have tried to rely on his personality and ability to persuade even the most intransigent of opponents when he took up his post in Madras on June 22nd, 1781. Just four days later, for example, he wrote his immediate superior in Bengal, the Governor-General Warren Hastings. The tone of Macartney’s private correspondence closely echoed his earlier speech in London:

Sir,

The prospect of a satisfactory connection and communication with you in my present Station, which I derived from the high Character you bear in the World, was confirmed to me and height-ened, if possible, by our common friend Mr.[Samuel] Pechell, from whom I have the honor to

\(^{55}\) For more discussion of the impartial spectator and its relationship to moral propriety, see Chapter 1.
transmit a couple of Letters to you. It is my good fortune to be supported by the same Persons who are attached to your Welfare; a coincidence which I trust will lay a foundation of Friendship and Confidence between Us. In this reliance it should be my constant Aim to give you my best Assistance in forwarding the public Business; and I flatter myself with finding every facility on your part. I trust you will please to open yourself to me, without reserve, on the present State of Affairs (Macartney 1950:108).

Likewise, Macartney wrote to Sir Eyre Coote, the commander of the Company’s military forces in Madras, in November of the same year, declaring that “Though with an exact knowledge of facts, I combined the observations of several capable persons, I was very cautious in forming my own judgment; but after taking these precautions, it appears to me a laudable exertion of duty to become responsible in following the dictates of such a judgment” (quoted in Barrow and Macartney 1807:106).

Macartney’s correspondence with Coote in the same letter displays frustration with Coote’s intransigence—a frustration which was generated by the repeated challenges Macartney faced both from his own staff and his superiors in Bengal as he attempted to govern Madras. In 1781, the Company suffered grave military defeats at the hands of the Sultan of Mysore, had yet to reconcile and settle its political relationship with the Nawab of Arcot (whose extraordinary debts were still being pursued aggressively by Madras civil servants), was at war with the French, and was dependent on cash from Bengal to meet its military’s payroll (see Barrow and Macartney 1807:213ff for a good summary). Yet whenever Macartney attempted to coordinate civil operations with the Company’s military in Madras, negotiate effectively with Arcot, or leverage new revenues from local merchants or Bengal, to his surprise he found himself thwarted by some of the same men he had expected to be his allies.

Consider the course of Macartney’s relationship with Coote. In October 1781, Macartney wrote to Coote upon hearing that Coote felt disrespected by Macartney. Concerning Coote’s “Dissatisfaction and disappointment,” Macartney was

Totally at a Loss to guess from whence it arises: I know It ought not to arise from any part of my Conduct, which I am conscious has been not only perfectly blameless towards You; But I should flatter myself in some degree meritorious (Macartney 1950:152).

A month later, Macartney still expressed optimism that his diplomacy and affability would win over Coote, writing to John MacPherson that

Sir Eyre Coote and I are, as far as I know, upon good terms. If every mark of Regard, and even of Respect towards him personally, and an implicit and immediate Compliance with all his Wishes in his public Situation, can ensure his Satisfaction and Good Will, I must consider myself in possession of them; nor shall I be induced to think otherwise from any momentary Sallies of ill humour which disappointments, Hastiness of temper, or ill health may occasion; his cooler and fixed Sentiments will lead him to do me justice (Macartney 1950:3).

Later that same month, Macartney was even blunter, writing to Macpherson that “The General and I are at bottom the best of friends that can be…I have courted him like a Mistress, and humoured him like a Child” (Macartney 1950:5).
But as these attempts to woo Coote failed, and especially when Coote appealed to Hastings in Bengal over Macartney’s head, Macartney’s descriptions grew increasingly negative. At first Macartney blamed Coote’s behavior on syncophants taking advantage of his passions. In January 1782 Macartney complained Coote had been

made ridiculous by those who ought to make him respectable; made miserable by those who ought to make him happy; and from a great public Character worked into the little instrument of private Malignity and disappointed Avarice (Macartney 1950:23).

Finally, when Hastings ratified Coote’s counter-claims against Macartney and declared that Macartney was to obey Coote’s orders on military matters in summer 1782, Macartney was incensed enough to question Hastings’ conduct, albeit with great circumspection:

I know the public importance of concert and confidence between us [Macartney and Hastings]. On this ground I have implicitly followed all his ideas since his return to Calcutta, and wherever my Opinions have been communicated to him, I have delivered them with as much delicacy and deference as possible. I own to you [Macpherson] they sometimes differ much from his, but he having been long resident in India, and I being new in it, I distrust my own Judgment, except where the points appear impossible to mistake. I think for instance that the recommendation of gratifying Sir Eyre Coote [emphasis original] in his Command ‘to the utmost possible extent of his wishes,’ and entrusting to him the other unusual Powers, may be attended with very serious inconveniences, but what can we say, what can we do (Macartney 1950:48–49).

Even though Coote died in 1783, the course of his relationship with Macartney was hardly unique. The same pattern—in which Macartney initially showed high hopes that his persuasiveness could bring recalcitrant administrators around, but then gave way to bitterness and confusion—was repeated with Anthony Sadlier on the Madras council, Paul Benfield, who resumed attempts to recover the Nawab’s debts illicitly, James Stuart, who replaced Coote and who Macartney eventually had forcibly deported, Hastings, over whose affections Macartney incessantly agonized, and even John Macpherson himself, who proved to be more loyal to Hastings than Macartney.

Disconnected from politics in Madras, these interactions between Macartney and his superiors and inferiors could be mistaken for personality conflicts or an artifact of the crises that dogged Company servants in India at the time. Yet it is important to remember that what look on the surface like epiphenomena in fact had important consequences for the EIC’s organization and its policies in South India. The conflict between Coote and Macartney, for example, is thought to have led to several of the military disasters against Hyder Ali in the early 1780s, the fate of whole Indian districts (in this case, the Northern Circars) rested on the extent to which Macartney and Hastings felt their careers to be threatened by each other. And as Pigot discovered (along with Macartney, as shall be discussed below) what began as breakdowns in decorum could have violent consequences.

In the face of these conflicts and the failure of his original strategy—to combine politeness, persuasiveness, and impartiality—Macartney combined three approaches into a novel way of gov-
erning in Madras. First, in both his private and public correspondence he shifted his appeals from primarily appeals to personal ties and his particular relationships with other administrators to broad, abstract justifications. As late as September of 1781, Macartney included long passages in his public correspondence with Bengal which justified his behavior in terms of personal relationships, writing, for example, that “our personal respect and esteem for the Governor-general and other members of your board, on all occasional have naturally excited in our minds to yield implicitly to every direction we receive from you” even when protesting that “the dictates of duty” prevented him from executing the specific policy (quoted in Barrow and Macartney 1807:457). But by 1784, when Hastings was about to be recalled to London, Macartney took pains to distinguish between his public and private roles even in his private correspondence, writing to Hastings that “I am conscious in my own Mind of a wide distinction between public, and personal differences and am not without hopes of finding the same distinction in the liberality of your sentiments” (Macartney 1950:136). Thus at the beginning of his administration Macartney closely intertwined personal and public sentiments and duties, but by the end he held them carefully separate.

Even as he held these two dimensions of himself—his role as a Company official and his private likes and dislikes—Macartney reconnected them powerfully. If men like Benfield had “endeavored to give false impressions,” Macartney, by contrast, claimed credibility on the grounds that he was “open and undisguised” in his declarations (both quotes Macartney 1950:40). In other words, by separating his personality from his public duty and then reconnecting them while using the consistency of his desire to perform that duty as evidence of his truthfulness and authenticity, Macartney added new force to statements like “One thing depend on, I never will deceive your Government in the slightest point. I would sooner cut off my right hand” (to John Macpherson; in Macartney 1950:52).

But if Macartney turned away from personalistic ties and instead relied on a narrative of his own consistent representations of inner desire to his official duty, what ends was he to serve? Macartney found footing in service to “the public,” and by applying it to Madras transformed it from an aggregation of his close peers (i.e., other Indian administrators) into an amorphous domain of social life. As he put the point to Macpherson: “...amidst all the difficulties which Surround Me I hope to stand firm. Indeed nothing but Integrity can support a man against the universal Intrigue and Duplicity which prevail here thro’ every department. It is to guard the public in these circumstances that I am under the necessity of attending perhaps too much to inferior affairs” (Macartney 1950:10–11). Or even more bluntly, “If I have done ill, let me suffer, if I have done well, I will trust to the Public for my reward” (Macartney 1950:52). Thus, by Macartney’s own account, he stood as a protector of a slippery thing: a “public” in Madras, which was composed of virtually none of the administrators nor private merchants he encountered, but which had the capacity to command his duty and judge his behavior.

Though it emerged as a rhetorical strategy to justify his personal integrity, authority, and policy claims in Madras, Macartney directly defended the public in two spectacular incidents. The first occurred in 1784 when Macartney was still Governor of Madras. Anthony Sadlier, a long-time and senior company servant who Macartney’s biographer castigates for his “petulance, unsteadi-
ness, and timidity” (Barrow and Macartney 1807:207). Their dispute arose, by all accounts, because Sadlier reversed himself on a matter before the council and refused to withdraw his lone opposition to the technical matter at hand. Macartney then accused Sadlier of lying, and although he immediately apologized, Macartney let the accusation stand in the Council’s minutes, writing to the Court of Directors that he did so because

I never will attempt to conceal from you any thing, however unimportant, which the meanest member of this community might wish to be laid before you. Every gentleman of feeling knows that there is a species of audacious contradiction which can only be stopped by a particular mode of expression. In the case no alluded to, that expression, although arising from absolute necessity, was no sooner used but apologized for to the board (Barrow and Macartney 1807:300).

In the subsequent duel in Madras, Macartney was wounded in the chest but recovered (Barrow and Macartney 1807:582–583).

The second incident was also a duel, and while it stemmed from conflicts over the administration of Madras, it took place in London. While Governor, Macartney also clashed with the replacement for Eyre Coote, Major-General James Stuart Macarteny, who was unsatisfied by what he perceived to be Stuart’s continuing insubordination, had him dismissed, and when Stuart (how had lost a leg in military action in 1781) refused to board a ship home, Macartney had him forcibly carried on board (Love 1988:III, pp. 253–257). This (somewhat understandably) enraged Stuart, and when Macartney returned to London in 1786, Stuart challenged him to a duel. Again, in responding to Stuart’s challenge, Macartney carefully distinguished his private and official roles:

…when Major-general Stuart thought fit in January last…to send a letter…censuring, in unqualified expressions, my public conduct in relation to him, and contradicting my assertions, I help it sufficient to observe, that those persons to whom I was accountable for my public conduct, if any such there were, who entertained a doubt of it, would ever find me ready to explain it to their satisfaction; but that I was long resigned to the consequences of having fulfilled the duties of my station, and to be exposed to the contradiction and opposition of those individuals, of whose misconduct in my official capacity I had been obliged to take notice… (Barrow and Macartney 1807:600).

The two men fought in Kensington Park in 1786—General Stuart having to be propped against a tree and an aging Macartney of poor eyesight—and Macartney was again wounded but survived, declaring that Stuart had “called upon me to give him satisfaction in my private capacity, for offence [sic] taken at my public conduct, and to evince that personal safety is no consideration with me, I have nothing personal, the General will proceed as he thinks fit” (Barrow and Macartney 1807:604–605).

In contrast to the Madras governors who had proceeded him (and some who would succeed him), Macartney resigned his post of his own will and returned to England with his reputation at least relatively unscathed. He declined to be made Governor-General of India when it was offered without a British peerage and was subsequently made an envoy to China and governor of the

56 Stuart, then a Colonel, toasted the majority of the Madras Council after deposing Pigot in 1776.
Cape Colony in modern day South Africa (Thorne 2004). In other words, after his stint in Madras, his reputation was intact enough that he continued his perambulation around the British empire.

But while to him it represented only one step in his career, Macartney transformed the way Madras was governed. By divorcing his public and private roles, reintroducing his private self as a source of motivation for his official conduct, and then turning to a consistent account of his private desires towards an amorphous “public,” Macartney introduced a powerful new institutional logic into Madras administration. While the notion of an autonomous public making moral demands on officials’ duty was still ambiguous, the subsequent cohort of Madras governors (most notably William Bentinck and Thomas Munro) attached Macartney’s notion of public to Indian society itself (Rosselli 1974; Burton Stein 1989). But again, this society did not correspond to any specific Indian social group or particular class of society, but rather stood as an imaginary form which justified the actions of the colonial state.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the emergence of “society” as an autonomous source of moral order in Madras and how it became an organizing institutional logic for the presidency’s administration. The core argument is that this understanding of society—as distinct from the interpersonal ties that grounded officials’ senses of moral propriety beforehand—emerged out of the dynamics and fallout of the Nawab of Arcot’s debts scandal in the 1760s and 1770s. It was not the content of the scandal that mattered, however. Rather, it was the context in which the scandal occurred that led George Macartney to be appointed governor, and it was Macartney’s own efforts to control policy and his own administrators in Madras that led him to fabricate an abstract notion of a “public” for whom he stood. In sum, then, rather than a grand ideological project, “society” emerged as a means of control—not of Indians (in the beginning) but rather of European administrators themselves.

This strange origin of society as an institutional logic in Madras serves to contextualize Patrick Boyle Smollet’s complaints against the administration in Madras in the middle of the 19th century. For at the same time that he argued that the administration’s policies were destroying the “ancient native families of Southern India” in the name of “guard[ing] the natives against themselves,” Smollett continued a regime of justification rooted in his own selfless defense of Indian society. Indeed, his complaint was less that the Madras administration was attempting to defend Indian society, but rather that it was doing so without a “true” knowledge of that society’s structure. As such, the terms of the debate taking place in the 1850s would have been intelligible to administrators in the aftermath of Macartney’s administration half a century earlier.
Chapter 3: “The Corruption is Not Among Ourselves”
Strange Roots of the State as an Administrative Order in Bengal

No sooner on shore had our Phill set his feet,
Than he drove, like a post boy, to Leadenhall Street;
In the flames of his malice, he burnt to disclose
A tale which had cost him some years to compose;
But he got a rebuff from the Court of Directors;
They were Hastings’ friends; they were virtue’s protectors;
They paid just regard to their honour and glory;
They read not Phill’s papers, they heard not Phill’s story.
Tho’ like lightning to England from India he came,
In speed he was greatly surpass’d by his fame;
They knew how the measures of Hastings he crost,
How near his advice Coromandel had lost;
By the Court of Directors, it clearly was seen
That the man was a compound of envy and spleen.

—Letters of Simpkin the Second to his dear brother in Wales (C. Lawson 1895:87)

Introduction

Soon after he landed to take up the seat of Governor-General of India in 1798, Richard Wellesley, earl of Mornington—whose Governor-Generalship “was…the decisive phase in the establishment of British dominion over the India subcontinent” (Bayly 2004)—wrote to Henry Dundas, Chair of the British Government’s Board of Control, who was tasked with overseeing the Company’s affairs in India. Though Dundas had favored reappointing an aging Charles Cornwallis to the post, Wellesley had enjoyed favor from William Pitt (the Prime Minister) because Wellesley was as an Anglo-Irish politico, member of parliament, and subordinate of Dundas’ on the Board of Control. Thus, once Cornwallis refused the reappointment, the job was Wellesley’s (Melville and Wellesley 1970:1).

Wellesley sailed to Calcutta full of confidence—he went so far as to apologetically open the sealed strategic correspondence Dundas had sent with him and offered voluminous reflections on Indian geopolitics while still at the Cape Colony (Wellesley to Dundas 28 Feb 1798)57—but he quickly grew frustrated with the Company’s administration in India. By October, he wrote a long letter to Dundas detailing his complaints. According to Wellesley, the problems began with his predecessor, John Shore, who had been manipulated by subordinates on the Bengal Supreme Council, particularly Peter Speke and William Cowper. Speke and Cowper, both long-term Company servants who had been promoted by seniority, took advantage of Shore’s “candid and

57 All referenced correspondence between Wellesley and Dundas in this chapter comes from their edited volume of correspondence (Melville and Wellesley 1970).
artless character,” Wellesley wrote, to distribute lucrative posts within Bengal’s administration “according to a regular system of interest and intrigue” which “collected a sort of party about Messrs Speke and Cowper, consisting as well of expectants, as of the obliged and their friends.”

Why had Shore failed to reform this administration, despite being “a man of great integrity, of considerably knowledge in the affairs of these provinces, and of very respectable talents”? The key, from Wellesley’s vantage point, was Shore’s history as a company servant:

…the circumstances of his having been originally a Company’s servant, and the facility of his temper and simplicity of his disposition, tended to weaken his authority, and to impair the vigour as well as the dignity of the government in his hands. It was not possible for him to maintain the consideration, which the station of governor-general requires, among person with whom he had passed the greater part of his life on a footing of equality, and who were acquainted with all the little circumstances of his private character; which (however amiable and honourable) was not in every point calculated to restrain familiarity.

The effect of these circumstances was to reduce the office of governor-general in the estimation of the settlement to a level little higher than that of the senior civil servant at this presidency. All the advantages which had been derived from the high authority and rank of Lord Cornwallis were entirely lost, and the efficiency and even the purity of the administration were considerably affected (This quotation, and those above, from Wellesley to Dundas, 1 October, 1798).

In the same letter, Wellesley went on to call for a wholesale reorganization of the EIC’s administration in India around the figure of the “governor-general in council,” who would “be the centre of all authority within the British possessions in India” and who would stand above the petty politics and intrigues of the council. And two years later, Wellesley’s call had grown even more radical: “you [Dundas] ought to place the governor-general in such a station, that no rank should at all approach his: he ought to be the representative of the King; and his person should be inviolable in India” (Wellesley to Dundas 25 January 1800). In short, Wellesley wanted to transform the Governor-Generalship from that of “most senior civil servant” to a semi-sovereign figure who commanded his subordinates as though they were a “privy council.”

As with the previous chapter’s analysis of the origins of society as a foundational institutional logic of the colonial state in Madras, this chapter similarly seeks to account for the rise of the state—as an abstract, remote sovereignty—as the organizing framework of Bengal’s administration from the last two decades of the 18th century onwards. Two features of Wellesley’s complaints to Dundas provide important clues about the origins of that logic: first, his conclusion that Shore’s failure to reform the administration was because Shore, as a “Company man” with years of India experience, was too deeply embedded in the administration to be effective; and second, as Wellesley implied, Shore had failed to continue Charles Cornwallis’ earlier reforms and had instead allowed Bengal’s administration to slide back into its earlier state of corruption. Thus, for Wellesley, successful administration in Bengal rested on his ability to stand apart from his corrupt and incompetent subordinates (with “the state” standing at his back and legitimating his action), and the model of how to do this successfully was to be drawn from his predecessor (and friend) Lord Cornwallis.

This chapter seeks to understand how Wellesley’s abstract view of “the state” as a moral resource
for senior company administrators emerged in Bengal in the second half of the 18th century. The context for this shift was similar to what had been the case in Madras in four ways. First, the EIC organized its settlements in Bengal identically to Madras before the Seven Years War, relying on a highly personalized frame of moral reference among administrators and the patrimonial figure of the settlements Governor to provide a moral example to his subordinates. Second, as in Madras, administrators began to use abstract notions of state, society, and economy as they sought to grapple, on the one hand, with a series of corruption scandals that disordered the administration as the Company became a territorial power, and, on the other hand, as senior administrators without Indian experience attempted to govern in the face of deeply entrenched, patrimonial subordinates. Third, corruption scandals in Bengal also followed a pattern of escalating appeals to metropolitan authorities which, as the EIC’s domestic organization experienced severe fiscal crises after the Seven Years War, drew spectators unfamiliar with the details of Indian administration into the Company’s affairs. Finally, the emergence of abstract moral spheres in Bengal also happened in the shadow of the Mughal empire’s decay and geopolitical rivalry with militarized French (and Dutch) mercantile trading companies.

The course of transformation in the Company’s Bengal administration was also different from Madras in important ways, however. For one thing, the substance of the abstracted moral sphere that became the core logic of the 19th century colonial state’s organization was different than in Madras—relying on the state as its basis rather than society. For another, the Mughal Nawabi the Company supplanted in Bengal was far stronger than any of the regional powers in Madras. Bengal had been a core province of the Mughal empire, and the Company became a formal (if not real) vassal of the Mughal emperor himself. As a consequence, the Company inherited a relatively coherent and centralized revenue-collection apparatus from the Nawabs which allowed it to maintain indirect rule for a decade after it obtained de facto sovereignty. And unlike Madras, where serious military action raged all the way to the gates of Madras itself until late in the 18th century, Bengal’s heartland suffered no serious military threat after the 1760s. (The Company as a whole, though, continued to be threatened by the Marathas until 1818.)

But most importantly for the purposes of this chapter, the course of the Bengal administration’s use of abstract spheres of moral order was more complicated than in Madras. In Madras, a single scandal (albeit growing from deep roots) drew the attention of unfamiliar metropolitan spectators, which was a key reason Company authorities sent out a Governor (George Macartney) who was unable to rule effectively without seizing on society as an abstract moral justification for his behavior. In Bengal, however, this process was significantly more complicated. In fact, the breakdown of the patrimonial form of moral propriety that governed relations among administrators when Calcutta remained mainly a trading settlement had three main phases.

First, with his victory at Plassey in 1757 and at Buxar in 1765, Robert Clive inaugurated an age of “nabobs” in Bengal, in which unscrupulous men could make enormous fortunes by leveraging the East India Company’s new political and military power. But though these practices at once aroused concern within the Company’s London offices and among the greater public in England—to say nothing of the major financial crisis Company control of Bengal produced for the EIC as a whole—the Company’s first attempt at reform in Bengal failed. This was primarily because
their chosen man for the task was Clive himself, who had justified taking a huge prebendal annuity, called a jagir, in highly contextualized moral terms, and whose continuing perfidy and corruption in Bengal, combined with the triumph of his enemies within the Court of Directors, led to his jagir being withdrawn and eventually to his suicide. Subsequent Governors in the 1760s, moreover, were all drawn from within the Company’s Indian ranks and failed to contain Bengal’s administrative disorder.

The second phase of transformation occurred in the aftermath of Clive’s public exposure and the scandal surrounding the ejection and legal troubles of William Bolts in the late 1760s and early 1770s. The public and parliamentary outcry from these events culminated in the passage of Lord North’s compromise Regulating Act in 1773, which appointed a Governor-General of India for the first time and placed him at the head of a Supreme Council in Bengal. In contrast to similar intervention in Madras in the early 1780s, in Bengal the Company chose an old India hand and current Governor, Warren Hastings, to fill the seat of Governor-General. Yet at the same time they also appointed men to Hastings’ supreme council who had no Indian experience (but who were steeped in domestic British politics), including, most famously, Philip Francis. And in fact, the clashes between Hastings and his own council—and between Hastings and a newly interested British government—over the next 13 years proved generative, in the sense that they conclusively smashed the old system of local moral propriety and proliferated newer, and much more abstract, frames.

Once they have proliferated, which of these abstract moral frameworks would actually be instituted was a question answered during the third phase of development in Bengal. After the passage of Pitt’s India Act in 1784 and Hastings’ recall (and eventual impeachment), Charles Cornwallis (fresh from humiliation at Yorktown) was sent out. But unlike Hastings, he oversaw a council composed of old India hands, including the Governor-General pro tem, John MacPherson. As he struggled with his council, and as his relationship with MacPherson deteriorated, Cornwallis adopted Hastings’ abstracted notion of sovereignty onto state policies, particularly with regards to law and the Bengal Permanent Settlement of agricultural taxation. In so doing, he created a remote colonial state that stood apart from Indian society (partially as a means to combat corruption) and justified the behavior of its administrators. Thus later colonial administrations—especially that of Wellesley—did not create the moral world of a disembedded, colonial state whole cloth, but rather worked within a framework inherited from earlier administrations.

This chapter proceeds first by describing the patrimonial organization of EIC settlements in pre-Seven Years War Bengal, then goes on to describe and analyze each of the three phases of the Company’s administrative transformation in Bengal.

**Founding and Organization**

From its origins in the second half of the 17th century, the administrative structure of British settlements in the Mughal province of Bengal was significantly less coherent than in Madras. Ben-
Gal had no Governor until early in the 18th century, and even then disciplining recalcitrant Company servants proved extremely difficult. Yet this section presents evidence that in spite of these challenges, the way that the EIC struggled to control servants in the region reveals that the dominant form of understanding the propriety of their actions was similar to that of Madras. Action was to be judged by the ways it conformed to, or violated, local conventions among the hierarchy of Company servants.

Although the Company had settlements in Bengal beginning in 1634, they were directly managed from Ft. St. George in Madras and it was not until the 1660s and 1670s that they became large enough to warrant inspection as part of Streynsham Master’s perambulation. Master visited EIC settlements at Ballasore, Hoogly, and Cossimbazar, where small factories were collectively overseen by a rotating “Chiefe of the Bay” and his council. And, just as he had at Masulipatam, Master directed the factories in Bengal to begin the practice of collectively dining under the watchful eye of the Factory Chief:

A Public table shall be kept as the Honble. Company have appointed, at which all single persons of the Factory are to Dyet; and noe Dyett mony shall be allow ed to single persons… (Master 1911:II, p. 333).

Likewise, Master’s regulatory efforts also demonstrated concern for the moral uplift and tight control over company Servants in Bengal. As the Council at Hughli declared at Master’s behest in 1679,

…we doe Christianly admonish every one imployed int he service of the Honble. Egnlish East India Company to abandon lying, swearing, Curesing, drunkeness, uncleanness, prophanation of the Lords Day and all other sinfull practices, and not to be out of the House of from their lodgings late at night…[Punishments to include:] 1st. Whosoever shall remai ne out of the House all night (without license from the Chief), or be found absent at the time of shutting the gates after nine at night (without a reasonable excuse) shall pay ten Rs. To the use of the Poore or sett one whole day publikey in the stocks (Master 1911:II, pp. 345–346).

As had been the case in Madras, these regulations were necessary because Master found significant disorder in the Company’s factories. This disorder sprang from two sources. The first was recalcitrant Company servants who refused to accept the authority of the Chief of the Bay.

One of the clearest examples of this was the trial of Joseph Hall, over which Master Presided in 1679. Hall was sent out to be a Factor in the Bay of Bengal, but clashed with nearly every Company servant he came into contact with—apparently because he resented being passed over for promotion because of the EIC’s seniority system. These affronts escalated as Hall shuffled

---

58 Mentioned in Chapter 2.
59 As the Council complained of Hall: “…he has Constantly, ever since his arrivall in Bengala, binn a Contemner of the Honourable Companyes Chiefes, slighting their persons, and a great Incendiary, aggravating small differences amongetheir servants, endeavouring be clandestine meanes to animate and Creat factions and partyes to their disquiete, and the Honourable Companyes disreputation, and to the great prejudice of their affaires” (Master 1911:I, p. 459). Hall's response was that “I never was a Contemner of the Honourable Companyes Chiefes, or slighted their persons, though it hath binn my hard fortune to be very much slighted and contemned, and for noe reason as I know of then appearing in the Companyes behalfe, and therefore called
among the Company’s Bengal settlements in the early 1670s, and came to a head when he charged and was countercharged for corruption by Walter Clavell, then Chief of the Bay. While it was certainly nothing new for Company servants to quarrel amongst themselves, the substance of the charges—and how they were handled differently in the cases of Clavell and Hall—reveal how important the Factory Chief’s patronimial authority over other Company servants was. On several counts, the substantive charges Clavell and Hall made against one another and the evidence they brought (in the form of various witness) was of nearly identical strength. But three aspects of the charges against Hall stood out, and ultimately served as the basis for his conviction. First, Hall had refused commercial assignments within the Company he deemed beneath him, as when he refused to take up station at Patna repeatedly in 1669 (Master 1911:I, p. 451). Second, even when he finally accepted an assignment at Ballasore, as chief he abused Company servants, falsely claiming orders to do so:

[Among other charges against Hall] That he, after a most barbarous manner, caused Mr. Nurse, then appointed to keep a diary at Ballasore, when he was on his Cot quietly reading, to be seized on by Peons who bound him and tore almost all his clothes off, and afterward, as Mr. Nurse affirmed, beat him with a Caine himselfe, and being bloody, and without a hat or other Clothes, thrust him into the street out of the Honourable Companyes Factory, not premitting him to returne againe to his Lodgeing. And afterward, feareing what the issue of this might be, insinuated into Mr. Nurse maliciously, telling him that he had order from Mr. Clavell for soe doeing as he did to him, when it is well knowne the Quarrell betwixt them was for words of difference uttered one to another some time before (Master 1911:I, p. 453).

Hall’s counterclaim was, first, that he in fact was acting under direct authority of Clavell, and second, remarkably, that “…but for Mr. [Clavell’s] abuseing [Mr. Nurse], throwing him downe stairs as is said, and for Mr. Vincents [a witness of Clavell’s against Hall] abuseing him at Cassambazar in the like nature without cause, [know] noe reason any of them can give for it” (Master 1911:I, p. 463). The council found this explanation, such as it was, unconvincing, and especially in light of the Directors’ orders to recall all servants guilty of “disobedience” and “mutyny” that was “soe destructive to ours and all other civill governments” (Master 1911:I, p. 489), Hall was dismissed.

Remarkably, then, the contrast between the behavior of Clavell, as the factory’s chief, and Hall, as his subordinate, lay not so much in the fact that Hall had beaten another servant, but rather than he had overstepped his position in the social order of the settlement. Indeed, while Hall was asking directly to be judged by the proximate moral example of his official superior, the Company’s efforts to reign in their servants was geared towards fortifying senior administrators’ authority over the settlements. In other words, the Chief was to hold authority and provide a moral example, but that could not be allowed to take place on equal grounds with other Company servants.

60 See the discussion in Chapter 3 concerning Foxcroft and Winter in Madras a decade earlier.

61
But to what end was that authority to be exercised? As the density of complaints heard by Streynsham Master during his visits to Bengal factories and the consistent admonitions of the Court of Directors and Council in Madras show, the goal was to enrich the Company’s trade. This meant, on the one hand, ensuring that EIC officials only used Company funds and other resources for Company—rather than personal—trade; and on the other hand, controlling the collaboration—which the Court considered an “unpardonable sin” (quoted in Hedges 1887:II, p. xii)—between Company servants and the swelling ranks of “interlopers”—private European traders operating in a legal gray area in Bengal.

Interlopers multiplied as the EIC’s presence in Bengal grew. In the early 18th century, “there were reckoned…about 1200 English, some Military, some Servants to the Company, some private Merchants residing in the Town, and some Seamen belonging to Shipping lying at the Town…” (Hamilton 1727:7), but the Company’s administration itself appears to have been radically smaller: a list of Company servants in Fort William Council minutes lists only 52 EIC employees serving in the whole of Bengal in 1711 (C. R. Wilson 1895:II, pp. 32–33). Moreover, it was no help that at the turn of the 18th century the Company’s Bengal possessions were governed under a system of “rotation” whereby Factory Chiefs regularly switched. By 1713, the practice of keeping a public table at the Company’s expense was even abolished in favor of greater “economy” of the Company’s expenses (C. R. Wilson 1895:I, p. 205).

But in spite of these organizational challenges, concern for the conduct of Company servants remained a high priority. For example, in 1728 the Directors wrote to Bengal worried that gambling was an “infection” spreading within the settlement that the Council was not doing enough to quell (C. R. Wilson 1906:I, pp. 125–126), and by 1752 their admonition—and its underlying assumptions about the proximate nature of moral judgment and example—had grown even more explicit:

…whatever turn you may give to our admonitions,c all it preaching or what you please, unless a stop is put to the present licentious career wee can have no dependence upon the integrity of our servants now or in future, for it is too melancholly a truth that the younger class tread too closely upon the heels of their superiours and, as far as their circumstances will admit and even further, copy the bad examples which are continually before their eyes…[Therefore they order] That the Governour and Council do carefully attend tot he morals and manner of life of all our servants in general and reproove and admonish them when and where ever it shall be found necessary.

That all our superiour servants do avoid, as much as their several stations will allow of it, an expenecive manner of living, and consider that as they representatives of a body of mercahnts a decent frugality will be much more in character.

That you take particular care that our younger servants do not launch into expences beyond their incomes, especially upon their first arrival, and wee here lay it down a positive command that no writer be allowed to keep a pallankeen [a litter used as a vehicle and carried by four servants], horse or chaise during the term of his writership.

That you sett apart one day in every quarter of the year and oftener if you find it necessary to enquire into the general conduct and behaviour of all our servants below the Council and enter the result thereof in your diary for our observation.
Wee do not think it necessary to give such a direction with regard to our servants in Council because we are and always can be well acquainted with their characters without a formal enquiry (National Archives of India 1958:1, pp. 28–29).

Thus, over the first half of the 18th century, Bengal’s organization was less organized than Madras’, but it was still to be governed using the same logic of proximate moral example. At the head of the settlement stood the Governor and Council, of whose characters and standing the Court of Directors was “well acquainted.” The real concern was that the head of the settlement provide an example to “the younger class.” These junior servants stood threatened, on the one hand, by the riches to be gotten by colluding in private trade, and on the other, by the vices of gambling and licentiousness. Either, according to the Company, could damage the prospect of trade in the region.

While this system stood as the core logic of EIC administration until the middle of the 18th century, the way the Company interacted with regional and geopolitical competitors between 1750 and 1770 would transform Junior Servants’ prospects at making their fortunes. And as the next two sections will show, these prospects amplified what administrators had found so challenging about a servant like Hall’s disruption: the pursuit of officials’ private interest, when coupled with a refusal to recognize the administration’s hierarchy, could throw Company governance as a whole into chaos.

Incomplete Transformations: Clive, Succession, and the diwani

The transformation of the East India Company’s position in Bengal emerged because of the conjuncture of (1) the militarization of regional politics among competing Mughal successor states and the Mughal empire itself; and (2) the parallel militarization of and competition among European mercantile trading companies. When that conjuncture met the complexities of Company rule and the patrimonial, proximate form of judging moral propriety used by its officers, the result was profound disorder within the Company’s Bengali administration and its London organization.

Like Madras, Bengal was also a mercantile outpost of the East India Company, so it is not surprising that its early years resembled Madras’ trajectory of patrimonial development and reliance on the moral example of the Governor-in-Council to demonstrate and guarantee social order. And like Madras, Calcutta quickly became entangled in regional Indian politics and rivalries with other European merchant companies, albeit in the form of a single, well-organized Nawabi. Moreover, with direct military assistance from Madras, Calcutta became a military player in North-Indian power politics and de facto territorial sovereign of a vast area by the last third of the eighteenth century. Finally, just as it had in Madras, governing these new possessions strained both the Company’s administrative apparatus and its patrimonial moral order.

While the Mughal empire’s grip on Southern India had never been strong, Bengal (along with Bihar and Orissa) had been one of its key possessions since the province was originally con-
quered in 1575. But after the Mughal Emperor Augranzeb’s death in 1707, Bengal began to slip from Delhi’s grasp. When Murshid Kuli Khan ascended to the seat of Nawab of Bengal in 1716, he combined the two most important imperial administrative posts—that of Diwan, responsible for collecting and remitting territorial revenues, and Nizam, responsible for maintaining the military and law and order—for the first time. Kuli Khan and his successors also renegotiated the prebendal jagirs through which administrative officials were remunerated and began directly managing revenue collection, thus more forcefully stepping between the flow of money between Bengal and Delhi. By doing so, “Murshid Kuli Khan had in effect founded a dynasty” (Marshall 1987:49), albeit one with an uncertain succession. When Kuli Khan died in 1727, his chosen successor was overthrown by his own father, and when that Nawab (Shuja Khan) died in 1740, the son was again overthrown, this time by the Governor of Bihar, Alivardi Khan.

Alivardi Khan faced daunting challenges upon his ascension. From one side, he had to placate numerous constituent social groups: powerful Bengali elites, including the residual Mughal aristocracy; administrative officials; large Hindu landholders called zemindars; merchants and bankers (the most prominent of whom were the India-wide banking family the Jagat Seths); and European trading companies, including the English at Calcutta, the French at Chandernagore, and the Dutch at Dhaka. From the other side, Khan faced external pressure from the Hindu Maratha confederacy, the rulers of Avadh (another semi-independent Mughal province), and even from the Mughal empire itself, which had grown restive because of Khan’s declining tribute. While the annual tribute under Murshid Kuli Khan and Shuja Khan was allegedly 10,000,000 rupees annually, an audit in 1758 showed that only 4,000,000 to 5,000,000 had been paid to Delhi over the last 15 years of Alivardi Khan’s rule (Marshall 1987:51–52). Thus the decade from 1742-1752 was one of nearly constant campaigning in western Bengal and Orissa, and culminated in Alivardi Khan essentially having to ransom all of Orissa to the Marathas (Marshall 1987:71).

As it had for the Nawab of Arcot in southern India, these extended military campaigns both increased Alivardi Khan’s debts and also damaged the ability of his subsidiary zemindars to pay. Fears of the Marathas’ stark brutality seem to have kept the zemindars and Mughal elites from defecting from Alivardi Khan, but the system as a whole could not survive another death and succession struggle. Indeed, when Alivardi Khan died in 1756, he named his grandson Siraj-ud-Daula to succeed him, and at least initially Daula was able to overcome challenges from the Mughal aristocracy (in the form of a rebellion by the faujdar of Purnea, Shaukat Jang). But Daula also acted imperiously, not only cutting Alivardi Khan’s administrators out of the new regime, but also extorting money from the Jagat Seths and even personally beating the head of the banking house when he refused (Marshall 1987:76).

But most fatefully, Daula also turned against the Europeans along Bengal’s shores. He demanded nearly three quarters of a million Rupees combined from the French and Dutch factories, but in order to reduce the symbolically-disgusting military fortifications around Calcutta, the Nawab sacked the city in June 1756 (Marshall 1987:76–77). After British people smothered to death while imprisoned in the Daula’s famous “Black Hole of Calcutta,” the Company sailed an army under Robert Clive from Madras in December of 1756 with the help of a Crown fleet
and artillery. Clive’s force was “an entirely new element [in] the politics of Bengal, a highly professional European army” (Marshall 1987:77), and although Daula at first tried to negotiate with the British, he could not stand British demands that he destroy French settlements in Bengal and took up arms. But Daula had alienated too many of his own bases of support, and the Jagat Seths negotiated with the British to attack Daula while Daula’s own top aides—Mir Jafar and Rai Durlabh—stood aside. The British accepted the deal, defeated the small fraction of Daula’s army that was loyal at Plassey in June 1757 with trivial losses, and installed Mir Jafar as the new Nawab (Marshall 1987:77–78). As part of the deal for support, Jafar signed a treaty promising a crore of rupees (1 million, or about £100,000) for indemnity to the Company (Henry Dodwell 1920:133; Hill 1905:II, p. 442). This led the Bengal Council to write the Court of Directors, excitedly reporting that bullion exports from London could be suspended and a dividend promised to Company investors (Hill 1905:II, pp. 451–452).

Plassey thus ratified the British position as regional military players and involved them deeply in the political economy of Bengal. Company servants tried to draw the EIC’s interests closer to Britain’s national ambitions, since Plassey took place in the context of the Seven Years War and the consequent militarization of the French and English East India Companies (Henry Dodwell 1920:passim). As William Watts, a key player in the intrigues leading up to Plassey and author of a self-aggrandizing memoir he published in London in 1760, wrote:

This stupendious [sic] Revolution may be also considered as equally glorious and advantageous to the British Nation. We may be allowed to say, because the Fact cannot be disputed, that it is a signal Proof of the Utility of Maritime Empire (Watts 1760:131–132; emphasis original).

In sum, Plassey appeared at first to be a decisive victory against French intrigues, a positive Company intervention against a troublesome indigenous state, and promised to pay for itself through the new Nawab’s restitution. But the aftermath of Plassey profoundly disordered the Company’s administration, and as the next two subsections will show, transformed the organizational setting of administrators’ contextual moral judgments of their behavior.

The Aftermath of Plassey: Succession Politics, Disordered Administration, and the diwani

Though it initially seemed to be a boon for the Company and its servants, Plassey proved to be profoundly destabilizing. At first, Company influence over the new Nawab promised not only reimbursement for its military expenditures, but also favorable trading concession and protection from European rivals in Bengal (Henry Dodwell 1920). But instead of stabilizing, company relations with the Nawab’s deteriorated, and the Bengal council overthrew Mir Jafar in 1759 in favor of his son in law, Mir Kasim, only to overthrow Kasim and reinstall Jafar in 1763. Moreover, Rai Dulabhb crossed into open rebellion against Jafar (followed by some key zemindars), and Ali-vardi Khan’s wayward son Siraj-ud-Namj was an active pretender to the throne. Finally, the Wazir of Avadh and the Mughal Emperor had recognized the threat that Company control posed, and hence rallied behind Namj. Collectively, these events were so disruptive that by 1765 the Nawab’s original indemnity promised to the Company had yet to be repaid.
One reason the Nawab (whoever it was at the time) was so slow to repay—and indeed, a key source of the disorder overall—was with each succession struggle Company servants who supported the successful claimant stood to make huge fortunes from inams, or “presents.” Indeed, between 1757 and 1772, when the Nawabs’ sovereignty in Bengal was much more directly folded into the Company’s, a 1772 Parliamentary committee estimated that £2,000,000 was distributed as “presents” among Company servants at various levels (Marshall 1976:163). Indeed, before Plassey the Company’s select committee negotiated a set of private “presents” for themselves and the army and navy for supporting Mir Jafar’s claim to the throne, totaling 40 lakhs of rupees (about £440,000) for military officers and troops and 12 lakhs (about £144,000) for the councilors (Marshall 1976:164). Soon after Mir Jafar was installed as the new Nawab in Murshidabad, Company servants were dispatched to the treasury to settle the debts, which was done before Mir Jafar began paying the huge indemnity owed to the Company and residents of Calcutta in a “public” capacity (Henry Dodwell 1920:185; Marshall 1976:164). But above and beyond these payments to Company and Crown servants generally, Mir Jafar showered particular rewards on Clive. Clive was given 16 more lakhs of rupees (about £175,000) outright, and was created a Mansabdar, or imperial official, within the Mughal empire. Along with his title of “Zubdat ul Mulk” (“Select of State”), Mir Jafar also invested Clive with a prebendal annuity, called a jagir, from the 24 Pergannahs immediately surrounding Calcutta. Mir Jafar had already ceded these lands to the Company, but reassigned their revenues—amounting to £27,000 yearly—to Clive personally (Marshall 1976:166–167). In sum, the House of Commons Select Committee estimated that the 1757 payments to Company servants alone amounted to £1,250,000 (Marshall 1976:165), and Marshall estimates that in total £15,000,000 of private profit were remitted home by Company servants between 1757 and 1784 (Marshall 1976:256).

The promise of fortunes like these (as well as favorable trading concessions granted to interloping European allies) also destabilized the Bengal council. In fact, because the Governor could be overruled by his own council on matters of foreign policy and even war and peace, local Company attitudes towards the Nawab oscillated according to who controlled quorum in Calcutta. Most importantly, when a dissenting faction obtained quorum to overrule Clive’s successor, Henry Vansittart, in 1763 and unseat Mir Kasim, Kasim retreated into Bihar after a military defeat and was joined by Emperor Shah Alam and the Wazir of Avadh in united opposition to the company. These forces, however, were defeated at the hands of the Company’s army in 1764, and in 1765 the Company was granted the diwani, or right to collect territorial revenues from Bengal (Marshall 1987:87–89). This was to be done in the name of the Mughal emperor, such that the company de jure stood as a vassal to him, and de facto controlled Bengal outright. (Indeed, it was they who appointed the next Nawab, and who named his adminitrative naib responsible for collecting revenues.)

The grant of the diwani shortly predated Clive’s return to India as Governor. In his time in England, Clive had dabbled in both Company and Parliamentary politics, but especially since he felt his jagir might be under threat from the Bengal Council (CITE Sutherland), Clive accepted the charge to “clean the Augean stables” of corruption on the Council and returned to Calcutta in 1765. He reported a bleak picture to the Directors just after landing:

Upon my arrival, I am sorry to say, I found your affairs in a condition so nearly desperate as would
have alarmed any set of men, whose sense of honor and duty to their employers had not been
estranged by the too eager pursuit of their own immediate advantage. The sudden, and among
many, the unwarrantable acquisition of riches, had introduced luxury in every shape, and in it’s
[sic] most pernicious excess. These two enormous evils went hand in hand together through the
whole Presidency, infecting almost every member of each department. Every inferior [sic]
seemed to have grasped at wealth, that he might be enabled to assume the spirit of profusion
which was now the only distinction between him and his superior [sic]. Thus all distinction
ceased, and every rank became in a manner upon an equality. Nor was this the end of the mis-
chief, for a contest of such a nature among your servants, necessarily [sic] destroyed all propor-
tion between their wants and the honest means of satisfying them. In a country where money is
plenty, where fear is the principle of government, and where your arms are ever victorious; in such
a country, I say, it is no wonder that corruption should find its way to a spot so well prepared to
receive it. It is no wonder that the lust of riches should readily embrace the proffered means of its
gratification, or that the instruments of your power should avail themselves of their authority, and
proceed even to extortion in those cases where simple corruption could not keep pace with their
rapacity. Examples of this sort, set by superiors, could not fail of being followed in a proportion-
ate degree by inferiors [sic]. The evil was contagious, and spread among the civil and military,
down to the writer, the ensign, and the free merchant (National Archives of India 1958:IV, pp.
330–331).

How could Clive possibly justify such a diagnosis, when he himself had sailed to India in part to
protect his own “acquisition of riches”? An answer to this question starts with Clive’s emphasis
on “unwarrantable” acquisition, and on how “all distinction ceased, and every rank became in a
manner upon an equality.” Under the older, patrimonial, proximate mode of judging moral pro-
priety which Clive championed, “It was the practice of the eighteenth century to accept advan-
tages which were consecrated by custom, or which did not threaten the interests of the State”
(Henry Dodwell 1920:186), so Clive openly wrote to the Court of Directors about the presents
distributed in Murshidabad in 1757, and was congratulated in return (2 July, 1757, no. 493 in Hill
1905:II, p. 444). Likewise, William Watts also wrote openly (if with some circumspection,
couching personal emoluments as “Satisfaction for the Losses private Persons had sustained”) in
his Memoirs of the Revolution in Bengal (published in London in 1760) of how “the unliquidated
Demands in the Sketch [of a treaty between Mir Jafar and the English] should be reduced to a
Certainty” (1760:83, 87). Clive provided a good summary of administrators’ attitudes at the time
when he casually wrote to a friend to justify accepting £175,000 from Mir Jafar:

…Exclusive of which Treaty or any Agreement whatever, the Nabob of his own Free will from the
Services rendered him made me a present much beyond my Expectations, part of which I bestowd
on those immediately about me & one or two of the principal Officers: I never made the least
Secret of this Affair—but always thought the World ought to be acquainted with the Nabob’s Grat-
itude.

As to what was given to the Committee, perhaps you will say very undeservedly, I may venture to
assure you, what is no Secret, that without some such provision I should have found it a difficult
Task to have executed the late Glorious Expedition.

Thus Sir you have matters of Fact as to Private Money Concerns; if I had been disposed to grow
rich by receiving presents from any other Hands but those of the Nabob, surely no one had ever
the like Opportunity; but there is not that main living among the daily Temptations which Offerd
who can accuse me of receiving anything of Value but from the Nabob himself. I have troubled
you with these particulars because among some it may be computed as a Crime my being rich: if it
be a crime, you Sir are truly acquainted with the Nature of it (to John Payne, quoted in Forrest 1918:II, p. 10).

From the vantage of the kind of moral justifications of concern, Clive’s justification is striking. He openly declared taking a present from the Nawab in his private capacity for a duty nominally performed in his public capacity, yet stressed how he distributed some of this present among his subordinates. Clive also stressed how the gift was given “of [the Nawab’s] own Free will,” implying that a coerced gift would have been inappropriate, yet spoke of the presents to the Bengal Council and Clive’s own personal intervention as though they were tools of statecraft, implying they would have had to be at least suggested beforehand. And most importantly, the shadow of even greater “Temptations” from “any other Hands but those of the Nabobs” loomed as the alternative to the gifts Clive actually took—clearly implying that the Nawab’s present counterbalanced Clive’s passionate desire for even more. In other words, the Nawab’s gift was justified because of Clive’s service and position of seniority in the Company, and more generally because generous gifts that demanded reciprocal gratitude and loyalty (if the receiver wished for another gift) were a way to control officials’ greed. But above all, Clive’s present was appropriate, because it was being given to him as the most senior Company servant, and that his proper example of moral restraint would be reflected in the behavior of his subordinates. Indeed, the view of many like Clive was that

A man should, if he survived (as many of course did not) make a considerable fortune in the Company’s service, but only if he had worked his twelve or fifteen years through the ranks and given the Company the benefit of his industry and acquired experience. While making this fortune through the recognized channels of perquisite, private trade, and money-lending, he need not reject presents from wealthy and important Indians, but he ought to do so if in return he had to sacrifice his employers’ pecuniary interests, and he must not permit his private concerns to monopolize his attention to the detriment of his public duties (Sutherland 1952:53).

Thus, among old-school Company servants, the “corruption” endemic in the aftermath of Plassey stood not for the acquisition of a fortune per se, but for that acquisition out of step with the EIC’s patrimonial hierarchy in Bengal. As Harry Verelst, Clive’s immediate successor well summarized the perspective of old India hands:

The dissolution of government in Calcutta kept pace with that of the country. A general contempt of superiors, a habit of equality among all orders of men had obliterated every idea of subjection. To reclaim men from dissipation, to revive a general spirit of industry, to lead the minds of all from gaudy dreams of sudden-acquired wealth to a patient expectation of growing fortunes, were no less difficult in execution than necessary to the existence of the company. Large sums of money, obtained by various means, had enabled many gentlemen to return to Europe. This cause…occasioned a very quick succession in the service, which encouraged a forward spirit of independency, and produced a total contempt of public orders, whenever obedience was found incompatible with private interest (Verelst 1772:56–57).

When this overall view of the sources of corruption in Bengal are combined with Clive’s own narrative of how his temptation of riches could be balanced by accepting them from honorable sources (if still as a personal “present”), Clive’s suggestion for how best to reform the conduct of administrators makes more sense. In fact, the core of his proposal to the Court of Directors
rested on the *diwani* itself. As he wrote:

I have at last, however, the happiness to see the completion of an event, which in this respect [of rampant corruption and insubordination among Company servants], as well as in many others, must be productive of advantages hitherto unknown, and at the same time prevent abuses that have hitherto had no remedy. I mean the *dewanee* which is the supintendancy of all the lands, and the collection of all the revenues of the provinces of Bengal, Bahar and Orissa. The assistance which the Great Mogul had received from our arms and treasury, made him readily bestow this grant upon the Company, and it is done in the most effect manner you can desire…Revolutions are now no longer to be apprehended; the means of effecting them, will in future be wanting to ambitious Mussulmen, nor will your servants—civil or military—be tempted to foment disturbances, form whence can arise no benefit to themselves. Restitution, donation mony [sic] &c. &c. Will be perfectly abolished, as the revenues from whence they used to issue will be possessed by ourselves. The power of supervising the provinces though lodged in us should not, however, in my opinion be exerted…though we may suffer in the collection yet we shall always be able to detect and punish any great offenders, and shall have some satisfaction in knowing that the corruption is not among ourselves. By this means also, the abuses inevitably springing from the exercise of territorial authority, will be effectually obviated… (National Archives of India 1958:IV, p. 337).

In other words, Clive presented the *diwani* to the Directors at home (shortly after Clive returned to India to reign in the administrative chaos in Bengal) as a panacea: (1) it would definitively stabilize EIC finances in Bengal and London (since it would mean that the Company could pay for its commodities without exporting bullion); (2) it would reign in corruption by reducing the temptation presented to Company officials, because (3) it could and would be administered indirectly by Mughal officials with Company oversight; and (4) it would stabilize Bengali politics by placing the Company in a supervisory role and removing the motivation to overthrow the Nawab.

Even after the Company’s position in Bengal had been transformed, then, administrators still clung to a conception of the moral propriety of their action that was at once deeply patrimonial and which relied on the moral example of immediate peers and superiors for its force. But whatever the initial attempts to reform Bengal’s administration may have been, as the next section will show, events in London would mean new interventions by the British state as well as new attention paid to dissenters’ efforts to mobilize support for their views in London.

*The Reaction to Plassey and the diwani in London*

In London, the news of the *diwani* exacerbated an already-delicate political situation with the EIC’s Court of Directors at its center. At first, the Directors’ goal was to use the revenues from the *diwani* as a means to finally hush bullionist (and ironically, mercantilist) criticisms that the Company exported silver by directly providing money in India to remit Company goods home. This policy, however, demonetarized the Indian economy and damaged trade; by January 1767 the Bengal Council was already complaining to the Court of Directors of “a stop to all important of Treasure from Europe” which “no kingdom can support long” (National Archives of India 1958:V, p. 268). Thus Georgy Dudley, chairman of the Court of Directors, instructed Clive in 1766:
[I] also induce…you to take every measure in your power to put them [the revenues] into a flow of cash, by sending home large quantities of goods, supplying the China supercargoes with great sums of money and providing Bombay with what ever treasure they may want, and lastly by draw ing upon the Court of Directors for as little money as possible. These are the two grand points to be now attended to, for if we do not find ways and means to bring our great acquisitions to centre in England neither the Company nor the nation will reap the expected benefit from them (quoted in Bowen 1991:13).

But this anticipated boon was soon attacked from two main directions: from below, as Company shareholders and returning servants eager to guarantee their fortunes began interfering in the Directorate; and from above, as Parliament became increasingly interested in Company affairs.

From below, a shareholder uprising demanded an immediate dividend from the *diwani*’s unreal- ized revenues, and Director’s elections became hotly contested events notorious for “stock-splitting” among factions of investors with political and financial aims. These collisions became par- ticularly heated between Laurence Sullivan, who aimed to preserve the Company’s largely mer- chant character, and Robert Clive, who, besides being interested in protecting his *jagir* and newly-minted position as an MP, also believed that territorial revenues held the key to the Company’s long-term political and financial prosperity. Contention between the two figures got heated enough, particularly surrounding the Directors’ elections of 1758 and 1763 that Parlia- ment was forced to intervene (in the form of two investigatory committees) (Bowen 1991; Sutherland 1952). These committees largely stayed out of the details of the Company’s organization in India itself, but did despose Clive at length, and forced him to justify his acceptance of the *jagir* and other emoluments from Mir Jafar, which he did (as discussed in the Introductory chapter) in heavily contextualized terms that relied on local Mughal custom and the behavior of his immediate peers among Company servants in Bengal. But though Clive survived the skir- mish, because so many outsiders to Company affairs were now attentive to the EIC’s finances and internal politics (Bowen 1989b, 2006), the Court felt new pressure to respond to a wider domestic political constituency.

From above, the Company also faced increasing pressure from Parliament. This came from a desire to get a piece of the promised revenues from Bengal (since the Crown’s fleet had been instrumental at Plassey), and took the form of the Chatham ministry’s efforts to formalize the legal relationship between the Company and Crown over the *diwani*. The struggle over the *diwani* took the form of complicated legal disputes in the gray-area of the Company’s chartered monopoly, as back-room negotiations between the ministry and Directors. But in brief, the Company used its formal vassalage to the Mughal emperor Shah Alam as a means to legally shield the *diwani* as a “grant” rather than a “conquest” to prevent the revenues from legally defaulting directly to the British state (Bowen 1991:55). For its part, the ministry saw the *diwani* as a way to alleviate a spiraling domestic debt, which by 1767 had reached £131 million (Bowen 1991:1), and to ministers hungry for revenue, a share of the 2 millions pound annually Clive privately estimated to Rockingham and Chatham was a great prize, especially given the rising crisis in the Atlantic empire over colonial taxation (Bowen 1991:51). (Clive publicly declared in 1765 to the Court of Directors that the *diwani* would mean “a clear gain to the Company of 122 lack of *sicca* rupees, or £1,650,900, which will defray all the expence of the investment, furnish the whole of
the China treasure, answer all the demands of all your other settlements in India, and leave a con-
siderable ballance in your treasury besides” (National Archives of India 1958:IV, pp. 337–338).
While the ministry was unable to gain control over the revenues outright (in part because it
wanted no part in their actual administration and collection), in 1767 the Directors agreed to a
yearly payment of £400,000 to Parliament (Bowen 1991:64–65).

These two pressures on the Company—from its shareholders to distribute revenues on earnings
that had not materialized in London and from the Ministry to contribute what amounted to a tax
share of its new revenues—combined with a more general economic downturn in England in the
early 1770s to produce a general fiscal crisis. In 1772, the Company declared that it could not
make its annual payment to the Crown, and, in the face of a shareholder sell-off of its stock and
sudden absence of purchasers for its bonds, would instead need a loan from the state and might
suspend its dividends altogether (Bowen 1991; Sutherland 1952). This financial crisis was com-
ounded, moreover, but a new controversy relating to the Company’s administration in Bengal.
William Bolts, a sometime-employee of the Company, had been deported for repeatedly abusing
the Company’s trading privileges in Bengal’s interior (much to the aggravation of the Nawab,
Mir Qasim), and was deported by the Governor (and Clive’s post-Plassey successor), Harry
Verelst in 1768 (Furber 1997; Kuiters 2002). Upon his return to England, Bolts sued Verelst
(who also returned shortly thereafter), and though the Company indemnified Verelst against the
trivial damages awarded Bolts, Bolts also engaged in a public broadside against Verelst by pub-
lishing Considerations on Indian Affairs in 1772.

The book proved extremely popular (going through three editions), and Verelst felt compelled to
respond to it, which he did in his A View of the Rise, Progress, and Present State of the English
Government in Bengal of the same year. This public debate was remarkable not only because it
was one of the first times that debate about Indian the Company’s Indian administrative policy
took place publicly (and so polemically) before British eyes, but also because of the contrasting
views of corruption, its sources, and the appropriate foundations of administrative order the two
works represented. For “thwarted” servants like Bolts, while the source of corruption was the
 disordering of the Company’s old patrimonial organization, the answer was to ratify solutions to
the problem of moral order that rested on radically new, autonomous moral foundations: for
Bolts, “free trade,” if practiced, would draw together Britain and India in harmony; and for
Verelst (responding publicly to Bolts), the answer was to empower the Governor such that his
local, patrimonial authority to deport nettlesome characters like Bolts could not be questioned.

In addition to proliferating these abstract moral frames, the outcome of this domestic period of
disorder was the passage of the compromise Regulating Act of 1773. The key provisions of the
act were, first, to limit the payout of Company profits in dividends until it repaid its loans to the
Bank of England, and, second, to empower a Governor-General to oversee a Supreme Council in
Calcutta. The Governor-General-in-Council was to stand superordinate over Madras and Bom-
bay, and the Council itself was to be a composite of both Company and Parliamentary interests
(Sutherland 1952:260). The Governor-Generalship was a matter of consensus: it was to be War-
ren Hastings, who was “the one Company servant with a reputation which made him at that time
widely acceptable within the Company and to a wider public without” (Sutherland 1952:254).
But the composition of the Council stood much more debate, and yielded dubious results: Richard Barwell, “a typical ‘Nabob’ of the kind that had grown rich since Clive’s conquests”; General John Clavering, “who possessed, though he hardly deserved, the confidence of the king as a soldier and man of good sense and integrity”; Colonel George Monson, “no more than a mediocre soldier of good political connections”; and Philip Francis, “both desperately ambitious and so virulent of in tongue and per as to wreck the success of any team of which he formed a part,” and who was a last-minute replacement who a man who refused the personal hazard of Indian adventures (see Sutherland 1952:295 for descriptions). Of the newly constituted council, only Hastings and Barwell had ever been to India.

Thus, by the early 1770s the Company’s position had been transformed in Bengal, as had its relationship to Parliament and the Crown in London. But the transformation was incomplete. The EIC collected revenues from the whole provide of Bengal, but it did so indirectly and technically as a vassal to the Mughal emperor. The British state’s attention had been drawn to the structure of its administration, yet Parliament had avoided direct intervention, assigning politicos to serve under an old India hand, Warren Hastings, whose position the Court and Company had only tepidly empowered. And state interventions and new promises from the Directors seemed to guarantee that official abuse and corruption in India would be reformed, but the character and progress of that reform rested on an uneven terrain of competing visions of what the Company’s moral order was to be. As the next section will show, those competing visions were to clash repeatedly over the next decade and a half in Bengal.


Warren Hastings’ administration in India is often seen (and indeed, was excoriated by Edmund Burke) as an era in which “Asiatic Despotism” crept into and corrupted British administration (Marshall 1999). And if such were the case, Hastings’ career would mark the crucial point at which an abstracted “state”—even of an “Asiatic” variety—became a key organizing logic of Company administration (Travers 2005). Yet, the practical organization of Hastings’ administration, and especially the ways he interacted with local rulers and sought to discipline his own staff, reveal a very different process at work. In fact, although Hastings sought greater powers for the Governor-General over his own staff, he still fundamentally worked within the proximate, particularistic context of moral judgment which characterized earlier Company administration in Bengal. Indeed, disputes over the proper context of judgment proved to be an important source of conflict that would dominate the remainder of Hastings’ life.

Hastings moved cautiously against Muhammad Reza Khan (the Mughal naib, or chief revenue officer, whom Clive had entrusted with collecting the Company’s diwani), essentially “employing Indian officials and Indian laws, while occasionally infusing English constitutional principles” in order to “[attach] the upstart sovereignty of the Company to come idea of stability and longevity” (Travers 2007:106–107). Indeed, even though directly ordered to “stand forth” as the diwan and erase Clive’s system of double government, over the course of 1772 and 1774 his movements towards reforming Company administration and land revenue were tentative and
sought to preserve the Nawab’s “delicate” political position. Hastings’ reforms were also cali-
ibrated to preserve Company servants’ precarious positions. Hastings feared that disrupting the
indigenous Bengali political order would reveal that many wealthy Indians had “established an
interest” among Company servants (quoted in Travers 2007:108), and therefore, for example, he
resisted prosecuting the Company resident at Murshidabad, because it would shed “more light
than ought to be exposed” on officials’ corruption (quoted in Marshall 1976:176), especially
when those under investigation were “so many Sons, Cousins, or eleves of Directors, and Inti-
mates of Members of [the Bengal] Council” (quoted in Travers 2007:115). And although his
proposal was quickly overturned, Hastings appears to have looked backwards for a solution to
corruption—he sought to physically restrict Company servants to Calcutta and EIC factories,
thus promoting “harmony” and reducing “faction” by ensuring that junior servants stayed under
the watchful eyes of their superiors (Travers 2007:112–115).

But reconstructing the Company’s old system of administrative order proved impossible, and
Hastings’ efforts instead generated more controversy. This was because, first, as a territorial sov-
ereign restricting administration to Company factories proved impracticable and simply pre-
vented effective supervision of Indian revenue collectors and EIC political liaisons (as the exam-
ple of the resident of Mushidabad illustrated). Second, the 1773 Act established an English
Supreme Court in Calcutta under the direct auspices of the British Crown, creating an avenue of
appeal to Britain that compromised the figure of the Governor-General as the sole authority in
the Company’s possessions. Third, and most importantly, the Act also directly nominated a set
of subordinate councilors to serve on a newly-constituted “Supreme Council” in Bengal under
Hastings. The composition of the council was a compromise between the Court of Directors and
North’s ministry, and ended up composed of John Clavering, Geroge Monson, James Barwell,
and Philip Francis. Of the four, only Barwell was an “old India” hand like Hastings (Sutherland
1952), and Francis had already undertaken a public (though pseudonymous) career as the parlia-
mentary-opposition pamphleteer “Junius” prior to his appointment by North (Bowyer 1995).

Though Francis had a prickly personality, his brand of oppositional behavior, particularly regard-
ing Hastings’ attempted reforms of land-revenue administration in Bengal, proved especially
chaotic. According to Francis, Hastings’ proposed system of revenue farming “annihilated every
idea of private property” (quoted in Guha 1982:111) and instead ought to have been replaced by
a system of fixed-tax private property in land that would replicate, in India, “a real nobility in
the ancient and rational sense of the English constitution” (quoted in Guha 1982:111). Indeed, it was
by invoking the abstract moral power of the Company’s state, conceived as “the political union
of a Government with its subjects” and not “the oeconomical relation of master and slave”
(quoted in Guha 1982:111).

This moral conception of the state as an abstract guarantor of private property stood in contrast to
Hastings, whom Francis detested as “a busy, projecting, intricate politician of the lowest order,
[and that] it is not in his nature to walk straight” who simultaneously “is not content with abso-
lute power, but exercises it in the most arbitrary manner” (Parkes and Merivale 1867:II, p. 82).
Above all, Francis appears to have detested Hastings for what appeared to be disingenuousness.
As Francis wrote of Hastings to a friend:
The qualification commonly called ‘parts,’ is in general too dangerous to be trusted in the management of public affairs. It requires firmness, integrity, and good sense, and it requires nothing else. Mr. Hastings is, literally and exclusively, a man of parts. This is not a single principle, moral or political, either in his head or his heart. One natural effect of this character is that, when he means best, he constantly begins his building at the top, or with some room that has an agreeable prospect, and never thinks of a foundation till the whole edifice falls to pieces for want of it. Another is, that he is uncommonly dexterous at extricating himself out of difficulties, which with a very moderate portion of common sense, and the tenth part of his microscopic sagacity, he might have averted. I am not sure that his vanity is not concerned in preferring the intricacy of a labyrinth to any plain road on which he must travel with the multitude. ‘I detest principles’ is a common expression with him (quoted in Parkes and Merivale 1867:II, p. 81).

Hastings, for his part, appears to have attempted to manage Francis’ prickly personality much as Macartney had promised to supervise his council in Madras. As Hastings expressed his frustration to his friend (and successor) John Macpherson, “I acted with the strictest Honor to Mr Francis even so far as to throw myself upon his Mercy by parting with Barwell. I bore his repeated Breaches of Treaty, and I bore his Insolences (I can not immediately find a softer Term for them) as long as I could do it without public and dangerous Consequences” (15 Oct. 1781, in Hastings and Macpherson 1927:93). Yet as the emnity between the two worsened, Hastings eventually even accused the Court of Directors itself of stoking the conflict:

For when this fair opportunity of restoring peace and Harmony in Bengal presented itself [of supporting Hastings fully]; When it was hoped that Party would have died with the Person who formed it; When the bad effects of it had been felt in every department; When the Fabric which had been raised by Mr H. had stood the repeated shocks that opposition of every kind had given it; And when nothing but Unanimity could repair the breaches which discord had made, the Court of Directors widened these breaches by keeping alive the embers of that Faction They ought to have smothered. They reviled and reprobated all the measures of Mr Hastings because Mr Francis objected to them. They praised Mr Francis because He was an enemy to Mr H. And they seemed to have kept the Governor General in the Chair purely for the sake of abusing him (“Abstract” in Hastings 1786).

As it had between Macartney and Sadlier in Madras, the animosity between Hastings and Francis worsened to the point where the two even fought a duel in 1780 in which Francis was wounded but recovered. The duel appears to have revolved around Francis’ defense of his own stand for principle and moral conviction, because Francis challenged Hastings after the latter privately wrote to Francis that “I do not trust to Mr. Francis’ promises of candour, convinced that he is incapable of it. I judge of his public conduct by his private, which I have found to be void of truth and honour” (quoted in Impey 1846:211–212). Thus the conflict between the two was over the extent to which each could credibly be said to reflect their inner convictions in public matters. But while for Hastings the structure of the “honour” he represented meant a long-standing embeddedness in and deep experience of the Company’s administration in India, for Francis, the goal was to represent “principles,” especially that of a state guaranteeing its people’s rights. Remarkably, both men were willing to die to protect these self-representations.

But while the connection between abstract principles of state and moral conviction were crucial for Francis while in India, he could not sustain that connect upon his return to England in 1781.
As soon as he returned, he set about projecting his favor with the North ministry and the risk that his political connections might mean to Hastings’ allies in the Court of Directors (though those allies estimated that these connections were grossly exaggerated; C. Lawson 1895:80). Francis’ opponents, it seems, were capable of shutting off direct access to power and the ability to attack Hastings directly, either from within the Ministry or the Court. Moreover, as a contemporary doggerel summarizes nearly, this was in part because Francis was made out to be acting on his own passions, rather than on principle:

No sooner on shore had our Phill set his feet,  
Than he drove, like a post boy, to Leadenhall Street;  
In the flames of his malice, he burnt to disclose  
A tale which had cost him some years to compose;  
But he got a rebuff from the Court of Directors;  
They were Hastings' friends; they were virtue's protectors;  
They paid just regard to their honour and glory;  
They read not Phill's papers, they heard not Phill’s story.  
Tho’ like lightning to England from India he came,  
In speed he was greatly surpass'd by his fame;  
They knew how the measures of Hastings he crost,  
How near his advice Coromandel had lost;  
By the Court of Directors, it clearly was seen  
That the man was a compound of envy and spleen.

Then away to the mongers of boroughs went he,  
To try, if with some one he could not agree;  
And find a fit corner—for once—to his use  
For speech unrestrained, and for licenc’d abuse.  
But when he discovered that loud declaration  
Could produce no effect on a sensible nation,  
His attention was turn’d to the Quixote-like Burke,  
Who is fond of engaging in Quixote-like work.

Quoted from Letters of Simpkin the Second to his dear brother in Wales (C. Lawson 1895:87)

But if Francis had no direct avenue of attack against Hastings, Francis turned, as the second stanza of the poem describes, to parliamentary opposition. Indeed, Francis cashed in on his “long-term insurance” policy (Marshall 1965:16)—his friendship with Edmund Burke, begun before Francis sailed for India—and served as the key witness for Burke’s reconstituted oppositional Select Committee of Parliament (in contrast to the ministerial “Secret Committee”). The Select Committee’s reports, which “smote [Hastings] hip and thigh” (Marshall 1965:14). These reports, moreover, are more important than the long-running Parliamentary impeachment of Hastings itself, because they decisively influenced the flavor and structure of Pitt’s India Act of 1784, and especially its decision to place senior levels of EIC Indian governance under Governmental supervision through the Board of Control (Sutherland 1952:362–364).

To sum up, between 1773, when Lord North’s Regulating Act established Hastings as Governor-General of Bengal and 1784, when Pitt’s India Act again altered the relationship between the EIC and the British state, the Company’s administration in Bengal represented a clash of moral styles of self. Warren Hastings, as an old India hand, represented a fragmentary, embedded way of
judging the propriety of official action, and hence of organizing the administration as a whole, which depended on servants’ harmonious embedding within the Company’s larger patrimonial hierarchy. Philip Francis, by contrast, came to India as an outsider and without the same kind of access to the Company’s network. Likely in part because of this exclusion, he depended on a form of decontextualized moral judgment that reflected (claims to) underlying “principles.” Moreover, at least part of Francis’ failure to successfully attack Hastings directly in London can be ascribed to his failure to successfully maintain the connection between his unitary, authentic personal belief and his political convictions. And as the next section describes, while his alliance with Edmund Burke may have pushed further structural transformation in the Company’s administration, Francis’ fusillade against Hastings was hardly the last instance of perceived moral disorder in Bengal. Indeed, it would be carried to fruition by Charles Cornwallis.

Contingency and Reform: Macpherson, Cornwallis, and the Rise of the State

Cornwallis returned to England a French parolee (his transport from America having been captured), but somehow free from blame for his surrender at Yorktown. But while most of the blame for the American misadventure may have fallen on Cornwallis’ superior, General Clinton (F. B. Wickwire and M. Wickwire 1980:7), Cornwallis still found himself indebted and in search of government employment. Considering that Cornwallis was friendly with the incoming Government after Lord North’s first vote of no-confidence in 1782, it made sense that the incoming parliamentary leader, Lord Shelburne, proposed to repay Cornwallis’ political support by nominating him to be Governor-General of India. The position would be lucrative for Cornwallis, and he eagerly accepted.

But the instability of British politics in the early 1780s blocked Cornwallis’ way. When the elderly Marquis of Rockingham died in July 1782, Shelburne’s ministry lost a key bastion of support because Rockingham’s parliamentary faction was taken over by Charles Fox, who personally opposed Shelburne. Fox allied with the previously ousted Lord North, and formed a coalition that replaced Shelburne after the Peace of Paris with America in 1783. Though they were detested by George III, Fox and North nonetheless proposed a sweeping East India Bill in 1783 that would have meant radical state intervention into the affairs of the Company, and would have placed all of the EIC’s administrative appointments under the Crown’s control. However, the Act proved to be the wedge necessary to bring down the coalition, and when parliamentary opposition, backed by the East India Company itself, approached George III and proposed a government headed by William Pitt in the Younger (son of the Earl of Chatham, first minister from 1766 to 1768), the Kind withdrew his support for Fox and North, and their coalition quickly fell. To reward the Company for its support, and in keeping with its line of attack against the 1783 India Bill’s as a sign of ministerial corruption and usurpation of the Company’s rights to patronage appointments, Pitt proposed a considerably more compromise-minded India Act. The 1784 Act established a ministerial Board of Control over India appointments and claimed a right to propose the Governor-General and subsidiary Governors (though in practice these were agreed-upon by the Court of Directors) yet left all appointments below that in the hands of the Directors themselves (Sutherland 1952:365–414; F. B. Wickwire and M. Wickwire 1980:8–11).
Amidst this intersection of colonial and national politics, Cornwallis bargained his political support for the best appointment he could obtain. Though he first supported Fox and North, when they appeared to have passed him over for the Indian appointment, he followed the King’s lead and threw his support behind Pitt. He was rewarded for his newfound support first with an offer to be Lord Lieutenant of Ireland (he discreetly refused) and then by a renewed offer to go to India. Cornwallis sought a military command, and the terms of Pitt’s 1784 India act kept the Governor-Generaliship a civil appointment. Cornwallis subsequently was slighted for domestic military appointments (as the Governor of Plymouth and in the King’s Grenadiers) and bounced among a series of government posts, including as an envoy to Russia. But by 1785, his indignation at having been denied proper terms for the post in India had reached Pitt’s ears, and the India Act was modified in 1786 not only to unify military and civil command in the person of the Governor-General, but also to boost the post’s salary to 25,000 pounds a year. This time, Cornwallis took the job.

During his administration in Calcutta, Cornwallis faced pressure from above and resistance from below. From above, the Court of Directors constantly applied pressure to reduce territorial charges for the administration of Bengal, such that Cornwallis had to repeatedly assure them that he was motivated by an “earnest desire to avoid and discourage in every shape all kinds of superfluous expenditure of the public money” (Cornwallis 1859:I, p. 543). This, however, became extremely difficult as renewed hostilities with the Maratha confederacy in Bombay and Tipu Sultan in Madras loomed. Moreover, Cornwallis was under pressure from the newly-constituted Board of Control to reign in perceived corruption and fraud throughout the Company’s administration in Bengal. As Cornwallis wrote to the Court of Directors, “I am doing everything I can to reform the Company’s servants, to teach them to be more economical in their mode of living, and to look forward to a moderate competency; and I flatter myself I have not hitherto laboured in vain” (Cornwallis 1859:I, p. 290). And in these efforts, Cornwallis hoped to preserve his own integrity and reputation, for “The reasonable object of ambition to a man is to have his name transmitted to posterity for eminent services rendered to his country and to mankind” (to his close friend Viscount Brome, in Cornwallis 1859:I, p. 247). More publicly, to the Marquis of Lansdowne, this self-presentation translated into the declaration that “I am not conscious that I have, in any one instance, sacrificed the public good to any private consideration” (Cornwallis 1859:I, p. 280).

While these pressures worked on Cornwallis from London, he faced stiff resistance to his reforms from long-established Company servants in Bengal. Cornwallis expressed shock, for example, at how brazenly taking bribes—and giving them to EIC Directors in exchange for patronage appointments within the Company’s service—was discussed, to the point that he stormed out of a conversation with a Colonel who was describing the practices. Likewise, his correspondence is peppered with admonishments to redacted inferiors for appealing to him for relief from punishment for corruption,61 and he was particularly galled by the behavior of the

---

61 For example, he wrote to Charles Stuart in 1787 that “Your Friend ——— seems to me to have lost his own senses, or to suppose that I have completely lost the use of mine” for expecting relief (Cornwallis 1859:I, p. 296).
Company’s political residents at the Courts of the Wazir of Avadh and the Nawab of Bengal, the latter of whom Cornwallis described as having “enjoyed the almost absolute government of the country without control” (Cornwallis 1859:I, p. 279).

Yet in spite of the harsh diagnosis of the Company’s administration in Bengal, Cornwallis resisted ascribing its sources to the individual characters of the servants involved. He resisted the Directors’ orders to dismiss and prosecute the entire Bengal Board of Trade for dabbling in silk speculation, telling Dundas that to do so would mean “…cruelty to some of their best and most deserving servants, and…mischief to the public service” (quoted in Aspinall 1931:16 n. 1). Instead, Cornwallis ascribed their corruption to systemic sources: “[Company servants targeted for prosecution] have committed no fault but that of submitting to the extortion of their superiors; they had no other means of getting their bread, and they had no reason to expect support if they had complained” (Cornwallis 1859:I, p. 318).

Instead of relying on his own moral example or on the proximate actors’ judgment of administrators’ behavior, Cornwallis instead proposed an ambitious plan that at once would raise their regular salaries beyond the temptation of perquisites while substituting an abstracted sense of duty for earlier forms of ensuring administrative order:

> When you consider the situations of your servants in this country, the very high responsibility now more particularly annexed to the office of a collector, the temptations of the situation, the incessant labours of his office, and the zeal which must be exerted to promote the prosperity of the revenues and the country at large,—when on the other hand, you advert to the solemn restrictions imposed upon him by the Legislature, as well as those in the Public Regulations, and the separate orders already noticed absolutely precluding him from any emolument whatever, excepting such as are publicly allowed,—and when you are further pleased to consider, that excepting instances of extraordinary merit, your servants cannot in future expect to obtain the office of a collector under a period of twelve years spent in your service,—we trust that we shall be found to have consulted your true interests with every compatible attention to economy, and that you will approve the allowances and commission fixed by us for your servants in the revenue department (Cornwallis 1859:I, p. 279).

In Cornwallis’ formulation, immediate superiors provided no fatherly moral example of conduct to their inferiors, nor did peers help to reign in administrative corruption through their virtuous gaze. Instead, corruption was a matter of sheer incentive, wrought by ill-considered policy, to deviate from the remote imperatives of the “Legislature” and of “the Public Regulations.” In other words, the logic of administrative organization in Bengal differed from Madras—rather than standing as part of an amorphous, abstract “society,” the organization of the Company’s officials in Bengal was meant to free them from the “temptations of the situation” they faced, and allow them to express their obedience and “zeal” to a set of morally compulsory regulations.

In implementing these changes, however, Cornwallis had not only to contend with the Court of Directors and Board of Control in London but also jealous competitors on his own council. Chief among these was John Macpherson, who had sat on the Council when Pigot was over-

---

62 In the same correspondence, Cornwallis described Peter Speke—“Poor Speke”—as “one of the honestest men living.” This is the same Speke whom Wellesley accused of manipulating Shore.
thrown, acted directly as a political agent-for-hire for the Nawab of Arcot in London, was a close confidant of Benfield and Hastings, yet somehow survived the direct purge of such “undesirables” to serve as Governor-General pro tem in the interim between Hastings’ resignation and Cornwallis’ arrival. Macpherson was a longtime India hand, and along with Macartney he canvassed to replace Hastings (Anon 1808:26), and then again to succeed Cornwallis (Macpherson 1800). And although he was not chosen either time, during his Governor-Generalship, he proposed a sweeping set of reforms to the Company’s administration which attempted to ratify implicitly many of Bolts’ criticisms and assuage the Directors’ worries about rising expenses in Bengal.

BL/OIOC/F291.61:

[2] The opposition, which, in all Government, resist every attempt to reduce the Public Expence, have their peculiar Force in this Presidency; and the doubtful light, in which the Advocates and Leaders of extraordinary Efforts of Public Reforms, are generally considered, is more discouraging in India, than in any other Country. Here, the voice of the People is not heard, to confer praise, or animate to Perseverance. (Every advantage, that is retrenched in favor of the Company, is lost to an Individual; of, perhaps, extensive Connections, and ultimately creates an Enemy.) But, to take a decided Lead in a general and bold Controul of the inveterate Abuses in Office, is to rush upon general dislike. The Governor, or Councilor, who attempts such a Duty, ought to possess the Confidence of permanent support. He should be assured that his Character and Office are protected, by the Justice and Influence of his Employers: His best Labours may, otherwise, meet with an ungracious return.

(Even Punishment, which should be the Penalty of Misconduct, may await him in the Career of his Merit; and it may be his Lot, to see his threatened, or actual recall, turned into a Subject of public triumph, or secret ridicule, by those whom he was restraining from Peculation. To give a further Trial to his Philosophy, it is not unlikely, that, on his Return to Britain, he may dins himself neglected, if not distressed; while those who are grown powerful at the Expence of your propriety, are treated with Respect) and congratulate themselves upon the Boldness of their rapacity, amidst Impunity.

In offering these Truths to your Notice, I mean to impress their force in Favour of your Future agents. I disclaim any Application of them to my own particular Situation; my Obligation to the Company have been great, and uncommon: they more than counterbalance disappointment I can experience in your service.

[4] Zeal, determination, and Unanimity in your Executive administration, are not alone sufficient to complete a public reform. The temper of your service must be managed; and the exigencies of the public Distress, with an exemplary Conduct on the part of every Member of your Government, must be brought to operate in Concert, to carry through a reforming System.

[...]
by being recorded, must wait our final Judgement. In like manner, we order that no Officer, holding a military commission in our Service, shall be deprived of that Commission, or removed from our Service, but by the Sentence of his Brother Officers, in Regular Court Martial. After securing, in this manner, the Rights of our Servants, we doubt not but they will, unitedly and unanimously strive to assist in the Execution of Orders, which have an equal Tendency to secure their own general Benefits, as they seem indispensable to preserve the Existence of the Power which employs them. They will, upon the least Reflection discover, that those who by Peculation, or abusing the great Trusts of our Service, have brought the Company to a distress, which incapacitates them from paying their Current Expences, so as to throw them Months in Arrears, have been the greatest Enemies of the Service in General.

[...]

To such a Consideration of the Subject, are you indebted for those immense Supplies of Goods, which are now pouring upon you from Bengal. Such an extraordinary number of Cargoes must arrive with you seasonably, when a general Peace has opened the Doors of Commerce, and to every Market. The Bills which provided the prime Cost of these Goods, are rendered convenient to your Ability to discharge them. They are British Property, which pay the Duties of Commerce to the Parent State; and in preventing it from passing as a remittance into the hands of Foreigners, to undersell you at the Market, with [28]goods provided upon your own Estate; a real Service is rendered to the Company; and an extensive one, to Great Britain. Upon a liberal Extension of this Commercial Plan, you turn any Peculations of your own Service, to a Public use: You perhaps establish some lights by which they may be brought to your knowledge. At all Events, I rejoice in having given my Voice for a Resolution, which, at the close of a destructive War, dispatches for England fifteen Indiaman, loaded with the Manufactures of Bengal, of an improved Quality, and at a reduced original Cost!

Should you fortunately approve of the Plan, upon which your Commerce has been lately extended, and which enables your Ships to return with Advantage; and should you further have it in your Power, to adopt, and enforce Regulations, which, by a frugal and just application of your Revenues, may perpetuate your Tenure of your Asiatic Possessions; You will render the India Company a Medium, for administering the British Empire all the Blessings, without the disadvantages, of great and distant Colonies: It may be observed with equal truth, and without Prejudice, or Flattery, that there is no Medium, but that of the various Checks of the Company’s institutions, thro’ which, Britain can receive the same Benefit in a constant flow, and without Danger to the Equilibrium in the Constitution; on that order in the State which leaves Room for the Operation of every good, while it resists improper Influence.

Macpherson thus called for a broad-based reform rooted in, first, a recognition of Company servants’ rights to appeal charges against them, and second, a fundamentally economic appeal to the alignment of their pecuniary interests with those of the EIC itself. But his appeal for how exactly a connection was to be made between affirming servants’ commercial rights and administrative order rested on a personalistic conception of moral judgment. This is evident in both Macpherson’s pleas for support from the Directors—however much he may have disclaimed “any Application to my own particular Situation,” he was most concerned about the “general dislike” reforming efforts might provoke and hence wished that his “Character and Office are protected”—and also how Macpherson imagined EIC officials would react were his reforms to be implemented. The key to the plan was “Concert” in the operations of “every Member of your Government,” which was to be achieved not, as in Cornwallis’ formation, to the universal sense of public duty to the administration which existed in every honorable official, but rather by securing “the Rights of our Servants,” which would “convince all our Servants, Civil and Mili-
tary, that we consider their real Welfare as justly connected to the prosperity of the Company.” Above all, then, in the name of turning “any Peculations of your own Service, to a Public use,” Macpherson’s proposed reforms called for persuasion, harmony, and moral example—all watchwords of an embedded, proximate form of moral judgment.

What happened when Cornwallis and Macpherson’s views of the proper administrative order in Bengal, and especially the underlying abstract and proximate foundations for these views, collided? After all, although Macpherson’s administration was, in the estimation of one eminent Indian historian, “an example of vacillation [with] no parallel in the history of the omnipotent governor-generalships of the eighteenth century” (Guha 1982:165), Macpherson still served as the most senior member of the Bengal Council on Cornwallis’ arrival, and began, at least, as a key adviser. But over the course of the next three years, their relationship soured as Cornwallis discovered Macpherson’s efforts to outmaneuver him both on the Bengal Council and in London.

A sample of Cornwallis’ changing opinion of Macpherson from his correspondence illustrates the deterioration of their relationship:

Sept., 1786: “Macpherson is perfectly cordial, and all promise a most hearty support” (Cornwallis to Dundas, Ross, p. 226).

Aug. 1789: “His flimsy cunning and shameless falsehoods seem to have taken in all parties; believe me that those who trust the most in him will be the most deceived...” (Cornwallis to Dundas, Ross, p. 428).

Nov. 1789: “...he is a very good-humored fellow; but I think him weak and false to a degree, and he certainly was the most contemptible and the most contemned Governor that ever pretended to govern” (Cornwallis to Dundas, Ross, p. 454).

But Macpherson not only lost credit with Cornwallis personally—upon his return to England, he also aggravated the Court of Directors and Board of Control. In essence, Macpherson simultaneously campaigned to be reappointed as Governor-General and challenged the legal grounds for replacing him with Cornwallis to begin with. The case has been seen as a spurious attempt to extort a pension from the Court (deGategno 2004) but from the perspective of Macpherson’s style of proximate moral judgment, the case also represents the failure of Macpherson’s political strategy to accomplish its stated goals in London. For although Macpherson was successful with the Court, his claim to the Board of Control rested on sets of personal correspondence (Macpherson 1800), and even his assertions about personal conversations with Cornwallis, that carried little weight with Dundas.

In sum, Cornwallis and Macpherson represented alternative administrative models by which to reform the Company’s administration in Bengal, and these orders were in turn embedded in different forms of judging moral propriety. Macpherson’s alternative was conservative in the sense that it was animated by a proximate view of how moral discipline among Company officials was maintained—by the personal example of their superiors—but proposed radical reforms by explicitly motivating officers with personal economic incentives. Cornwallis’ administrative system, by contrast, relied on an abstracted sense of public duty, enforced by universal adherence to
regulation, and placing the Directors’ imperatives for “every compatible attention to economy” [emphasis added] second to the “very high responsibility” of EIC service. Finally, these two underlying assumptions about the proper judgment of moral propriety—Macpherson’s a commitment to the “harmony” of his immediate social setting and Cornwallis’ to an abstract “public good”—enabled different political strategies when relating to the broader political public in London. Cornwallis, detached from the particularities of Indian administration, and for whom Bengal was one more stop on a more general colonial perambulation, stood on the constancy of his character as well as his political service in England and military career in America prior to his time in India to buttress his claims as Governor-General. Macpherson, by contrast, was reduced to weak public appeals made by immediate friends and to relying on the increasingly intermittent support of patrimonial contacts within the Company’s London administration, which after 1784 stood in a significantly weaker position. Thus Macpherson (who died in London as a confidant of the Prince of Wales in 1821) and Cornwallis (who died in Bengal during a second stint as Governor-General in 1805 ironically experienced personal fates inverse to those of the administrative reforms and forms of moral propriety they championed in India.

Coda: Wellesley and the Limits of the Colonial State

This chapter has explored the foundations of the notion of “the state” as an abstract, organizing administrative logic in colonial Bengal. It has argued that this sense emerged out of a crisis in the Company’s older patrimonial, proximate form of administrative order, as a cohort of administrators who had never been to India prior to their service—especially Philip Francis and Charles Cornwallis—struggled to successfully govern their own subordinates and manage administrative corruption. While Francis struggled unsuccessfully against Warren Hastings, his central precepts, and especially the notion of providing “justice” to Indian zemindars by withdrawing direct Company intervention into their agricultural affairs, was adopted by Cornwallis as a justification for his famous Bengal Permanent Settlement.

This arc of institutional change, however, demonstrates ironies when viewed from both Calcutta and London. From the view of Bengal and the Company’s administration there, one irony is that Cornwallis himself was essentially a conservative Whig, fearful of government intervention into the affairs of agricultural landlords. When, however, these concerns were transplanted onto Indian soil they inaugurated an era of extremely radical intervention into agricultural relations by the central EIC state, in the sense that the regime of private property they required to implement decisively shifted the zemindars themselves from deeply political, quasi-feudal “little kings” to “landlords” who were dependent appendages of the colonial state (Dirks 1986; McLane 1993).

The second irony from the vantage of Company administration in India concerns officials’ own experience of the new Company regime. Cornwallis hoped that his administration would release officials’ sense of duty and honor, and historians have generally viewed his administration as the dawn of the era of “good administration” (if any colonial administration can be so-called) in India. But Cornwallis’ very strategy to instill this sense of duty meant the abstraction of “the state” officials served to the point where it implied only indirect contact with Indians themselves
Finally, viewed from London, the events in Bengal in the second half of the 18th century reveal another irony. When evaluating Burke’s impeachment of Warren Hastings, an eminent historian has concluded that critics of the prosecution as undeserved and overwrought were correct, and “[i]f Burke had been able to see Hastings in perspective he would probably have agreed with them” (Marshall 1965:190). But because of the way that the local political and social orders in which Burke and Hastings were steeped collided, such a position-taking (at least as a public, political stance) was not possible. Instead, a man who lately has begun to be resuscitated precisely as a figure who could courageously appreciate the particularities of non-European cultures (Mehta 1999) thundered at Hastings trial that his conflict was over “maxims and principles” (Marshall 1965:190).
Chapter 4: Missing the Modern Economy
The Failed Institutionalization of Laissez-Faire in Bombay

“In this world it is not sufficient to be virtuous, we must appear to be so.”
—Samuel Mansley to John Milne, 1803 (MSA BSPP, No. 145, p. 4798).

Introduction

In June 1813, Robert Rickards took the floor of Parliament to speak on the renewal of the East India Company’s charter. Rickards wrote, he said, based on his experience of “twenty-six years resident among the People of India” (1814:v) and as a member of the Bombay Council. Of his analysis of the EIC’s fiscal and commercial policies, Rickards claimed that “nothing but a sincere conviction of their truth, and an argente hope of their resulting…in some degree of public good, could have induced me to submit them to judgment of this Honourable House” (1814:52).

But what Rickards failed to mention amid his calls to “improve the condition, increase the happiness, and promote the civilization of the native Indians” (1814:viii) was that his tenure in India had ended in acrimony. Rickards repeatedly clashed with his superiors on the council—particularly the Governor, Jonathan Duncan, who had been appointed by Cornwallis—so much so, that he had been unceremoniously recalled by the court of Directors under suspicion of extorting the Raja of Cartenaad (Nightingale 1970:114 n. 3). Moreover, from the Directors’ perspective, while on the Council in Bombay, Rickards had also colluded with the merchant “agency houses” of Bruce, Fawcett & Co. and Forbes & Co. (Nightingale 1970:233–235). Finally, Rickards even seemed to prove the Directors’ point, because immediately upon his return he formed his own agency house in London—Rickards, Mackintosh and Company—which partnered with yet another agency house to pursue trade to China (Nightingale 1970:235). In other words, Rickards claimed to speak on behalf of the Indian people, yet his history in Bombay had reflected the pursuit of his own private interests.

But whatever the tangle of motivations and interests that lay behind Rickards’ words, his analysis of the Company’s position in India and its flaws was clear. By the time Rickards was writing, the EIC’s administration in India had repeatedly failed to live up to its revenue promises (either from taxation or trade), and for Rickards, its monopoly was the root cause. Not only had the Company’s control over cotton markets in Bombay artificially depressed prices and hence production (Nightingale 1970:234) but, according to Rickards, the logic of monopoly could be extended to the way the EIC taxed land. The increasingly-popular ryotwari system assumed the state to be the sole landowner in India, and stood in contrast to the zemindari system instituted by Cornwallis in Bengal. Rickards was adamant that the zemindari system had failed not, as its opponents had claimed, because it was poorly matched to Indian social structure, but instead because its tax rates had been too high and the private property in land it guaranteed was never sufficiently secured. Zemindari had been “frustrated” in Madras and Bombay, said Rickards, because it cre-
ated a class of men who “could not easily find its proper level in society, and served only to dis-

turb and confound established relations and to invade the acknowledged rights of cultivators” (Rickards 1814:34–35).

If the zemindari system failed to take hold as it expanded in India, it was because the Company was mimicking the Mughal “despotism” over land—“revolting as it is to British ideas of prop-

erty” (1814:4)—in the name of institutional continuity and order. The effect, according to Rickards, was to permanently retard India’s growth:

A rigid enforcement of this principle of taxation [government ownership and leasing of land for
cultivation] must necessarily induce the very worst condition of society that can be conceived to
eexist, viz. a limitation of classes to the despot who rule and the slaves who obey; and in propor-
tion as political causes check the growth of intermediate ranks, the people will be found to
approach this point of extreme misery and weakness (1814:6).

These two forms of monopoly—over Indians’ trade with the outsiders and over the ownership of
the land itself—intertwined politics and economics, Rickards thought, corrupting both the Court
of Directors and lower-level Indian administrators. Echoing Burke’s earlier criticism that the EIC
could not function as “A state in disguise of a merchant,” Rickards argued (somewhat perversely
for a corporation granted an explicit monopoly by royal charter) that their behavior was compro-

mised precisely at that intersection:

Indeed it is but justice to say, that the purely political letters of the Court display ability and
knowledge in the science of Government, and a liberality of principle, from which it is impossible
to infer but that the prosperity of India would be materially advanced, if the Directors would con-
fine themselves to the exercise of their political functions. It is only where commerce is mixed
with their politics that the spirit of monopoly is displayed in their correspondence—but here the
same justice compels me to add, that their sovereign interests are but too frequently sacrificed to
views of commercial emolument.

[…]

Every merchant is a monopolist at heart; but when every merchant is on an equal footing, the same
principle pervading every breast neutralizes by its natural operation the prejudicial influence of a
love of gain, and produces through the mass of society common benefits. But when a merchant is
raised by exclusive power above his equals, that power is sure to be abused; it cannot, int he
nature of things, be otherwise; and this, as far as my experience goes, has invariably been the con-
sequence of the Company’s interference in the trade of India (1814:36, 45–46).

But beyond simply serving commercial concerns to the detriment of political interests, Rickards
also argued that the intertwining of commerce and government produced corruption in the
administration itself. European Company revenue administrators were restrained by the Com-
pany’s “thirst after revenue” from caring for the wellbeing of those in their districts (1814:42),
and corruption among their Indian subordinates was even worse. These Indians, the “whole mass
of servants, both in Cutcherrys [sic; provincial courts] and in the districts,” “felt the desire and
sought the means of peculation and plunder” (1814:69). This temptation resulted, once again,
from the power over commerce and taxation the Company held, and created “a general combina-
tion against the Government” (1814:72).
Thus, for Rickards, the way the Company combined sovereignty and trade inevitably corrupted both its corporate motives and its officials at all levels, and the solution was to organize it in terms of an abstract economic actor—to place “every merchant on an equal footing”—thereby releasing India’s economic potential. But while Rickards and his allies succeeded in having the Company’s trading monopoly in India partially repealed in the 1813 Charter Renewal, the deeper project of supplanting the logic of governance in India with the presumption of an abstract “economy” failed. Indeed, the 1813 Charter carefully protected Indian economic exchange with Britain itself (resulting in “the elimination of the Indian cotton Industry” (Webster 1990:404) and Indian industrial and agricultural production, despite major shifts, remained directed by the colonial state down through India’s independence (e.g., Goswami 2004).

This chapter seeks the origins of Rickards’ attempted appeal to this abstracted sense of “the economy” as a source of administrative logic in colonial India. It traces its origins to Bombay, where the EIC’s settlements at Bombay and Surat began with similar patrimonial, proximate forms of administration as Madras and Bengal. Bombay, however, stood in contrast to the other two presidencies in that it was smaller, gained responsibility for territory later, and was dominated by the presence of European traders in a way that was not true elsewhere. Thus, although “the economy” did emerge and was advocated by officials in Bombay, its brief ascendance was squelched by subsequent senior administrators.

Bombay Before Territory: Territorial Containment and Domination by Merchant Elites

While Bombay’s subsidiary factory at Surat was the oldest of the Company’s settlements in India, by the middle of the 18th century the presidency had become a backwater. This was partly because of the effects of the disastrous (at least from the EIC’s perspective) “Child’s War” from 1688 to 1690, in which the brothers Josiah and John Child (Director of the Company and Governor of Bombay, respectively), unsuccessfully attempted to extract trading concessions from the Mughal empire by force. Instead, Company officials were hemmed into Surat and forced to prostrate themselves before the emperor, and even as Mughal power waned, the Mahrathas and the Sultanate of Mysore served to contain Bombay’s territorial ambitions until well after the Seven Years War.63

Yet while the pace of Bombay’s territorial expansion may have diverged from Madras and Bengal’s, the presidency’s internal organization closely mimicked that of its cousins:

The English society in Bombay was arranged on a strictly hierarchical plan from the Governor, through the senior and junior merchants to the factors and writers, the common soldiers and sailors. Rules of procedure were as strictly observed at the end of the [18th] century as at the beginning, so that Mrs. Graham could complain that no general conversation was possible at a Bombay dinner, since the same people invariably met and sat next to each other at every dinner party (Spear 1963:77).

---

63 Bombay only began to gain large chunks of territory during the Napoleonic wars, when conflict with the Marathas won the Company territories such as Gujarat, Cambay, and Kutch.
Dinner parties like these were an important aspect of Bombay society, and new visitors were quickly integrated into them according to a hierarchical ranking system that matched the importance of the visitor to the host’s standing in Bombay society (Nightingale 1985:36–37). Yet, as in Madras and Bengal, the core of the settlement’s social organization remained the “Table” maintained by the Governor. The flavor of this setting—and the structure of moral judgment it revealed—is illustrated by an account derisively related by the newcomer George Paterson, in which the Governor ordered the Court-Martial of an Indian Sepoy for allowing two EIC officials on the Bombay Council to steal grapes from the Governor’s garden:

[The Governor] then boasted publickly at his own Table of what he had done. Talked of robbing him of what was his sole property. But the Council resented this much more than he or anybody else expected; and though they had borne many insults from him before yet now a bunch of Grapes roused them from their Lethargy. From that instant they resolved unanimously on an opposition, and began by leaving him to a Man at dinner the first Council day, to his great astonishment. He never suspected this spirit. In short this continued for some time, till at last he made some kind of concession. He mulked [sic] the Members of the Court Martial to a few days pay, and give it to the Man. And had them reporved in orders, by the commanding Officer for passing a sentence which he had commanded. And to appease the Gentlemen he made them a speech in Council which I am told from very good authority was worse than the whole as he treated them like children: which however they being well disposed took in a favorable light, and were willing to accept as an appology [sic]. They dined with him that day. He was civil to them all and they departed pleased; boasting of his honors submissions (Quoted in Nightingale 1985:43–44).

Thus, to Paterson’s eye as an outsider, the patrimonial world of Bombay administration resembled one where the Governor could at once act capriciously, reversing his ordered court-Martial, and treat his council “like children” in a speech only to have them accept and forgive his transgression.

Bombay produced two of the most important Directors of the East India Company in the second half of the 18th Century, Laurence Sulivan and David Scott. Sulivan sought to control the Company during the crucial decades of the 1750s and 1760s and was Robert Clive’s opponent during the “stock-splitting” controversies at the end of the 1760s, while Scott came to be a crucial figure in the Company’s patronage structure during the 1790s. Yet the administration of Bombay itself soaked up the dregs of the Company’s larger patronage structure. The presidency had no substantial military force paying _batta_ to its European officers, and malarial swamps near the settlement (and the Company’s propensity to fertilize its mangrove plantations with dead fish, which contaminated Bombay’s wells) caused such high mortality that it was said that in Bombay “[t]wo monsoons are the life of a man” (Spear 1963:66–68). Compounding this, in the 1780s and 1790s, Bombay experienced repeatedly liquidity crises that hurt its ability to attract senior, country-trading merchants. For example, the Chief at Tellicherry, Jon Beaumont, had to pay his staff in worthless company scrip, and in 1785 the Governor of Bombay had to personally extend a loan to the settlement for operating expenses (Furber 1948:208–211). Indeed, Bombay was such a despised posting that in the East India Kalendar (Anon 1800) lists seven vacant junior positions in Bombay (with 38 filled) with no similar unfilled positions in either Madras or Ben-

---

64 _Batta_, or field pay, was a special supplement originally given to European officers when actually fighting but increasingly even when demobilized; in the 1790s and 1800s, scaling it back caused a series of mutinies among the British officer corps.
gal. As Holden Furber has summarized:

Conditions such as these made a minor post under the Bombay government not the first but the last choice all ambitious young writers and cadets. Many of those who were doomed to Bombay because their sponsors were junior members of the Court of Directors cursed the day of their decision to try their luck in India. In the late Eighteenth century, discontent was rife from the bottom to the top of the Bombay service (Furber 1948:212).

Given these frustrated ambitions, it is little surprise that Company officials in Bombay turned to the one substantial economic opportunity they were afforded: private trade. For while Bombay had no real military presence, it did have the largest collection of European, creolized Portuguese, Armenian, and Arab trades in the whole of India. Dominated (on the European side) by great agency houses like Fawcett and Company and men like David Scott and Murdock Brown, it was commonplace for Company servants to explicitly hold dual roles as employees of private agency houses at the same time they served the Company. For example, Alexander Adamson, parter in David Scott’s agency house, served in Bombay’s treasury, while he was assisted by an employee of Fawcett and Company and his accountant also worked for the Forbes agency house (Nightingale 1970:25). This honeycomb of colliding organizations extended into the Company’s satellites as well, as agency house partners served as Company chiefs in settlements like Tellicherry, Calicut, and Mahe (Nightingale 1970:25). The object for these officials, no matter their role, was the valuable trade in pepper on the Malabar coast (at settlements in Tellicherry and Mahe) and cotton in Gujerat, Cutch, and Cambay surrounding Bombay and Surat.

If Bombay, then, represented a costly swamp, both literally and figuratively, how was it viewed by the rest of the East India Company? Worries about its cost and prospects to return to profitability in fact threatened to have the presidency downgraded to the status of a mere factory and have its administration folded into Madras’, but when the proposal to do so (offered by Cornwallis) landed on Henry Dundas’ desk in London, Dundas refused the proposal (after deliberating with “intelligent persons, well informed in the trade of India, either now or in former times”; quoted in Nightingale 1970:49) for two main reasons.

The first was strategic. Bombay stood at the back of both the Maratha confederation and the sultanate of Mysore, and hence, Dundas worried, downgrading Bombay’s status would diminish it as a strategic threat. As he wrote to Cornwallis in 1788:

[Bombay’s] importance to the safety of India, both in respect to its being the only asylum to our fleet in time of war, and in respect to its being an important military station, at the back both of the Maratta and Mysorean countries, to keep those powers in awe, is too familiarly know to you to require any illustration from me; but notwithstanding its importance in those very essential articles, its establishment is totally incomplete; and has always appeared to me even defective in its constructions although it was complete, especially in so far as concerns European force, by which I take it for granted it ought in a great degree to be garrisoned (Cornwallis 1859:I, 534).

Indeed, these strategic concerns long dominated British views of Bombay’s importance as, after the defeat of Mysore, French threats to India loomed, and after both France and the Marathas were defeated, the “great game” between Britain and Russia continued the need to shore up the Company’s western frontier (Ingram 1992).
Beyond these military concerns, though, Dundas’ second reason for defending Bombay’s status reflected hopes that it could serve as a springboard for broader Asian trade. Clearly mouthing the influence of the “intelligent persons” (likely Bombay private merchants like David Cuming, who were trying to curry favor with Dundas; Nightingale 1970:53), Dundas thought that Bombay could serve as a commercial springboard, supplying cotton to Canton for tea, and hence remitting the goods to London more cheaply while taking advantage of trade already taking place. In response to Cornwallis’ skepticism about the plan, Dundas wrote:

I am apt to think you are no great friend to the idea of supplying Canton from India. I shall write you in the course of the summer my ideas very much at large on that subject. I am clear it can never be attempted except through the medium of Commerce, between the two countries; and if Bengal is to be materially injured by it, the idea must be dropt, but as well in a Political as in a Commercial view, it would be of the utmost importance if the vast Tea Trade now carried on to this Country could be supplied from Indian Resources, without bringing any drain upon the country. In short if China could be supplied by the sale of British and Indian manufacture either directly or indirectly finding their way to China, it would render the benefit of our Indian Empire perfect, of course you will join with me in thinking that every exertion, and every ingenuity should be exercised to effectuate such a system, and it ought only to be departed from on the most unequivocal conviction that the system is impracticable (quoted in Nightingale 1970:50).

In sum, Bombay’s importance to the Company lay, on the one hand, on its strategic importance as a check against the Marathas and Mysore, and on the other hand, in its ability to successfully obtain cotton from Gujerat and pepper from the Malabar coast. As the next section shows, as Bombay began to actually govern territory at the end of the 18th century, these imperatives conflicted.

The Emergence of Territorial Power: Sources of Organizational Conflict

Bombay’s rise as a territory power started late and progressed furtively. From 1792 to 1800, it was placed in control of Malabar, the pepper-producing region on the southwest coast of India. Its control was originally unilateral, but the commissioners appointed as administrators were forced into a controversial dialogue with counterparts from Madras. In 1800, because of the awkwardness of Bombay’s administration of the territory, Malabar was completely given over to Madras (Nightingale 1970:Ch. 4). Moreover, Bombay also acquired more permanent territory from treaties with the Marathas beginning in 1803 with the acquisition of most of Gujarat and accelerating with their final military subordination in 1818.

Governing these new possessions intensified conflicts within the administration both in Bombay itself and in its subsidiary outposts. The Bombay Secret and Political Proceedings are littered with reports from the Company’s small settlements along the Arabian sea like Aden, Mocha, and Basra as new officers rotated into them and conflicted with their superiors at the turn of the 19th

---

65 Cuming characterized private merchants who were already trading from Bombay to China as “monied men Joining Interest to Wealth [who] have long been accustomed to engross for themselves through the Influence of the Company, the whole trade of the different Countries round it” (quoted in Nightingale 1970:53).
An excellent example of this dynamic occurred in 1803 among Samuel Mansley, the commercial resident of Basra, Thomas Day, his assistant, and John Milne. Milne was a newly-appointed surgeon, having turned his previous, lucrative position aboard an East Indiaman into “some money” (J. Smith 1871:14) and, upon his 1808 return to Britain, appears to have well-integrated into the elite of his native Aberdeen (J. Smith 1871:17). Soon after arriving, Milne came into conflict with Mansley, who was the senior Company official in the settlement and a long-term employee of the Company, having been first appointed in 1779 (Anon 1800:147). The dispute began simply: Mansley wished to move out a house that he, Day, and Milne shared. Milne objected, and this conflict among roommates (Basra was a small enough settlement that Mansley held no responsibility for his subordinates’ conduct) escalated to the point where they were forced to write to the Bombay council to adjudicate.

While the substance of their dispute was unremarkable, its structure reveals the texture of organizational conflict within the Company at the time. Milne, who represented the cohort of new administrators rotating into the EIC’s service with little previous experience in India and with the details of the Company’s administrative politics, fought to establish a distinction between his private opinion of Mansley’s behavior and his public duty to Mansley as a superior, declaring “Nor can I deem a private difference of opinion with any man unbecoming” (Bombay Political and Secret Proceedings [hereafter BSPP], no. 145, p. 4747). Milne likewise seemed perplexed at the violent emotion in Mansley’s reaction to his objection, reasoning that since “you [Mansley] may feel hurt by my having differed in opinion…you have wish to injure me” (BSPP, no. 145, 4748). But Mansley, who began his service while the Company’s older, proximate logic of organization was still dominant, seems to have found precisely the distinction between private opinion and public duty to be the most irksome aspect of the conflict, especially once it escalated into appeals to Bombay. As he wrote, “Is it possible you have not been aware of the real nature of your conduct?…[because of your oppositional tone,] when you intend Well, you act as if you intend ill, and of course you must take then Consequences of this new species of Error. In this world it is not sufficient to be virtuous, we must appear to be” (BSPP, no. 145, p. 4798; emphasis original). Thus, to Mansley, while the distinction between private opinion and organizational role within the Company was incoherent without a durable link between the two, the stress for him, as an older employee of the Company steeped in Bombay’s proximate form of moral judgment, stressed the necessity of the appearance of virtue, rather than simply its possession. Indeed, to Mansley, the most damning insult he could throw at Milne was that “instead of being treated as a Friend or Brother, I must Consider You as a Stranger,” and by consequence “I shall simply Confine Myself, to the exact line of my Duty” (BSPP. No. 145, 4802-4803).

British officials also expressed frustration at EIC administrators’ inability to present stable representations of themselves in Bombay itself. For example, in 1812 Robert Henshaw was indicted for corruption during a famine for taking bribes from Indian merchants to allow food to be exported from Bombay. The prosecutor for the Recorder’s Court in Bombay, Stuart Montcreiff Threipland, ended his opening statement at Henshaw’s trial by complaining of Henshaw’s “artful representations…interested to mislead, to deceive, and to betray.” Indeed, the core of the case
against Henshaw rested not only on the act of having taken bribes itself, but most importantly on the *intent* to undertake corrupt activity as demonstrated by his efforts to conceal his role. These efforts, said Threipland, were “not the hasty effusion of inconsiderate candour, but a work in composing which upwards of three anxious weeks were expended, and which, from the zeal of friends…went through many editions before it saw the light,” and they demonstrated “by what extraordinary infatuation guilt is sometimes led to mistake a cobweb covering, transparent to every eye but its own, for a cloak affording complete concealment” (all quotes from Henshaw 1807:29–30).

Thus at the turn of the 19th century, the power that accompanied territorial responsibility in Bombay intensified controversies over the presentation of self within the Company’s administration. Company officials struggled with one another over whether it was possible to remain embedded in a proximate system of judging the propriety of one another’s actions, or whether they were subject to more universal and abstract notions of duty. As the subsequent section discusses, these struggles also spilled over into the most senior levels of the administration, as Jonathan Duncan became Governor of Bombay.

*Duncan, Rickards, Economy: The Rise of Laissez-Faire and its Projection onto Indian Soil*

Jonathan Duncan was a Scot who began his service in India in 1771. He was deeply affiliated with the Scottish political network that interlaced the Company’s administration, through John Michie, Duncan’s uncle and a Director of the Company who first secured him his appointment to the Bengal civil service, and David Scott, the wealthy former Bombay civil servant and Director, who in 1795 backed Duncan as Governor of Bombay (Nightingale 2004; Scott 1951). As he worked his way up in India, Duncan appears to have inspired mixed feelings in his fellow officials and in his superiors. William Hickey described him as “a heavy, dull man, without a particle of genius” (Hickey and Spencer 1913:Vol. 4, p. 129), and James Mackintosh worried that “four and thirty years’ residence, in this country have Braminised his mind and body” (J. Mackintosh and R. J. Mackintosh 1836:Vol. 1, p. 207). Cornwallis, for his part, appears to have thought—perhaps based on this very “Braminization”—that Duncan was well-equipped for administration. He thus appointed Duncan to the important post of resident of Benares, declaring to Dundas “Perhaps you are not acquainted with Mr. Duncan’s character; he is held in the highest estimation by every man, both European and native, in Bengal, and, next to Mr. Shore, was more capable of assisting me, particularly in revenue matters, than any man in the this country” (Cornwallis 1859:Vol. 1, p. 283). However, although he did not describe the source of these concerns, Cornwallis also warned Dundas that “With all his honesty and ability…I doubt whether he would have sufficient authority over men of equal standing int he service” (quoted in Aspinall 1931:20).

It is thus puzzling that he was recommended first to sit on the commission to investigate the pepper trade in Malabar and later to be Governor of Bengal, but the most likely explanation is Dundas’ efforts to help Duncan rebuild his finances shattered by embezzlement and mismanagement in the late 1790s (Nightingale 2004).

Duncan’s style of government seems to have earned the contempt of both his subordinates and
superiors. Rickards described his practice of rule:

As President in Council he gave his vote last; and whenever he has secret, yet partial scruples, after the majority had decided a measure generally according to his wishes, he would endeavour to shelter himself against possible censure, in respect to particular part, by a half record of his doubts, without openly expressing them in the first instance, for the equal and candid consideration of the members (quoted in Nightingale 1970:175).

Likewise, both Dundas and Wellesley complained of Duncan’s penchant for referring every major decision in Bombay either to the Director or to the Supreme Government in Calcutta (Nightingale 1985).

Duncan’s indecision and obsession with his standing in the eyes of others led him to strongly emphasize harmonious integration—both his own with other Bombay officials and the Bombay governments’ with the Indians at was to oversee as it gained territory. In terms of relations with his own staff, aside from friction with Rickards, it led Duncan into dependent relations with the private trader Murdock Brown for commercial advice (especially relating to Malabar) and Alexander Walker (famous as a progenitor of the ryotwari settlement in Madras) on territorial revenue matters (Mukherjee 1962; Rabitoy 1972:24–26). As for relations with Indians, Duncan preferred that the Bombay administration integrate itself as seamlessly as possible into their customs and social structure. As he declared to Wellesley in 1804,

[Indians] are guided by a Set of Maxims of their own, which they may be quietly rule by under our general authority; whereas any immediate attempt on our part to abrogate these, & to Substitute what we may view as Sounder Rules of Equity would certainly Set them aflame, Such, as it is not less just than politic that we Should avoid the raising of, as may easily be done, by moderation & an equitable degree of attention to their Prejudices (quoted in Rabitoy 1972:29–30).

As late as the authoring of the Malabar Commission report, the attitude of the Bombay establishment towards the logic of free trade appeared deeply ambivalent. On the one hand, the goal of the proposed settlement was to “secure that equal protection to the Persons and property of all so necessary [sic] to improve & repeople the country” (BSPP, Malabar Commission Report [MCR], p. 379), but this would prove exceptionally difficult to do, given that

To trust wholly to the Rajahs is certainly to be deceived, and as the company have as yet never sustained any other character then a Mercantile one, we do not find amongst those under their protection any Persons at all acquainted with the detail of the Revenues of the Countrys ceded to us… Under such a Number of impediments it will long be difficult to make any clear investigation, the fear of the people are also against us (BSPP, MCR, p. 383; sic throughout).

While the beginning of the report prefigured the calls of later free trade agitators like Rickards by emphasizing the importance of security of Property, when considering the EIC’s trade in Malabar pepper, the Commissioners did an about-face and emphasized the importance of maintaining a monopoly:

Since therefore the charges of the Company will not bear a competition on a mercantile footing it might be expedient to consider Pepper merely in the light of a remittance to Europe of the surplus
Revenues of India...The fact is that in our new situation it cannot be reckoned in any other light. Military stations must now take place of Factories and Pepper will be a remittance of tribute in the same manner as Muslins & Long Cloths from Bengal & Madras—if the whole of what is procured on this Coast could in any mode be secured, it might perhaps at a much higher price than the Company yet allows be a better remittance and would further have the advantage of increasing [sic] the Company’s commerce, and the carrying Trade of England by compelling Nations to go to London for Pepper, who now carry it from hence (MCR, p. 395).

But as the Bombay presidency’s reach into the hinterland expanded at the turn of the 19th century, the conflicts between its roles as merchant and sovereign intensified into open conflict on the Bombay council. The key issue was similar to the tension expressed in the Malabar commission report: could the Company justifiably act as both merchant and sovereign in its newly won (in 1803) cotton-producing territory of Broach? The EIC’s mercantile role demanded that as much cotton be collected at the lowest price as possible, but its sovereign role required that land revenues (paid out of the profits of selling the cotton) be as high as could be borne by cultivators (see Rabitoy 1975, 1991). The solution of the Bombay officials, composed of Jonathan Duncan and Thomas Lechmere on the Bombay council with the support of Alexander Walker, the Resident of Baroda, was to maintain the Company’s cotton monopoly by purchasing all cotton produced in Broach, but then remunerate cultivators in money for the difference between the produce and the taxes they owed the Government.

Predictably, such a policy decision infuriated Rickards, who by 1808 had become the free-trade crusader on the Bombay Council. Rickards in particular seems to have chafed at the suggestion of his colleagues that their knowledge and experience of the “facts” of Bombay trumped “opinions formed at a distance by ingenious men” (quoted in Rabitoy 1991:749), to which Rickards responded with a broad denial of India’s uniqueness:

I must Certainly have taken pains to very little purpose to instruct myself in the principles of my present profession if those principles have no other limit than that of the Earth itself...The principles of natural Law have their origin in the Divine Will...[and] must be universal to be true” (quoted in Rabitoy 1991:748).  

Shortly after this conflict between Rickards and the rest of the council had come to the fore, Rickards himself was recalled (for illicit dealing with private merchants in Bombay) and Duncan died in 1811.

Evan Nepean and the Turn to the Economy; Mountstuart Elphinstone and the Turn to the State

While the controversy between Duncan and Rickards illustrated a wider conflict between organizational alternatives the Company’s Bombay administration faced at the turn of the 19th Century, the presidency’s course followed neither of the substantive alternatives proposed. Instead, Duncan’s various successors turned to mimic the organizational logics of Madras (with regards to how land revenue and its administration was to be organized) and Bengal (with regards to the legal apparatus of EIC rule). Thus, Bombay represented a peculiar hybrid that—while it was the origin of an abstracted sense of the economy as a potential organizational logic for the adminis-
tration, and although this logic was briefly and forcefully instituted during the famine of 1812-1813 under Evan Nepean—never saw that logic institutionalized in the way administrators judged the propriety of one another’s action.

Evan Nepean arrived in Bombay fresh from an imperial perambulation similar to Cornwallis’ and Macartney’s, which had carried him from a naval post to American to the Home Department in Britain, back to the Admiralty, and then to Ireland. When he arrived in Bombay, he faced a devastating famine which had been caused by a failure of the monsoon. But Nepean was unmoved by calls to prohibit grain exports from Bombay, declaring that

I have always entertained an opinion that the provisions of the British Legislature, in respect to Grain, have not been productive of General benefit, but have produced a Contrary effect [Nepean is referring to the protectionist “Corn Laws”], and I therefore feel disposed to think that the less we interfere on these Subjects (excepting in Cases of any great imemergency [sic]), the better (quoted in Rabitoy 1991:755).

Under Nepean, the Council even went so far as to remonstrate Thomas Keate, the collector of the Kairwar district, for refusing to lift protections for starving cultivators:

The Right Hon'ble the Governor in Council is disposed to think ... that those approved & recognized principles, founded as they have been on the experience of the prejudicial effects of a Contrary policy in all ages and in all Countries, which prescribe an entire and unrestrained freedom in the Grain Trade as best adopted to the relief of any existing Scarcity and to the prevention of famine are particularly applicable to the Dealers in grain in the Province of Guzerat whatever may be the state of Society in that Province, or the Character of those in whom the Control of the markets may exist.... It is universally admitted that the Natives of India are as provident of their own Interest ... as any other description of men ... and therefore any interposition on the part of the ruling authority in their Commercial Concerns or Speculations, or any attempts to ascertain their hidden stores of grains are more calculated to accelerate the dreadful Crisis of famine than to produce any salutary relief to the exigencies of the public(quoted in Rabitoy 1991:759).

Yet however brutally complete Nepean’s embrace of economic logic may have been with regards to famine policy, his approach to land revenue administration deviated not only from a strict laissez-faire understanding of the relationship between state and economy, but also from the physiocratic principles of the Bengal Permanent Settlement. Cornwallis had championed fixing the land revenue permanently and investing private property in land in the zemindars as a way to permanently restrict the Government’s reach into society (N. H. Wilson 2011), yet Nepean swept away the set of intermediary Indian revenue officials and put European district officers in direct control over revenue measurement, registration, and collection (Rabitoy 1975:532). Moreover, Nepean instituted the ryotwari land revenue settlement even though it had been criticized by free-market advocates precisely because it abolished private property in land (conceiving of the state as the sole proprietor and of all cultivators as lessees) (Rabitoy 1975:535; Burton Stein 1989). Indeed, the whole subsequent architecture of British land revenue administration in Bombay pulled away from a logic of free-market economics, and instead mimicked the system which had been instituted in Madras (Rabitoy 1972:72ff).

While the architecture for land revenue administration and its concern for society as a central
organizing principle of Company administration was most clearly imported from Madras, the logic of the EIC’s legal authority (and its consequent assumptions about the ethical duties of Company servants and the structure of their moral judgment) was drawn from Calcutta. This is perhaps most clearly shown by contrasting Rickards’ assumptions about *dacoity* (or “banditry”—a broad term that the EIC used at the time to classify nearly any kind of violent resistance against the colonial state) with those of Nepean’s successor, Montstuart Elphinstone. Rickards, in his *Speeches* (1814), implied that tax relief and the guarantee of private property in land would cause *dacoity* to evaporate. This vision, in turn, rested on the assumption that resistance was being produced by the fundamental deviation of the Company’s policies away from the “natural law” of economics.

But however forcefully Rickards expressed these views in London, they held comparatively little sway over how Bombay’s officials were meant to operate. Soon after he took over as Governor of Bombay in 1819, Elphinstone explained how he thought the connection between the Company’s legal authority was linked to the guarantee of social order in Indian villages. Tellingly, his explanation began with a claim that EIC power was to be restrained in a way that Rickards would have likely appreciated, but quickly turned into a broad affirmation of colonial power that left the District Collector as a representative of the Company’s ultimate power to guarantee order:

> Considering the want of military force in the territory, it is surprising how little disturbance the Mevasi [villages dominated by petty chiefs, called *Kolis*] have given us since we first came into Gujarat; and it would be equally inconsistent with justice and policy to risk this tranquility, for a little addition to the revenue or a fancied improvement in the police. That the improvement would be real, I think more than doubtful, for unless where Kolis have acquired habits of industry and order, they can only be restrained by rendering the communities to which they belong responsible for their conduct; and if we could quietly succeed in bringing each individual under the direct operation of our police, the effect, I doubt not, would be a great increase of robberies. I would, therefore, propose that in Mevasi villages we should hold the Thakur [regional magnate] responsible for the tribute and for the maintenance of the public tranquility…[but] it should rest with the magistrate what offences to notice in his village. All serious crimes ought, of course, to be noticed, and the criminal should be demanded of the Thakor. The demand should be enforced by a Mohosal [garrisoning of Sepoys in the village] and a daily fine. Obstinate neglect might be punished by apprehending the Thakor; and resistance, by attacking him as a public enemy. Complaints of a serious nature against the Thakor personally should be investigated in a summary way by the collector, before he proceeded to apprehend the accused: when it became necessary to apprehend him, he should be made over to the criminal judge in the usual manner. Thakors habitually guilty of connivance at plunder might be deposed and imprisoned, the office of chief being made over to another member of the family; or their villages might be garrisoned by troops, and deprived of all Mevasi privileges (Elphinstone 1884:486–487).

In sum, as Bombay’s territory expanded, including large parts of Western India, the dominant logics of organizing these new territories and the administrative structures they implied were driven by notions of society and the state as abstract spheres, not the economy. This was true, moreover, in spite of the initial thrust towards *laissez-faire* in the early years of Nepean’s administration.
Conclusion

When it is compared to Bengal and Madras, the Company’s administration of Bombay at the turn of the 19th century shows two main peculiarities. The first involves its context: Bombay became a territorial power three decades after Bengal and two after Madras, and was hemmed in by strong Indian competitors in the meantime. By consequence, there were fewer opportunities for EIC administrators to exploit ambiguities in their roles in the interest of private gain. Thus, while Company officials certainly did display the desire to turn territorial control into private benefit—as their attempts to establish a beneficial pepper monopoly in Malabar in the 1790s shows—their opportunities to realize such ambitions were limited.

The second main peculiarity of Bombay, however, is that it challenges the model developed in this dissertation of how abstract organizational logics of state, society and economy emerge and are institutionalized. Robert Rickards certainly proffered an abstract logic of “the economy” as a possible foundation for British rule in India, and he showed clearly how this logic was meant to not only reduce corruption among Indians, but also to stand as the “natural law” at the foundation of the correct organization of the colonial state. Yet he did so as a long-time Company servant, and one who, by the time he fully articulated his critique to the British public as a member of Parliament, was unable to effect the changes he proposed. Moreover, those officials who did institutionalize abstract foundations of the administration of Bombay in the first decades of the 19th century—Evan Nepean and Mountstuart Elphinstone—both looked to the Company’s well-established organizational models in Madras (representing “society”) and Bengal (representing “the state”) as they developed the modes of rule for the Company’s new possessions around Bombay and Surat. In this sense, while the attacks of Rickards and those like him successfully unwound the EIC’s monopolistic hold on trade to and from India—and indeed, in effectively winding up the Company as a commercial concern—the linked attempt to institute economic logic as a foundational organization for the colonial state was a failure.

Considering the transformations in Bombay from this angle reveals an irony. For by the late 18th Century the Court of Directors felt constant pressure to win profits from its new territories (or at least to staunch the fiscal bleeding from military and administrative expenses), and, in the words of Adam Smith’s famous critique, “their mercantile habits [drew] them, in this manner, almost necessarily, though perhaps insensibly, to prefer upon all ordinary occasions the little and transitory profit of the monopolist to the great and permanent revenue of the sovereign” (1976:2, p. 154). Yet this examination of the organizational politics of the Company’s Bombay presidency shows that while the Company’s activities prior to reform certainly give Smith’s criticism weight, as the EIC actually disentangled its roles as merchant and sovereign in the early part of the 19th century it decisively turned away from recognizing the abstracted notion of the economy that underlay Smith’s viewpoint. Thus a free trade critique of EIC administration in India produced constant pressure at the turn of the 19th century, but that pressure pushed the course of organizational reform away from the substance it advocated.
Conclusion

This chapter first recapitulates the substantive and analytic dimensions of this dissertation’s argument, then revisits their relevance for sociological and historiographical debates.

Summary

The central phenomenon this dissertation has sought to describe is complex. One dimension is the rise of ethical spheres called state, society, and economy within Company administration in India. In contrast to the administration’s prior patrimonial organization, these spheres appeared objective and impersonal, and seemed (according to those who argued for them) to operate in terms of natural laws. In 17th and 18th century Britain, Enlightenment intellectuals like Locke, Hobbes, and Smith proposed the existence of these spheres and the proper role of government and state officials in relationship to them, yet the actual conduct of political and administrative elites remained deeply patrimonial until at least the end of the 18th century. Officials did not act because of the ethical compulsion they felt to obey abstract laws of economics or statecraft, but rather because they wished to make their political and financial fortunes within a deeply interconnected and personalistic web of patronage. Thus one way of rephrasing the central question this dissertation has pursued is: when, where and how did state, society, and economy become ethically “live hypotheses” for officials (James 1897:21)? And one way of voicing its central answer is that British India was not the first place where anyone articulated state, society, and economy as separate spheres in either European or British culture, but it appears to be one of the first places where such ideas—and their derivate senses of moral obligation—were wedded to the organizational practices of politics and government.

If British India was one of the key sites where officials’ ethical obligations were coupled to the impersonal spheres of state, society, and economy, what did this process look like at the level of the small settlements of merchants that dotted the Indian coastline? As the preceding subsidiary studies of Company administration in Bengal, Madras, and Bombay have shown, the shift began a deeply contentious, sometimes even violent, period of struggle among senior Company officials, and was followed by administrative reforms deploying each abstract sphere as a guiding principle for operations in the Presidency. Although not every sphere was successfully institutionalized—notably, Bombay never incorporated the laissez faire organization advocated by Evan Nepean—at the very least each remained a seemingly viable alternative for how to organize the colonial state in India. Moreover, by focusing on the of ethics of duty—and its counterpoint, corruption—Company officials centralized how they presented themselves to each other and to London. In other words, state, society, and economy became objective “things” in Indian colonial governance as the EIC organized its new territories; organizing these new territories, in turn, meant projecting political and administrative struggles across thousands of miles and into an alien culture, yet embedding them in the patronage networks of British elite politics; and these
struggles over how to organize the nascent colonial Company state were resolved as officials transformed how they presented themselves and their motivations to others in India and Britain.

Thus the object this dissertation seeks to explain is multifaceted, encompassing micro-, meso-, and macro-dimensions of a colonial state’s transformation. While the details of the explanation offered are also multifaceted, the core theme is how people and organizations struggle for information amid dynamism and uncertainty. At the level of organizations, the East India Company and the British State engaged in a contentious reorganization in the aftermath of the Seven Years War. Three key stakes of this reorganization involved uncertainty and control: first, the State and Company both sought to stabilize revenues coming from India, albeit towards different ends (a share of military expenses and guaranteed dividends, respectively); second, the British state and Company both undertook reorganizations of how EIC officials in India were seen because they craved greater control over the Company’s financial and foreign policy administration; and third, British political elites inside and outside of the Company wished to stabilize the Company’s internal labor market, so that lucrative careers within its administration would remain viable paths for their “third sons.” Because those with financial interests in the Company were also deeply involved in British politics, and because the vicissitudes of domestic politics closed off the possibility of Crown control over Indian administration, Pitt’s India Act of 1784 was a compromise: its Board of Control oversaw the most senior levels of Presidency governance, but left the administration below that untouched.

Though Pitt’s India Act (and similar measures like the Regulating Act of 1773 and amendments to Pitt’s act in 1786) represented a compromise, piecewise reform of the EIC’s administration, it had profound consequences for the emergence of state, society, and economy as moral spheres of governance in India. This was because the act and its associated reforms broke down the patronage barrier which had left a career in the Company’s administration—even at its most senior levels—distinct from British elite political life. Thus amid and after the reforms, a new cohort of administrations sailed for India, including George Macartney, Philip Francis, and Evan Nepean. For each of these men, Indian administration was not an all-consuming career; instead, it was another stop on a much larger perambulation through the British colonial and domestic political worlds and, each hoped, a springboard for larger political ambitions.

Yet while Macartney, Francis, and Nepean pursued these larger ambitions, they were checked in India by their lack of knowledge of Indian circumstances and the intransigence they encountered among their fellow officials. This second moment of uncertainty, control, and knowledge coming together is also a key explanation for the rise of state, society, and economy in India. Each of the three men reached towards these abstract spheres in order to make their struggles legible to observers in England who were not steeped in the details of Indian administration, on the one hand, and to ensure the flow of continuing resources by mobilizing domestic support, on the other. And their strategy of using these spheres, moreover, demanded a new kind of credit: a narrative of themselves as actors who consistently hewed to the moral obligations of the spheres they referenced.

This dynamic is perhaps clearest in the contrast between George Macartney and John Macpher-
son. Macartney and Macpherson were similar in many ways: both were veterans of domestic British politics; both were known by associates as highly intelligent, amiable, and protean charmers; and both harbored enormous political ambitions both within and without the Company’s bounds. Yet they different in a crucial respect. By the time Macartney was Governor of Madras, Macpherson (by then on the Bengal council) had been in India for years, variously professing his loyalty to the Court of Directors, Parliament, the British Crown, and the Nawab of Arcot when he was not trying to get himself appointed Governor-General. Yet when Macartney appealed to “society” to protect Madras “from itself,” he was successful in part because he could plausibly paint himself as holding a consistent moral line. Macpherson, meanwhile, failed in his appeals to “economy” in Bengal during his Governor-Generalship pro tem partly because he by then was seen, as Cornwallis described him, as a man of “flimsy cunning and shameless falsehoods.”

In sum, this dissertation seeks to explain how moral spheres become objective, thing-like entities which seemed able to make demands on the people inhabiting them. In the 18th Century British administration of India, this happened because the Seven Years War put organizational outsiders into pockets of agency at the senior levels of the EIC’s Indian administration. When these outsiders found themselves alone in India and struggling against hostile subordinates on their own staffs, they seized on the rhetoric of state, society, and economy as objective spheres in order to prevail. To lend credit to these claims, they also introduced the ideal of moral consistency as an important resource in administrative struggle in India. In other words, the disembedding of state, society, and economy as moral spheres in British Colonial India was the unintended consequence of imperial, late-patrimonial administrative politics as it stretched and buckled under the weight of war.

Elaborations

Since they are complicated, this dissertation’s object of explanation and its explanatory model touch on several areas of sociological and historical interest.

To begin with, the study of administrative change within the East India Company in India helps revise models of state formation as a whole. In contrast to studies which locate the origins of crucial administrative innovations within European states or societies themselves (emanating either “bottom-up,” from institutional aspects of society or “top-down” from state reforms), this study shows the origin in colonial administration of at least two crucial innovation of modern state administration—the organization of governance around objective, disembedded spheres governed by seemingly natural laws, on the one hand; and the population of state administration by morally unitary officials subject to the ethical demands and consequences of those laws, on the other. As such, it shows how an important part of state formation is an ethical project, and how a crucial motivation for that project was the projection of power across physical distance and cultural distance via colonial administration.

While it demonstrates the importance of colonial administration for state formation, the research
presented here also modifies the explanation given by many work within empire studies. Colonies are typically seen as “laboratories” onto which the ideological “projects” of colonizing states are worked out (e.g., Stokes 1989) and within which the anxieties of modernity are fully expressed (e.g., Stoler 1995; J. E. Wilson 2011). In contrast, early British Colonialism, and especially the period in which the Company’s transition from being mostly a commercial concern to being a territorial power was worked out, appears to be more fractious, contentious, and disorganized than captured by the imagery of coherent projects or some unitary anxiety to be coped with. Rather, a set of practical organizational struggles within the Company’s administration yielded—as an unintended consequence—recognizably modern ways of presenting oneself and of justifying and guiding state reforms. In other words, for there to be a “project of liberalism” whose anxieties of inclusion and exclusion were to be worked out (Mehta 1999) in Colonies or an “Empire of Free Trade” to spread across British dominions (Semmel 1970; Sen 1998), there first had to be objective spaces called “society” and “the economy.” And instead of assuming the existence of these spaces or coupling them directly with the projects that built on them, this project has attempted to explain there emergence on their own terms.

Turning to sociology specifically, studying 18th Century British Colonialism in India provides an important demonstration and analysis of the origin of social fields, particularly within the realm of political power and the organization of governance. This dissertation shows how foundational understandings of a field’s logic—its doxa, to use Bourdieu’s term (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992)—can emerge from prior organizational politics that are played out in a much more direct, personalistic way. In other words, it shows how a struggle played against concrete other people and in terms of the particular ties one has with those people can be transformed into a struggle with others which appears as a struggle for and in the service of abstract ideological positions (Bourdieu 1996; Dezalay and Garth 2002).

Finally, and most generally, this has been a study of the dense links among politics, self-presentation, morality and knowledge. In particular, it has analyzed a transition that was made up of struggles by people to control their self-presentations while they sought to understand their environments amid political efforts to realize personal and familial ambitions to fortune and security. Thus it contributes by demonstrating some of the organizational conditions that stimulate the transition from network to field (e.g., White 2008); the links between self-presentation and objective knowledge (Biagioli 1993; T. M. Porter 1995; Shapin 1994); and the moral foundations of modern culture-in-action (Swidler 1986; Tavory 2011; Taylor 1985, 1989b).
Archives Consulted

Maharashtra State Archives, Mumbai.


The National Archives, Kew Gardens, United Kingdom.

Bibliography


Anon. 1793. The Trial of Avadaum Pauoiah Bramin, (Dubash to John Hollond, Esq.; Late Governor of Fort Saint Goerge, and to his Brother, E. John Hollond, Esq., Late Member of the Council Thereof); of Acadaumum Ramah Sauny, Bramin, Brother to Paupiah; Sunkaraporum Vincatchillah Chitty, and Appeyingar Bramin; For a Conspiracy against David Haliburton, Esquire. A Senior Merchant in the Service of the East India Company, under the Presidency of Fort Saint George. London.

Anon. 1800. The east India Kalendar; or, Asiatic register for Bengal, Madras, Bombay, Fort Marlborough, China, and St. Helena. For the Year 1800. on a more extensive plan than any hitherto offered to the public. Containing Complete and Correct lists of the
Anon. 1808. The case of Sir John Macpherson, baronet, late governor general of India: containing a summary review of his administration and services. Printed by W. Bulmer.


Hamilton, Alexander. 1727. *A new account of the East Indies, being the observations and remarks of Capt. Alexander Hamilton*, who spent his time there from the year 1688. to 1723. Trading and travelling, by sea and land, to most of the countries and islands of commerce and navigation, between the cape of Goodhope, and the island of Japon ... Edinburgh: Printed by J. Mosman.


National Archives of India. 1958. *Fort William-India House Correspondence and Other Contemporary Papers Relating Thereto*. Delhi: Manager of Publications.


Rickards, Robert. 1814. The speeches of Robert Rickards, Esq., in the debate in Parliament on the renewal of the charter of the Hon. East India Company, the 2nd and 14th of June, 1813; with appendicies, and an examination of the company's accounts. London: Printed by Whittingham and Rowland.

Robbins, Helen Henrietta Macartney. 1908. Our first ambassador to China; an account of the life of George, earl of Macartney, with extracts from his letters, and the narrative of his experiences in China, as told by himself, 1737-1806, from hitherto unpublished correspondence and documents. New York: E.P. Dutton and co.


Rumbold, Elizabeth Ann. 1868. A vindication of the character and administration of Sir Thomas Rumbold, bart., governor of Madras ... from the misrepresentations of Colonel Wilks, Mr. Mill, and other historians ... including an examination of Mr. Hastings relations with Sir Thomas Rumbold. London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer.


Smith, John. 1871. Memoir of John Milne, M.D. : late president of the Medical Board, Bombay; founder of the medical bursary at Aberdeen University; and of the “Milne bequest” to the parochial schools of Aberdeenshire. Aberdeen; Edinburgh; London: A. Brown ; John Menzies & Co. ; Longman & Co.

Smollett, Patrick Boyle. 1858. Madras: its civil administration, being rough notes from personal observation written in 1855 & 1856. Richardson Bros.


Travers, Robert. 2007. *Ideology and Empire in Eighteenth Century India: The British in Bengal*. 114
New York: Cambridge University Press.


Verelst, Harry. 1772. *A view of the rise, progress, and present state of the English government in Bengal: including a reply to the misrepresentations of Mr. Bolts, and other writers.* London: J. Nourse.


Watts, William. 1760. *Memoirs of the Revolution in Bengal Anno. Dom. 1757, By which Meer Jaffier was raised to the Government of that Province, together with those of Bahar and Orixa. Including The Motives to this Enterprize; the Method in which it was accomplished; and the Benefits that have accrued from thence to that Country, our United Company trading to the East Indies, and to the British Nation.* London: A. Millar.


Wilson, C. R. 1895. *The early annals of the English in Bengal; being the Bengal public consultations for the first half of the eighteenth century, summarised, extracted, and ed.*
with introductions and illustrative addenda. London: W. Thacker.


Appendix A: Source Methods

This dissertation is based on both primary and secondary materials on 18th century British political and social history as well as scholarship on British colonialism in India. Both areas of scholarship present rich material on the nature of imperial politics, the organization of state administration, and the way that Company administrators presented themselves to one another. However, the materials at hand present three problems for an analysis like this one. First, the sheer volume of materials available precludes a systematic survey, much less a complete incorporation of those materials into the analysis.66 Second, the types of materials available varied considerably between the different presidencies and over time. (For example, while there is an excellent scholarship today on Cornwallis’ administration in Bengal and on its relationship to Hastings’ prior administrative reforms there, there has been little work done the Nawab of Arcot’s debts scandal in Madras and its aftermath beyond two excellent, yet unpublished, dissertations by Gurney (1968) and Phillips (1983).) Therefore, it was impossible to establish the kind of directly-commensurable empirical materials usual in comparative studies like this one. Finally, both 18th century British political and social history as well as the nature and course of British colonialism in India have been the objects of extremely intense historiographical debate. By consequence, there are well-defined positions among historians that deeply color their interpretations of the facts on the ground, and even lead them to emphasize some over others. (For example, the so-called “Cambridge school” studying British colonialism in India emphasizes political processes and the relationship between English officials and indigenous Indian commercial elites as a key force in the Company’s expansion (Bayly 1990), while a “subaltern” historiography emphasizes how Indians resisted, suffered under, and adapted to the force of colonialism (e.g., Frykenberg 1965). This point is particularly important because most of the recent work on both Britain and India has eschewed the kind of detailed organizational and prosopographical studies useful for the analysis here as an artifact of Imperial hagiography.

Given these three challenges, I adopted an ecumenical methodological approach akin to process-tracing and field analysis to pursue my research question. From previous coursework and reading I was aware of the variety of historical interpretations of the Company’s position during my period of study, so I began by systematically identifying these positions, including their lacunae and biases, in the secondary scholarship. (Since I was interested in moments of contention within the Company’s administration as well as administrators’ self-presentation during these episodes, I was also careful to note any such episodes mentioned in this literature.) This approach helped draw me to core authorities on late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century British colonialism which, while sometimes criticized for the interpretations they offered, were still considered to be foundations of the historiography. The most important among these were Holden Furber’s John Company at Work (1948), Christopher Bayly’s Indian Society and the Making of the British

66 Indeed, the Company’s archives at the British Library in London alone comprise more than 150,000 official volumes and unofficial manuscripts.
Empire (1990), B.B. Misra’s The Central Administration of the East India Company, 1773-1834 (1959), P. J. Marshall’s Bengal: The British Bridgehead (1987), Huw Bowen’s The Business of Empire (2006) and Revenue and Reform (1991), Lucy Sutherland’s The East India Company in Eighteenth Century Politics (1952), and Cyril Philips’ The East India Company, 1784-1834 (1961). Combined with historiographical essays providing perspectives from both the discipline’s left, like Ghosh’s “Another Set of Imperial Turns?” (2012), and center-right, like Stern’s “History and Historiography of the East India Company” (2009), these materials provided the core survey of contemporary positions historians took as they examined the Company and its history as well as a basic narrative of relevant events to pursue in greater depth.

Beginning with a survey of contemporary secondary historical works also led me to a series of key older secondary sources which proved invaluable. These sources, which were generally compiled by antiquarians with direct connections to the Company and its administration, often reproduced critical newspaper reports, correspondence, and other documents that added depth and context to the events of interest. These included works like Penny’s Ft. St. George, Madras (1900), Love’s Vestiges of Old Madras (1988), Ross’ compilation of Cornwallis’ correspondence, and the Stracheys’ work Keigwin’s Rebellion for Bombay (1916).

From all of these secondary works, as a next step in gathering information about the episodes of administrative controversy at the heart of this dissertation, I compiled a list of published primary materials dealing with the key figures and episodes of interest. For some (like Rickards’ ejection from Bombay, for example), published primary materials were scanty, while other episodes (such as Pigot’s overthrow and death in Madras and Hastings’ tenure in Bengal) were subject to the obsessive, if salacious, gaze of the British public. These documents often provided key statements of officials’ positions as they tried to appeal to the British public. (For example, Rickards’ Speeches were a public performance of another public performance—a record of his Parliamentary speeches on Company issues published as polemics of a broader reading audience.) From these sources, I selected those composed by direct parties to administrative struggle in India for careful scrutiny.

Finally, where coverage by secondary and published primary works proved insufficient, I also conducted archival research. This was primarily done at the British Library’s Asia, Pacific and Africa collection (which houses the East India Company’s massive archive), the United Kingdom’s National Archives (which house colonial office records dealing with the Company’s foreign policy, Lord Cornwallis’ correspondence, as well as miscellaneous papers relating to the Bombay presidency), and the Maharashtra state archives in Mumbai (which contain fragments of the Bombay Presidency archives). Together, these archival sources allowed me at once to check the secondary and published primary materials I used for elisions and gaps while also providing extra detail and context for episodes that were comparatively neglected. (For example, I used Maharashtra state archival materials to better understand the orientation of the Malabar commission and the East India Company’s archives to understand John Macpherson’s term as Governor-General pro tem in Bengal.)
Given this daunting variety and volume of materials, my core strategy was to compose analytical sub-case studies between the different Presidencies within the Company for comparison. Thus I sought to understand the organizational conditions and administrators’ self-presentations prior to, during, and following the Company’s territorialization in the second half of the 18th century. Moreover, I sought to assemble the different kinds of evidence at hand—often different for the different people and Presidencies I was comparing—into broader case-histories for each of the Company’s presidencies, as well as for elite self-presentations in 18th Century Britain. Doing this allowed me, first, to incorporate different kinds of evidence—from diaries and memoirs to official reports and pamphlets—while sustaining a larger comparison among different parts of the Company’s administration. Second, I also used this analytic approach to try to balance a concern for the the Company considered as a single case, as well as the substantial variations present in its subsidiary administrative units.
Appendix B: Maps

Map 1: British Expansion in North India, 1750-1860 (from Bayly 1990:52).
Appendix C: Diagrams

Figure 1: Overview of Argument
Figure 2: Schemas Into Resources

(1) Appeals from corruption scandals

(2) Abstract moral justifications as resources

Metropole

Colonial Administration

Physical and Social Distance
Figure 3: Before and After the Seven Years War

England

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>London &quot;Public&quot;</th>
<th>(Failed Appeals)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parliament</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crown</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EIC Court of Directors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EIC Court of Proprietors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| (Sphere of Local Knowledge of India) |

India

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bombay</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Madras</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bengal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Before

Seven Years War

After

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>London &quot;Public&quot; and Parliamentary Committees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Crown</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parliament (Board of Control)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EIC Court of Directors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EIC Court of Proprietors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>&quot;The Economy&quot;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bombay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Society&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madras</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;The State&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bengal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Robert Rickards ejected from Bombay council in 1815
Nawab of Arcot's Debts Scandal in 1770s
Ejection of William Bull and Impeachment of Warren Hastings