From Reflection to Refraction: State Administration in British India, circa 1770–1855

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Most scholars think state administrations vary because rulers attempt to maximize resource extraction given pressure from interstate competition and as constrained by the social structure of the societies they govern. This perspective cannot account for variations in British colonial tax administration in India, circa 1770 to 1855. The British organized land revenue collection and administration as a whole through two different schemes. Both systems initially adopted a rhetoric of revenue maximization, but neither was decisively better matched to Indian social structure. Instead, administrators interpreted a seemingly opaque Indian society by understanding themselves as fundamentally similar to or different from Indians.

INTRODUCTION

Why do states develop different forms of administration? In the case of taxation, most scholars answer that administrations vary because rulers maximize revenue while bargaining with state officials and subjects paying taxes (Levi 1981, 1988). Administrative forms therefore differ because rulers attempt to extract resources from different kinds of societies (Ardant

1 I benefited from comments by Ann Swidler, Dylan Riley, Neil Fligstein, John Lie, James Vernon, Marion Fourcade, Heather Haveman, George Steinmetz, Philip Gorski, Barry Eidlin, Damon Mayrl, Ben Moodie, Caroline Shaw, Jo Guldi, Desmond Fitzgibbon, Kristen Gray, Sarah Quinn, Simone Polillo, Malik Martin, Basak Kus, Samuel Nelson, Xiaohong Xu, Ryan Calder, Andy Junker, Laura Mangels and the AJS reviewers. I presented this research at Northwestern University’s Thunder of History conference in 2007; Berkeley’s Center for Culture, Organizations, and Politics in 2007; and the Social Science History Association meeting in Miami in 2008. Direct correspondence to Nicholas Hoover Wilson, Department of Sociology, University of California, Berkeley, California 94720. E-mail: nwilson@berkeley.edu

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1975; Tilly 1990, p. 102). Especially given the pressure of expensive interstate war (Anderson 1974, pp. 51–53; Tilly 1985; Mann 1986, pp. 483–90; O’Brien 1988; Kiser and Linton 2001), this argument assumes that administrative forms reflect the most efficient fit with the social structures they govern (Kiser and Schneider 1994; Boone 2003). This assumption is inappropriate, however, in the context of colonial state-building (Adams 1996; Go 2000, 2008; Steinmetz 2007, 2008). Instead, administrators’ ideas about the societies they govern refract the choices they make (Comaroff 1989), guiding how they collect revenue and organize the apparatus of the state itself (Mitchell 1991; Migdal 2001).

An analysis of early British colonialism in India illustrates the utility of this theoretical approach. 2 Perplexed by a seemingly opaque Indian social structure (Travers 2004, p. 525; Marshall 2005, p. 143; Wilson 2008), British officials developed two systems of land revenue administration at the turn of the 19th century. The ryotwari system, developed in Madras and advocated by an administrative faction led by Thomas Munro, assumed that Indians were essentially different from the British and extracted revenue from individual cultivators, called ryots (Stein 1989). The zemindari settlement, developed in Bengal by Philip Francis and advocated by Charles Cornwallis, settled with large landholders called zemindars and presumed that Indians were fundamentally similar to the British (Guha 1963). In addition to having different points of contact with Indian society, the two systems implied alternative internal organizations of British administration. Moreover, competition between them was resolved by factional politics within the administration instead of either system’s effectiveness at extracting revenues.

Current explanations for state administrative variation assume a reflection model of administrative development. I construct and compare a refraction model of state administrative variation, building from a state autonomy perspective (Skocpol 1985a) and cultural critiques of the reflection perspective (Gorski 2003; Adams 2005a). The refraction model emphasizes how state officials’ images of the societies they govern anchor alternative forms of administration during periods of uncertainty and administrative competition (Meyer and Rowan 1977; Swidler 1986). After introducing the general context of early British colonialism, I examine the ryotwari and zemindari systems in more detail, analyze competition between the two systems within the same administrative district and across the Madras presidency, and discuss endemic disagreement about

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2 India was never a settler colony but was subject to more or less direct British sovereignty beginning in 1765. It would thus normally be referred to as an “empire” (Doyle 1986, p. 19). However, historians usually refer to British rule before 1858 as “colonial” to distinguish it from later direct control by the British crown.
the nature of Indian social structure within British colonialism between the 1770s and 1850s.

FROM REFLECTION TO REFRACTION

Until the 19th century, taxation represented the vast bulk of state activity (Braun 1975, p. 245; Mann 1986, pp. 483–90; Tilly 1990, p. 96). How states organized revenue collection guided state growth into other areas of social life (Schumpeter 1991, p. 107) and affected economic organization, the likelihood of rebellion and revolution, and even demographic processes (Campbell 1993, pp. 175–80). Taxation also shows the state’s connection with society and power relative to it (E. Lieberman 2002), thus revealing “[the state’s] skeleton . . . stripped of all misleading ideologies” (Rudolf Goldscheid, quoted in Schumpeter 1991, p. 100).

Why did states end up with different forms of taxation (Ardant 1975; Tilly 1990, p. 88; E. Lieberman 2003, p. 46) and administration more generally? Two lines of explanation—the international-relations and predatory-state approaches—emphasize competition among states (e.g., Tilly 1990) and domestic bargaining between rulers and their populations (e.g., Levi 1981, 1988). In so doing, however, they rely on the reflection model, assuming that administrative forms reflect structural constraint (Katznelson 2003). A third line of research, meanwhile, emphasizes rulers’ cultural beliefs about administrative organization (Gorski 2003; Adams 2005a, 2005b). Modifying the cultural approach, I specify a refraction model of administrative development and compare its assumptions, mechanisms, and expectations with the reflection model. The refraction model recognizes the importance of actors’ interpretations of the structures they encounter and emphasizes how officials articulate different images of society while struggling with one another.

Reflection

The international-relations perspective concentrates on one-half of the state’s Janus-face (Skocpol 1979, p. 32)—its gaze “outward” toward other states. The costs of war consequently drive administrative development. Stretching back to Hintze (1975), Weber (1946b, esp. pp. 80–85), and Schumpeter (1991), this view conceives of states as “quintessential protection rackets with the advantage of legitimacy” (Tilly 1985, p. 169; see also Trimberger 1976; Reuschemeyer and Evans 1985; Mann 1994, pp. 339–46; Evans 1995). States subjugate internal competitors, promising their populations protection from other states in exchange for resources to do so. Beginning in the 15th century, expensive and intense war drove
European states to develop new methods of extraction and organization. These methods were mediated by two processes: the distribution of economic exchange and class relations in a state’s territory (Tilly 1990, pp. 49, 130–37) and rulers’ capital-intensive, coercion-intensive, and capital-coercive bargaining strategies with local elites (Tilly 1990, pp. 98–99). Thus, as “war made states, and vice versa . . . [and] through struggle, negotiation, and sustained interaction with the [domestic] holders of essential resources, states came to reflect the class structures of their subject populations” (Tilly 1990, p. 102).

The overall importance of war as a driving force for state administrative development in Europe is well supported (Downing 1992; Ertman 1997), but the perspective has also been applied to contemporary and historical state administrative development elsewhere. At the level of strength relative to the societies they govern, the absence or poor timing of war coupled with the prevention of territorial change by the international community resulted in weak states in Latin America (Centeno 2002, esp. pp. 15–17, 165–66) and Africa (Herbst 2000, esp. pp. 112–26). At the level of state administrative variation, scholars have modified Tilly’s reasoning but continue to argue that states’ administrative structures reflect their domestic societies. For example, Barnett argues that Israeli and Egyptian rulers tried “to rearrange the state-society compact” to create a more favorable balance between international and domestic constraints on their war preparation strategies, but they still did so by “striking a bargain with societal actors for access to . . . resources” (1992, pp. 32, 256). And while Hui explains the divergent outcomes of the “warring states” period in China and early modern Europe via an endogenous “dynamic theory” of international relations that emphasizes an “interactive view of agency” (Hui 2005, p. 19), she still emphasizes how structural circumstances conditioned each system’s emergence. In the last analysis, the warring states evolved into the Qin empire, and early modern Europe became a system of powerful national states because “early modern Europe was relatively wealthy as a result of the expansion of international trade and an influx of bullion [from the Americas]” while “in ancient China, international trade . . . began to expand only after the onset of [state] system formation” (Hui 2005, p. 51). Thus, system-wide structural

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4 Anderson (1986, p. 11) similarly argues that different forms of state administration caused differences in Tunisian and Libyan “social structure that [provide] the framework for political organization.” However, her argument is not an explanation of state administrative variation itself, since it is attributed to the legacies of colonial administration, the sources of which lie outside her model (1986, p. 9).
differences in rulers’ bargaining positions resulted in divergent outcomes. Hui transposes Tilly’s analysis onto state systems as a whole.

Concentrating on the second half of the state’s Janus-face—its view inward toward its population—the predatory-state perspective complements an international-relations focus on war. Motivated by fiscal crisis, states are “predatory,” meaning that “rulers . . . always try to . . . maximize state revenues” (Levi 1988, p. 10). Rulers are constrained, however, by their relative bargaining power, discount rates, and the transaction costs of a particular way of organizing revenue collection (Levi 1988, pp. 17–33). Thus, “significant differences in state policies will primarily reflect differences in constraints on the rulers” (Levi 1988, p. 14).

A key line of research expands the predatory state model beyond tax policy, using it to explain administrative variation more broadly (Kiser and Schneider 1994; Kiser and Cai 2003; Kiser and Baer 2005). By this argument, rulers construct nonbureaucratic administrative arrangements because they are the most efficient given the structural conditions they face: rulers of small states can easily monitor their officials and are less likely to develop fixed administrative rules; if administrative tasks are simple, rulers are unlikely to recruit officials on merit; and when rulers can easily police their staffs, officials will likely be paid a regular salary (Kiser and Schneider 1994, p. 192). Administrative variations, moreover, need not occur only between states; the predatory-state model can explain subnational differences in organization so long as regional conditions vary (Boone 2003, esp. pp. 9–10). Boone also notes that the general mechanism underlying the predatory-state model—the proposition that “state-building strategies differ because rulers face different challenges and opportunities” (2003, pp. 9–10)—represents the “basic logic” of Barrington Moore’s (1993, pp. 430–32), Robert Brenner’s (Aston and Philpin 1987), and Perry Anderson’s (1974, p. 51) work.

Although emphasizing different causal aspects of the process, the international-relations and predatory-state perspectives on administrative variation share a common assumption: that state administrations reflect

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5 “Relative bargaining power” describes how many politically relevant resources rulers control, “transaction costs” refer to how “expensive” it is to implement and enforce a particular tax policy in terms of both measuring resources for collecting and the actual process of collecting and mobilizing them, and “discount rates” reflect how far into the future the effects of the policy are projected.

6 Structural constraints on rulers come from the socioeconomic structure of a society, the international context in which the state is embedded, and a state’s form of government at any given time (Levi 1988, pp. 33–38).

7 For a broader and more complicated “general model” of the bureaucratization of states with the same logic and type of explanation, see Kiser and Baer’s fig. 1 (2005, p. 231).
the constraints posed by the social orders they govern given developmental pressure from the international community. This reflection model, “the familiar combination of structural constraint and instrumental action” (Clemens 2005, p. 502), is based on two linked propositions. First, structures, whether the distribution of economic resources, social class, or even value commitments (Kiser and Baer 2005, pp. 235–38), are material objects (Eley 1996, p. 194). Second, and consequently, structures exist independently of actors’ interpretations and indeed impose demands and constraints on them (Katznelson 2003). Some versions of the reflection model argue that actors’ structural locations determine their interpretations of the world around them (Katznelson 2003, p. 280), while others contend that structures only constrain actors interpretations by imposing transaction costs (North 1981, pp. 26–27; Levi 1988, pp. 28–29). But both dynamics marginalize interpretation, reducing its variation to the by-product of actors accommodating structural change.

Cultural Critique

While the reflection model may remain the crucial “baseline model” from which “all examinations of politics should start” (see Adams 1999, p. 104; Hopcroft 2001, p. 160), scholars emphasizing cultural influences have questioned it. One critique examines its structural assumptions. According to Lieberman’s analysis (2003) of tax policy development, Brazil and South Africa had radically different levels of success organizing tax administration and collecting revenues partly because of their different “national political communities.” These communities, representing different state recognitions of “pre-existing racial and regional cleavages” and institutionalized during each country’s constitutional convention, “set in motion path-dependent processes of state development [in which] certain identities, including racial, religious, ethnic, or regional identities, are more likely to become politically salient than others” (E. Lieberman 2003, p. 14). Thus, collective social interpretations influenced the institutionalization of structures that in turn constrained action. Moreover, state structures stimulated the mobilization of particular identities in political struggle (Clemens and Cook 1999, pp. 454–55).

While Lieberman questions the structural dimension of the reflection model, others have examined rulers’ strategies of action. These scholars argue that rulers do not select among a universal set of administrative arrangements limited only by structural constraints (Gorski 1995, 2005, p. 272; E. Lieberman 2003, pp. 23–25). Instead, rulers choose state administrative arrangements because of the cultural images of appropriate social and administrative behavior and concomitant practices they share with their subjects. The sources of these images and practices range from
the religious dictates of Calvinism (Gorski 1995, 2003, 2005) to elite patrimonial family networks (Adams 1999, 2005a, 2005b), but in both cases rulers consciously or unconsciously transpose them onto state administration. Thus, in the case of early modern Europe, “there were two preconditions for successful bureaucratic revolutions: (1) an ascetic Protestant monarch of severe habit and mind, who regards kingship as an office rather than a patrimony and views the state administration in the same way; and (2) a popular, precisionist movement that opposes ‘courtly decadence’ and upper-class oligarchy as sinful and unjust” (Gorski 2005, p. 287). And for the “familial state” in the Netherlands, gendered images of family life were crucial political resources and organizational structures, since “politically secured private accumulation promoted a man’s honor, his family, and his hopeful line of descent; [and] conversely, the reputation of his lineage qualified him to occupy lucrative state positions and to pass them along to his sons, nephews, and grandsons” (Adams 2005a, p. 29).

Cultural critiques of the reflection model thus make two points. First, socially constructed structural constraints constitute the groups that subsequently bargain with the state. Second, rulers’ cultural conceptions and practices shape their views of appropriate state administration. These interventions take important steps toward a robust model of state administrative variation, but both need modification. Neither Gorski nor Adams seriously considers the existence of administrative alternatives within states, while Lieberman confines internal variation to constitutional conventions. Moreover, Gorski and Adams focus on rulers’ and administrators’ images of appropriate administration, to the neglect of their images of the societies they govern. A refraction model of state administration addresses both of these oversights.

Refraction
This section presents a model of how administrators refract the societies they govern using multiple and potentially conflicting frameworks. Like lenses, these frameworks draw different aspects of complex societies into focus, and under certain conditions anchor explicit worldviews that situate administrators and subjects in meaningful relations with one another. Each framework, worldview, and resulting organizational pattern thus reveals only a limited aspect of the complex social relations states seek to govern and stimulates variable administrative arrangements.

The refraction model’s basic proposition is that action stems from ac-

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8 Adams does not see patrimonial rule as the sole cause of state administrative organization, instead referring to it as “but one thread, although an important and analytically repressed one” (2005a, p. 36).
tors’ interpretation of the world around them, including other people’s behavior (Geertz 1973b, p. 5; Weber 1978, 1:4). This understanding of action recognizes structures as durable patterns of behavior among actors, rather than material, external facts unaffected by the concepts used to understand them (Sewell 1992). As such, the refraction model shares substantive terrain with the reflection model but derives divergent mechanisms and expectations for administrative variation (Adams, Clemens, and Orloff 2005, pp. 20–21).

To begin with, state administrators’ potential autonomy from the dominant socioeconomic classes in society has a different significance for the refraction model than for the reflection model (Skocpol 1985a, pp. 9–15). For the reflection model, state autonomy means that states are endowed with interests contrary to society’s, such as predatory demand for revenue (Levi 1981; Tilly 1985). By contrast, state autonomy is important for the refraction model because it is difficult for administrators to gain information about society (Reuschemeyer and Evans 1985, p. 53; Mitchell 1991, esp. pp. 12–28; 1998). This struggle for information is important because it is a central feature of colonial rule (Said 1979; Steinmetz 2007, p. 48; 2008) and characterizes long phases of European state formation itself (E. Weber 1976). Consider, as an example, a French centralizing ruler’s view of society while trying to standardize measurement: “The king’s ministers were confronted . . . with a patchwork of local measurement codes, each of which had to be cracked. It was as if each district spoke its own dialect, one that was unintelligible to outsiders and at the same time liable to change without notice. Either the state risked making large and potentially damaging miscalculations about local conditions, or it relied heavily on the advice of local trackers—the nobles and clergy in the Crown’s confidence—who, in turn, were not slow to take full advantage of their power” (Scott 1998, p. 29).

The refraction model’s heart is the way administrators abstract complex, opaque, and uncertain local circumstances into what Scott calls a “standard grid” (Scott 1998, p. 2). This grid focuses on narrow aspects of social relations—the amount of grain produced in a rural village, for example—while neglecting other dimensions of social life (Scott 1998, p. 13). The state’s abstracting frameworks are powerful because they are easily wielded by outsiders (Scott 1998, p. 13), function as codifiable and calculable rules (Weber 1946a, pp. 214–16; Bourdieu 1990, pp. 83–84), and enable state intervention into social relations (Scott 1998, p. 47). So

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9 See also the discussion below about the specific dynamic of the colonial state. Steinmetz insists on the specificity of the colonial state (2007, p. 36), but as he notes, the distinction between colonial and noncolonial political processes is less useful in the premodern period (2007, p. 36 n. 122).
in the case of “the heroic simplification of individual freehold tenure” (Scott 1998, p. 36), state abstraction “not only radically abridged the practices that the system described but at the same time transformed those practices to align more closely with [the state’s] shorthand, schematic reading” (Scott 1998, p. 33).

Scott emphasizes how state administrators abstract local circumstances and consequently refashion social relations. This process must be substantively and analytically clarified, however, to be integrated into the refraction model. Substantively, the refraction model seeks to account for variation in state administrations, so it regards the state as an aggregate of “the practices of a heap of loosely connected parts or fragments, frequently with ill-defined boundaries between them and other groupings inside and outside the official state borders and often promoting conflicting sets of rules with one another and with ‘official’ Law” (Migdal 2001, p. 22; also see Mitchell 1999). Rather than being an assumed point of departure, the state’s unity as an actor and policy coherence thus results from struggle among officials (Clemens 2005, pp. 496–98). Moreover, during their struggle, state officials use multiple and potentially conflicting lenses to interpret society (Skocpol 1985b, pp. 92–94; R. Lieberman 2002, pp. 702–4), even when claiming that each is objective (Porter 1995, pp. 3–8).

Analytically, instead of viewing administrators’ ways of abstracting society as quasi-universal characteristics of the modern state, the refraction model understands them as social institutions, or sets of ideas used to stabilize “murky worlds where it is never clear which actions will have which consequences” (Fligstein 1996, p. 659). All of these ideas make claims about what society is like, but they come in different forms and influence administrative variation in different ways. Relatively unconscious assumptions about what the world is and how it works can take on a “rule-like status in social thought and action” (Meyer and Rowan 1977, p. 341; see also Thelen 2003, pp. 216–17) and imply organizational forms through their conformity to widely held social beliefs (Meyer and Rowan 1977, p. 346; Dobbin 1994). Or, relatively explicit and coherent worldviews actively constructed by actors may provide direct prescriptions about the best organizational forms for a given situation (Chandler 1962, p. 13; Swidler 1986, pp. 278–80; Campbell 1998, pp. 386–89).

When two conditions obtain, administrators are more likely to articulate their implicit frameworks for understanding society as explicit worldviews. First, as discussed above, administrators must perceive society to be uncertain and opaque (Bourdieu 1990, p. 83; Sewell 2005, pp. 228–32). But second, and crucially, administrative factions must present alternative understandings of the same society (Berger and Luckmann 1966, p. 124). When forced to defend their own positions and attack competing
formulations of society (R. Lieberman 2002, p. 704), administrators, like any other competing social group (e.g., Bourdieu 1977, pp. 167–69; Anderson 1992, p. 57), articulate ideological stances, locating themselves and their subjects in meaningful social worlds and binding frameworks, practices, and justifications together into “a unified answer to problems of social action” (see also Geertz 1973a, pp. 18–20; Swidler 1986, p. 279). The triumph of one of these articulated ideologies meant to provide an organizational framework for state administration over others results from the political triumph of one faction over its competitors (Fligstein 1996, p. 664); in Berger and Luckmann’s pungent dictum: “He who has the bigger stick has the better chance of imposing his definitions of reality” (1966, p. 109; see also Katznelson 2003, pp. 282–83).

The substantive content of administrators’ views of society must still be specified to complete the refraction model. I draw cases from the history of British colonialism in India and therefore engage with the logic of the colonial state (Steinmetz 2008, pp. 591–93). The colonial state is characterized by the “rule of colonial difference” (Chatterjee 1993, p. 17), meaning that it “reproduces differentiation and inequality among people it incorporates” (Cooper 2005, p. 27). This foundational tension in turn engenders three ways administrators could grapple with the difference of colonized societies: they could view colonized peoples as similar to the colonizers, as different from the colonizers, or as temporarily inferior but teachable via “a suitable process of training and education” (Chatterjee 1993, p. 18). Moreover, recent work in historical sociology has linked the mobilization of and contest over these views of similarity and difference to different sets of “native policy” or management regimes of colonial subjects (e.g., Comaroff 1989; Go 2000, 2004, 2008; Goh 2007a, 2007b; Steinmetz 2007, 2008).

In sum, the refraction model argues that during colonial rule, administrators (1) are autonomous from the societies they govern and (2) view society as uncertain and opaque, even though they may claim otherwise. They rule by (3) interpreting colonial society in terms of conceptualizations of their subjects’ similarity or difference. (4) In periods of intra-administrative conflict, officials (5) articulate these conceptualizations into explicit worldviews relating themselves to their subjects through (6) different organizational forms.

Both the reflection and refraction models build from understandings of human agency to an interpretation of state autonomy and an explanation for state administrative variation, but their substantive content differs. The reflection model views agency as a structural constraint on instrumental actors and structures as material objects. The refraction perspective, meanwhile, emphasizes actors’ interpretative encounters with society and imagines structures as shared patterns of meaningful action.
The models’ dynamics also contrast. The reflection model assumes a process of struggle between a state’s ruler and his staff, or between a state as a whole and society, with each maximizing its respective interests to the limits imposed by structural constraints. The refraction model, meanwhile, sees struggle in the state’s efforts to comprehend the society it governs and among administrators over the most appropriate view of society. These contrasting assumptions and dynamics result in different explanations for administrative variation. The reflection hypothesis emphasizes the bargaining process through which state administrative forms are drawn into alignment with society’s socioeconomic structures. But in the refraction model, variation results from articulated worldviews that officials construct during intra-administrative conflict and that serve as definitions of what society is and of appropriate administrative arrangements.

The reflection and refraction models offer divergent explanations for why state administrations vary, yet they can be empirically congruent. Specifically, the refraction and reflection models should overlap when there is widespread administrative consensus about the nature of social structure. When a single view has been successfully institutionalized, the intra-administrative conflicts are much less likely, and, accordingly, conflicts within the state administration and between the state and the society it seeks to govern will likely conform to the reflection model’s bargaining process. In other words, when state officials agree about what society is, reflection is a plausible explanation for state administrative variation.

STUDYING BRITISH COLONIALISM IN INDIA: CASE SELECTION AND METHOD

While the reflection and refraction models are potentially empirically congruent, the analysis of British Colonial India below highlights an empirical circumstance where this is not so. This negative case methodology aims to extend the substantive content of explanations for state administrative variation by plunging into a case where orthodox explanations—in this case, the reflection model—prove insufficient (Emigh 1997; Riley 2003). To establish this insufficiency, I compare the empirical explanations of both the reflection and refraction models in light of evidence drawn from archival and published records of British colonialism in India. The goal of this comparison is to show that the explanation offered by the reflection model is insufficient—that “given available evidence and competing explanations” (Gorski 2004, pp. 20–21), the refraction model better explains state administrative variation in India, at least given British administrators’ uncertainty about the nature of colonial society. Thus, the goal is...
not to falsify the reflection model (Popper 2002) but, rather, to productively extend it (Lakatos 1970, pp. 140–54).

What kind of evidence best serves such an evaluation? If the reflection model is most appropriate, British officials should have adapted administrative forms as they bargained with local populations to maximize revenue extraction. Consequently the amount of revenue collected should have been sensitive to the administrative forms that officials undertook. By contrast, if the refraction model is superior, colonial administrators should have initially perceived Indian social structure as inscrutable and opaque and would have developed alternative systems of revenue extraction around conceptions of Indian similarity and difference. These systems should have featured both different interactions with colonized society and organizations of state administration. Moreover, conflict between the systems should have taken place over alternative visions of the nature of colonial society. Finally, neither system should have been demonstrably better at extracting resources.

In addition to using British colonialism in India as a single negative case and comparing the relative utility of the reflection and refraction models for explaining state administrative variation there, the analysis also decomposes British colonialism in India into its subsidiary cases of administrative conflict. I select the major episodes of administrative conflict at the level of an individual revenue district and the Bengal and Madras presidencies over nearly 70 years of British rule. This strategy has two purposes. First, it buttresses the relative explanatory utility of the refraction model, showing that administrators’ uncertainty about social structure in particular districts was not caused by exceptional social structures in the particular districts. Second, when each episode is considered as a case of political struggle among administrative factions with divergent interpretations of the same social structures, evidence from multiple levels of analysis and across time and space in British India serves to expose the process of refraction in sharp relief (Vaughan 1991, pp. 176–77; Steinmetz 2004, p. 393; 2005, pp. 149–53).

But for all its analytic utility for the reflection and refraction models, British colonialism in India is also empirically important. Grappling with what it meant to govern “well” amid the multitude of Indian social structures and political arrangements (Stokes 1959, pp. xi–xii; Bowen 1991, 1998), British officials made decisions with lasting consequences between the 1780s and 1850s. Property relations derived from British land revenue systems underwent serious reform only in the 1940s (Guha 1963; Marshall 1987, p. 122), and both the ryotwari and zemindari systems still account for inequality in Indian society today (Banerjee and Iyer 2005). Moreover, since British India constituted one beginning of the “second” British Empire to replace the lost American colonies (Harlow 1952, chaps. 5–6;
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Marshall 2005), British administrative forms developed in India spread throughout the rest of the empire (Bayly 1989, p. 120; Metcalf 2007, pp. 5–6) and back to England itself (Osborne 1994, pp. 293–301).

EARLY BRITISH RULE IN INDIA: THE RYOTWARI AND ZEMINDARI SYSTEMS

Though the English East India Company (EIC) had been present in India since the 17th century, in 1765 it became a de facto territorial power in Bengal after it gained the diwani, or right to collect taxes, from the Mughal emperor (Marshall 1987). Against the backdrop of geopolitical competition with France in the Seven Years’ War (1754–63), it gained a further foothold in both eastern and southern India (Marshall 1998, 2005, chaps. 4, 7, 8). Administration of Indian territories was split among “presidencies” based in Bengal, Bombay, and Madras, each headed by a governor. The presidencies were nominally integrated under the governor-general in Bengal after 1773 but in practice exercised considerable autonomy in terms of their internal organization and policy approaches (e.g., Marshall 2005, pp. 129–36).

The EIC’s territorial power originally promised security from French ambitions in India and a financial windfall for Company shareholders and the British state, but by the 1770s political and financial scandals within the Company threatened the stability of the domestic British credit market and political scene (Philips 1961, pp. 23–35; Bowen 2006, pp. 29–37). Combined with fears of cultural and political corruption from returning nabobs (Lawson and Phillips 1984), these financial scandals and suspicions of abusive administration in India led to parliamentary investigations, the impeachment of Warren Hastings, the first governor-general, and statutory reforms of the Company’s structure.¹⁰

After a failed attempt to pass a similar bill in parliament brought the downfall of the Fox-North Coalition in 1783, Pitt’s India Act in 1784 accomplished major reform. The act substantially reformed the domestic relationship of the Company to the British state by creating a government-appointed Board of Control to oversee Indian affairs and appoint senior staff (Philips 1961, p. 33). The new Board of Control sought changes in the Company’s Indian administration but left the substance of reform in the hands of officials on the ground. As an 1829 minute put it, “in the ordinary course of Indian administration much must always be left to the

¹⁰ The term “nabob” is an anglicized version of the Urdu nawab, or ruler. It took on a pejorative connotation to describe returning Anglo Company servants who had been “corrupted” by their wealth gained in India.
discretion of the local governments [i.e., British officials in India]” (quoted in Philips 1961, p. 22).

In undertaking reform, Company officials moved cautiously. This was partly because their grasp of Indian society was uncertain. This point should not be overstated; the British had long had contact with India and even had limited territorial control since establishing factories there in the 17th century.11 Yet, the EIC’s Madras administration initially refused to take over direct administration of extraction from the Nawab of Arcot, claiming to have “neither the knowledge nor the experience to manage large revenues” (Marshall, 2005, p. 143). And while Robert Clive seemed confident in guaranteeing revenues from Bengal, he left fiscal administration in the hands of the Mughal official Muhammad Reza Khan under a system of “double government” for the first seven years of the diwani (Marshall 1987, pp. 118–19). Indeed, even when the British actually took control over the revenue system, they expressed confidence that “[Indian government’s] complexity was more apparent than real” (Marshall 1993, p. 106) but “presented wildly diverging images of rural Bengal, and the appropriate means of taxing the country, which reflected enduring splits within the Company government” (Travers 2004, p. 525).

Thus, consistent with the expectations of the refraction perspective, administrative development in India was shaped after 1784 by administrators’ confrontation with their own “anxieties of distance” (Wilson 2007, 2008) or how to best tax and govern a poorly understood agrarian economy. London demanded that the Company extract as much revenue as it could and discipline “corrupt” officials but provided no specifics. Against this backdrop, administrators in India developed two main ways of extracting land revenue: the zemindari system, developed primarily in Bengal, and the ryotwari system, developed mainly in Madras. Each system was founded on an alternative view of Indians’ similarity or difference and implied a very different organization of administration.

“To Disregard All Conditions of Persons”: The Zemindari Settlement in Bengal

The zemindari system was so termed because it collected revenue from zemindars, or local magnates thought to be large landholders.12 Zemindars

11 Though each of the presidencies’ early governments may have constituted independent polities (Stern 2007, 2008), they became responsible for large-scale extraction of territorial revenues with only the diwani.

12 The zemindars actually were semifeudal actors who had complicated reciprocal economic, social, and military obligations to both their subordinates and superordinates under Mughal rule (Habib 1963, pp. 136–89; McLane 2002, pp. 8–15).
were imagined as the legal holders of individuated, alienable property rights to the land (Marshall 1987, pp. 117–27), and the ryots, or direct cultivators, were thought of as their legal tenants. The system, also called the Bengal Permanent Settlement, was schematized under Governor-General Charles Cornwallis in 1793. Advocated by two of his aides, Francis Place and Charles Grant, and first imagined by Philip Francis, a Bengal council member in the 1770s, the zemindari system opposed earlier particularistic tax-farming efforts undertaken by Warren Hastings and Clive’s scheme of double government (Guha 1963, p. 16). By the mid 1790s it was the administrative orthodoxy for the whole of India, and similar “permanent settlements” were undertaken in the rapidly growing Madras presidency. “Permanent” in the system’s name referred to officials’ promise, in the hopes of stimulating agricultural production and capital improvements, that the rate of land revenue would be fixed forever.

The Bengal Permanent Settlement was to be administrated by officials organized along nearly ideal-typical Weberian lines (Gerth and Mills 1946, pp. 196–204). Administrators were to be paid a living salary so they would no longer engage in the “country trade” to supplement their salaries and were to take on highly specialized administrative tasks based on good record keeping and strict hierarchy.13 Importantly, the office of district collector, responsible for the actual collection of land revenue from the zemindars, was firmly separated from both the magistrate of the district, who administered civil law, and from the captain of the police.

The collectors of the revenue must not only be divested of the power to deciding upon their own acts, but rendered amenable for them to the courts of judicature; and collect the public dues, subject to a personal prosecution for every exaction exceeding the amount which they are authorized to demand on behalf of the public, and for every deviation from the regulations prescribed for the collection of it. No power will then exist in the country by which the rights vested in the landholders by the regulations can be infringed or the value of landed property affected. (Bengal Civil Code, quoted in Stokes [1959, p. 6])

In other words, civil, military, and fiscal authority were split among different officials under the zemindari settlement.

The zemindari settlement carefully circumscribed administrators’ powers in the name of “the rights vested in the landholders” in an attempt to secure government’s noninterference in its subjects’ lives. This also altered the ethical demands made on the collectors, who were expected to wield authority over native revenue agents, called tehsildars,

13 The country trade was the practice of EIC officials supplementing their salaries with local economic activity. Though this had long been tolerated by the Company’s directors, it was a central element of the scandals that led to the EIC’s reform (Furber 1948; Marshall 1976).
and over the zemindars themselves. This amounted to the expectation that collectors should present an air of detailed local and revenue knowledge. As John Shore, an aide to Cornwallis and his successor as governor-general, described the relationship in 1789:

[The tehsildar] will regulate his conduct by the estimate which he forms of the abilities of the collector under whose authority he is placed; if he knows him to be vigilant, active, and well-informed, he will be cautious, diligent, and honest: if he supposes him to be otherwise, and that he can misbehave with impunity, he will intrigue with under-renters, or abuse his influence, withhold true knowledge, and impose upon his principle misinformation. The plan in its detail, by fixing the rents, removes a grand opportunity of abuse in the tehsildar. (Quoted in Firminger 1983, 2:488)\(^\text{14}\)

Shore only supported some elements of the Permanent Settlement and found this expectation of collectors’ knowledge unrealistic: “The objections which I have gone through, may be reduced in great measure, to the detail of the system, and the difficulty of executing and controlling it. The collector of Tirhoot, with great candour, acknowledged this; and with a diffidence which is highly to his honour, observes, that many evils must inevitably present themselves under the superintendence of men of an ordinary stamp, in the execution of systems adapted to the genius and comprehension of a favoured few” (1789; in Firminger 1983, 2:488)\(^\text{15}\).

The relatively strict, internally differentiated bureaucracy characteristic of the zemindari system was meant to have a minimal reach into Indian society. Based at least partly on Whig principles of minimal government (Stokes 1959, p. 5), the state’s bureaucratic apparatus was to be kept within the narrow confines of fiscal extraction. Beyond the actual collection of taxes, manipulation of the daily lives of the Company’s subjects was to be kept to a minimum: “the introduction of a new order of things, which should have for its foundation, the security of individual property, and the administration of justice, criminal and civil, by rules which were to disregard all conditions of persons, and in their operation, be free of influence or control from the government itself” (\textit{Fifth Report from the Select Committee}, quoted in Stokes 1959, p. 4).

The expectation that government’s role was solely “to disregard all conditions of persons” assumed British institutions like the rule of law,\(^\text{14}\) Firminger was the editor of the report issued by the Select Committee of Parliament concerning administrative policy in 1812. Though edited by advocates of the ryotwari settlement and influenced by Thomas Munro (Stein 1989), this report reviewed the previous Indian administrative practices and reprinted primary documents.\(^\text{15}\) This was the prime disagreement between Shore and Cornwallis. Shore believed that the Permanent Settlement could not be undertaken because the administration—and by extension the EIC—did not understand the country well enough to settle revenues forever.
private property, and minimal government could transform Bengal’s society into a model of Britain. This was because the intellectual foundations of the Permanent Settlement viewed Indians as fundamentally similar to the British. As Henry Pattullo, a British expatriate living in France whom Guha (1963, pp. 42–49) identifies as one intellectual progenitor of the Permanent Settlement, put the point in a 1772 pamphlet published in London,

> The minds of mankind we find are much the same in all countries, and actuated by the same views and desires. Thence, there can be no doubt that the acquisition of property will be as desirable to Asiatics as it is to Europeans. . . . The Company should still further consider, that a people who are debarred the acquisition and enjoyment of property, can never be at best, but a nation of slaves; timid and passive, without vigour, action, and industry, and who must very naturally both think and act, as the peasants in some of the interior provinces of France now do. (Pattullo 1772, p. 8)

Thus, British officials like Place, Cornwallis, and Shore imagined that if only the demands for land revenue could be fixed, then the zemindars would replicate the behavior of English gentry improving the agricultural production of their lands. Moreover, it was hoped that if only a minimal government were instituted, Indian society would become a cheaply governed domain, and if administration could be bureaucratized and itself disciplined by the rule of law, the specter of government despotism would be erased. As Shore wrote of the necessity of the rule of law: “We are not to depend upon the virtues or abilities of the natives only; our reliance must be placed upon the restrictions of our own laws, and upon and undeviating enforcement of them; and the same zeal and abilities that can control the conduct of a farmer, may direct and restrain that of a zemindar, admitting self-interest, in opposition to public good, to have equal operation with regard to both” (1789; in Firminger 1983, 2:481). In essence, then, the zemindari system assumed that Indians were fundamentally similar to the British; all that was required to transform their apparent difference was the transplantation of British legal, administrative, and economic institutions.

Against “This Village Revolution”: The Ryotwari System in Madras

The ryotwari settlement began its development shortly after Cornwallis appointed Alexander Read, assisted by Thomas Munro, to administrate the Baramahal district in Madras over the stern objections of the Madras civilian officials (Stein 1985; 1989, pp. 24–25) in 1792. Although Read and Munro developed the core principles of the ryotwari system together, thanks to Munro’s investigation into “the actual conditions of the people” in Kanara and the Ceded Districts, he came to be seen by the London establishment as the leading proponent of the ryotwari system. Part of
this was because of his perceived expertise about Indian languages, society, and land revenue administration (Beaglehole 1966, p. 101), though he also skillfully manipulated political patronage networks and benefited from his father’s relentless promotion (Stein 1989, pp. 13–15). After the influential *Fifth Report* was published in 1812, Munro returned to Madras as special commissioner to implement the ryotwari settlement in the whole of the presidency.16 During his administrative career, other officials such as Charles Metcalfe and Montstuart Elphinstone joined Munro in support of the ryotwari settlement, thus forming a “Scottish school” of Indian governance (McLaren 2001).

Like advocates of the zemindari system, Munro proposed a form of British administration of the land revenue. But while the Bengal Permanent Settlement attempted to replicate an idealized version of British agrarian social relationships, Munro built the ryotwari system up from a claim to knowledge about Indian political and social institutions. Thus, while advocates of the zemindari system attempted to transform Indian society, Munro set out to preserve extant institutions as he saw them. After claiming painstaking investigation, Munro concluded that the land revenue organization that most closely fit Indian institutions was direct state settlement with the individual cultivator, or ryot. Ryots could choose which fields to cultivate in a given season, so overall tax burdens would vary from year to year. Moreover, the system demanded an enormous and detailed agricultural survey of all landholding under British dominion, including value assessments of each piece of farmland’s agricultural potential.17

While he claimed to preserve his image of Indian practices and institutions, Munro proposed a very different form of administration than the zemindari settlement. He arrived at his alternative arrangement through a conviction that Indians were fundamentally different from the British (Metcalf 1994).18 This meant, first, that directly importing English insti-

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16 The ryotwari settlement became the new orthodoxy in India following the *Fifth Report*, but the zemindari settlement and other permanent settlements like them remained in force where they had already been established. Moreover, as discussed at greater length below, the new support for ryotwari changed the terms of debate between systems founded on presumptions of similarity and difference but did not extinguish it.

17 In practice, of course, such a detailed survey quickly outstripped the capacity of any single collector, and in general the ryotwari system relied in its first years on unreliable shorthand surveys and local records of agricultural production (Le Fanu 1883).

18 Metcalf also argues that British rule was characterized by divergent understandings of officials’ relationship with Indians, but I use the distinction in terms of its organizational consequences, while Metcalf stresses it as a process of ideological self-justification.
tutions would be inappropriate and, second, that a much more direct intervention into the daily lives of Indian subjects was justified:

We suppose our laws are founded on just principles, and that they must therefore have the same beneficial operations [in India] as at home; but we forget that one great first principle, the freedom of the people, from which they derive their influence, does not exist here. Our institutions here, not resting on the same foundation as those of a free country, cannot be made to act in the same way. We cannot make the inanimate corpse perform the functions of a living body; we must, therefore, in making regulations here, think only of their probable effect in this country, not of what such regulations have or might have in England. . . . Though the Rayets frequently complain of illegal exactions, they very seldom resist them; they more commonly submit without complaining, and they often abscond when they have no longer the means of paying them . . . as, therefore, they will not protect themselves by resisting injustice, we must endeavour to protect them by laws, which would be unnecessary in England, or in almost any country not under foreign domination. (Quoted in Gleig 1830–31, p. 379)

Protecting ryots from “illegal exactions” drew the British administration deep into Indian society; indeed, the system was supposed to directly regulate extraction all the way down to the individual ryot:

We erroneously think that all that is necessary for the permanent settlement of a country is, that Government should limit its own demand, and thus it is of no consequence by whom this demand is collected; and that provided the amount be not exceeded, the Rayet is not injured, whether he pay it to the officer of Government, or to a newly-created Zemindar landlord. But nothing can be more unfounded than this opinion, or more mischievous in its operation. . . . Every proprietor or Rayet, great and small, ought to pay his own rent and that of his tenants, when he has any, to the Government officer. If, instead of doing this, some hundreds of proprietary Rayets are made to pay their public rents to a Zemindar, they will soon lose their independence, become his tenants, and probably end by sinking into the class of labourers. (Quoted in Gleig 1830–31, p. 382)

Munro’s disparaging reference to zemindars being “newly created” signaled what he found so dangerous about the zemindari system. To him, it threatened “innovation,” potentially destroying Indian society’s “ancient offices and institutions”:

Such an innovation [as the zemindari settlement represented] would be much more fatal to the old rights of property than conquest by a foreign enemy; for such a conquest, though it overthrew the Government, would leave the people in their former condition. But this internal change, this village revolution, changes every thing, and throws both influence and property into new hands; it deranges the order of society; it depresses one class of men for the sake of raising another; it weakens the respect and authority of ancient offices and institutions, and the local administration conducted by their means is rendered much more difficult. (Quoted in Gleig 1830–31, p. 382)

Paradoxically, then, Munro used preserving Indian institutions in the face
of the “village revolution” threatened by the zemindari system to justify a bold state intervention into the everyday lives of its subjects. Of course, this intervention stepped far beyond the circumscribed role of state under the zemindari system.

The imagined depth of the state’s reach into society was not the only difference between the ryotwari and zemindari systems. The ryotwari system also merged juridical and fiscal authority, reversing the policy under the zemindari settlement. As Charles Metcalfe put it: “Revenue, judicial, and when practicable, military powers also, should be exercised by the same person; union, not division, should be the order of our rule. Confidence [in the Company’s civil servants], not distrust, should be the engine to work with” (Kaye, Papers of Metcalfe, quoted in Stokes 1959, p. 22). Trust in the Company’s civil servants demanded a full-scale embrace of the detailed local knowledge that Shore thought impracticable for the zemindari settlement. Thus, against the “general principles” of the abstract laws of political economy that he thought operated in the zemindari system, Munro argued that administrators under the ryotwari model should be guided by practical experience and detailed local knowledge.

The duties of the collector of a province should be such as to make it imperative on him to know the real state of the country; the amount of the assessment paid by the different classes of the inhabitants, its effects upon them, but especially upon the Rayets, in promoting or discouraging industry, and in rendering them satisfied or discontented with their rules, and to know all the details of internal administration by which the revenue is developed and realized; for it is only by possessing such knowledge that he can understand either what are the actual resources of the country, or the means by which they may be improved, or furnish useful information to Government. (Quoted in Gleig 1830–31, p. 365)

The ryotwari system thus conceived of administrators wielding extraordinary authority, gaining detailed local knowledge, and coordinating directly with central authority to make government more responsive to its subjects’ needs. But the organization of administration in this form had another function; Munro thought it would secure British rule by making British sovereignty more comprehensible to its subjects (quoted in Gleig 1830–31, p. 357).19

19 Henry Le Fanu, later collector in the Baramahal district in Madras and author of the district’s official manual for new colonial administrators, quoted a hagiographical description of Munro’s actions when still an assistant collector that illustrates the expectations of charismatic authority for collectors under ryotwari. The head of the district issues a complicated land revenue regulation regarding ryots’ leases on their land. The other assistant collectors wavered at the ryots’ concerns about the new regulations, but “Munro, however, foreseeing this, had gone through the whole of his division, and explained personally to the people what was the real nature of the charter” (Le Fanu 1883, pp. 237–38).
State Administration in British India

TABLE 1
VARIATIONS IN INDIAN ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Indians Perceived as Similar (Zemindari)</th>
<th>Indians Perceived as Different (Ryotwari)</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>External</td>
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<tr>
<td>Structural</td>
<td>Bureaucratic</td>
<td>Indirect rule</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cultural</td>
<td>Vocational</td>
<td>Rational/legal</td>
</tr>
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Table 1 formalizes the contrasts between the ryotwari and zemindari systems implied in the discussion above. Founded on different conceptualizations of Indian society and Indians as similar to or different from the British, the zemindari and ryotwari systems, respectively, developed different administrative forms. The zemindari system, imagining that Indian society was similar enough to the British that it could be governed by supposedly universal institutions of the rule of law and property, developed a starkly bureaucratic internal organization to discipline its own officials but circumscribed the reach of that system, stopping it at its point of interface with Indian society. The ryotwari system, by contrast, was only semibureaucratic, collapsing distinct responsibilities for civil justice, revenue collection, and even policing into a single official. In the process, it plunged deeply into Indian society. The two systems also differed markedly in how they envisioned officials’ motivating ethic and bond of authority with Indian subjects: under the zemindari system, the rule of law dominated both the disciplining of officials and the consequent trust Indians would have in them; the ryotwari system demanded a skilled, vocational ethic of local knowledge from its administrators that would, it was supposed, lead to a charismatic, paternalist bond with their Indian subjects.

REFLECTION OR REFRACTION? ADMINISTRATIVE COMPETITION IN INDIA

Having established the presence of two substantially different administrative arrangements in India under early British colonialism, we are now in position to evaluate directly the merits of the reflection and refraction perspectives. The reflection hypothesis leads to three concrete expectations about the development of the ryotwari and zemindari systems. First, given the vast difference between the way the two systems operated and extracted revenues from Indian society, we would expect one to be decisively more effective at revenue extraction, given their application to the same
social structure. Second, we would expect the ryotwari system, because of its purported goal of preserving extant Indian institutions, to represent a better “fit” with Indian social structure. And third, since Indian social structure systematically varied across the subcontinental “macro-regions” (Stein 1998, p. 117), the ryotwari and zemindari systems should have been better fitted to their places of origin, Madras and Bengal, respectively.

I evaluate these assertions in turn: first, I examine the sequential institution of the ryotwari and zemindari systems in a single district, the Baramahal, in terms of their effects on revenue and the behavior of Indians. Neither system was better at extraction or reducing “irrational” behavior by cultivators. Second, I more closely examine the ryotwari system’s claims to preserve Indian institutions throughout Madras. In this case, advocates of the two systems produced very different claims about the same social structure and attacked each others’ empirical foundations in a disagreement that stretched from the 1790s until at least 1820. Third, I analyze the predecessors to the zemindari system in Bengal and the aftermath of the ryotwari system’s triumph in Madras. While each system’s implementation represented a decisive moment in Indian agrarian history, neither extinguished the ongoing administrative contention over images of Indian society as similar to or different from the British.

Uncertainty and Competition in the Baramahal

Neither the ryotwari nor the zemindari system directly continued the Mughal forms of administration it inherited. Indeed, both in Bengal and Madras, the British confronted a social landscape in a profound state of transformation caused by war, rapid economic change, social dislocation, and mass migration (Irschick 1994). The increasing costs of war, as they had in Europe, had caused some south Indian regimes like the Sultanate of Mysore to institute centralized measures of revenue collection, some of which the British attempted to continue (Perlin 1985; Stein 1985). Both the ryotwari and zemindari systems, however, broke the intertwined web of economic and political power that characterized earlier Mughal and Hindu regimes. In the case of the zemindari system, this meant instituting a regime of alienable private property (Guha 1963). For the ryotwari settlement, it meant the Company state taking up the mantle of Asiatic despotism as the sole landowner and only legitimate lessor (Dirks 1986; Washbrook 2004).

In this context of Indian society’s social, political, and economic dynamism, British administrators experimented with the ryotwari and zemindari systems. One of the key districts where this happened was the Baramahal (later called Salem) in Madras. The district was ceded to the British by Tipu Sultan of Mysore in 1792, and its 3,500 square miles was
usually staffed by a single Company collector with three Anglo assistants, each of whom maintained further Indian staff (Stein 1989, p. 37). Cornwallis appointed Alexander Read to settle the district and begin to collect land revenue, assisted by Thomas Munro among others. Read was ordered by the Madras Board of Revenue to institute a permanent settlement along the lines of the zemdinari system, but he defied his superiors and developed the ryotwari system between 1792 and 1799 (Mukherjee 1962; Beaglehole 1966, pp. 12–34; Stein 1985, 1989), when both he and Munro were recalled to military service against Tipu Sultan. Once Read and Munro had left the Baramahal, the Madras Board of Revenue, which was still convinced of the zemindari system’s efficacy and upset by Read’s defiance, decided to implement it in the Baramahal between 1802 and 1805. Munro, however, subsequently convinced the Board of Control in London to return to the ryotwari system for the whole of Madras but was only able to reverse policy in the Baramahal once he became governor of the presidency in 1820 (Beaglehole 1966, pp. 102–20).

Thus, the Baramahal experienced four different administrative systems between 1792 and 1820. It had fluctuating lease-based settlements between 1792 and 1794, an early version of the ryotwari system from 1794 to about 1802, the zemindari system from 1802 until 1820, and the ryotwari system thereafter. The systems, however, had little effect on revenue collection. The initial step from the lease-based settlements caused revenues to fall because, as Read and Munro claimed, the early ryotwari settlement allowed cultivators to stop cultivating marginal lands (Beaglehole 1966, p. 30). Thus, revenues fell with the system’s implementation (Mukherjee 1962, p. 13), even though Munro and Read claimed they would eventually recover, thanks to increased production. Moreover, between 1805–6 and 1820–21 revenues fell from £182,348 to £178,295, and, even after the ryotwari settlement was finally implemented in 1820, the land revenues of 1834–35 were still lower than in the last year of the zemindari settlement, at £164,471.20

While neither the ryotwari nor zemindari system collected decisively more revenues than the other, both produced behavior among the Indians that the British perceived as irrational and that, from their perspective, destabilized Indian society. When field assessments—a cornerstone of the ryotwari system—first went into force in the late 1790s, revenues diminished markedly because ryots concentrated farming only on the highest-

20 I aggregated these revenue data from Dykes (1853, p. 421), Mukherjee (1962, pp. 11, 13), and Stein (1989, p. 44).
yield land. The Madras Board of Revenue insisted on implementing the zemindari system because of this decline (Le Fanu 1883, pp. 231–39), but, when it was introduced, it fared no better. The government had difficulty finding buyers for newly formed estates being auctioned, those that were bought quickly fell into arrears, the holdings that survived were split by inheritance laws, and administrators complained that the zemindars “were adventurers who launched into the speculation in hopes of making the most of their estates by squeezing out of the ryots all the money they could” (Le Fanu 1883, pp. 287–307, esp. 304–7). But even when the ryotwari system was reintroduced after 1820, agrarian relations and revenues did not stabilize. Instead, there were more unintended consequences. Under a system called kaul, the British allowed newly cultivated fields to be farmed at reduced tax rates for three seasons to promote increased cultivation. Ryots, however, quickly began to manipulate kaul by ceasing cultivation on prime lands for a season only to resume them at reduced rates the next (Le Fanu 1883, pp. 348, 366–67).

Taken together, evidence from revenue returns and the behavior of the zemindars and ryots suggests the refraction model’s relative explanatory superiority relative to the reflection model. Were either system more compatible with Indian social structure in the Baramahal, land revenue would have risen, or at least stabilized, when it was implemented there. On the contrary, however, both systems produced disruptive behavior by Indians, and neither produced the promised combination of higher revenues and increased agricultural production over the period of dispute between the systems.

Foundations of Knowledge: Ryotwari and Zemindari’s Claims in Madras

What about the ryotwari system’s claims to knowledge of Indian society? It is possible, after all, that the Baramahal had some form of intermediate social structure equally amenable to either system. In this case, the ry-

21 At the time, the ryotwari system allowed ryots to declare which field they would cultivate, and hence which would be taxed, at the beginning of a fasli, or revenue year.

22 Le Fanu’s Salem District Manual followed Dykes’s prototypical Salem: An Indian Collectorate (1853) and accompanied government-mandated manuals for each administration administrative district in Madras during the 1880s. While like the Fifth Report they are highly biased documents, since they generally strongly advocate the ryotwari system, they also reproduce many administrative documents and provide essential administrative histories of each district. Baden-Powell (1892, vol. 3, esp. pp. 3–50) also provides a useful administrative biography of the ryotwari system in Madras.

23 An AJS reviewer drew this possibility to my attention.
The otwari system would be better adapted to the conditions in Madras as a whole because it was defended on the basis of Munro’s extensive research in three different districts: the Baramahal, Kanara, and the Ceded Districts. A case mounted on these grounds, however, dissolves in the face of an examination of the administrative politics in Madras between 1800 and 1820. Proponents of both systems of administration still maintained that Indians were fundamentally similar to or different from themselves, but both shrouded their justifications for each system in Indian precedent.

The official position of the governor of Madras and governor-general of India as late as 1805 was that the Bengal Permanent Settlement was to be imported whole cloth into Madras from Bengal. Defenders of the zemindari system attributed problems in the districts where it had been tried to the precariousness of the leases and not to a fundamental misunderstanding of Indian subjects (Firminger 1983, 3:173). Indeed, the Madras Board of Revenue could repeat the core of the Bengal Permanent Settlement—a commitment to the abstract virtues of disinterested government, investing private property in zemindars, and fostering economic prosperity—in 1799 (Firminger 1983, 3:172). But Munro decisively shifted the grounds of the debate when he convinced William Bentinck, the governor of Madras, and the Board of Control in London, of the virtues of the ryotwari system. Munro was so convincing, in part, because he presented himself as deeply knowledgeable about Indian society and revenue systems, arguing forcefully that the ryotwari arrangement in Madras was a long-standing local tradition (Stein 1989, pp. 137–77). Participants in the struggle between the two systems thereafter had to justify their assertions in terms of some Indian precedent. In so doing, they sparked deep disagreement about the nature of Indian society and revealed, for the purposes of this analysis, the hollowness of Munro’s claims to knowledge of it.

In the face of Munro’s increasingly recognized expertise and advocacy of the ryotwari system, his opponents, many of whom sat on the Madras Board of Revenue, presented three counterarguments. Munro’s opponents in Madras first rejected his claims to the ryotwari system’s historical continuity with Indian practice. And indeed, while Munro and Read asserted in the Baramahal that the ryotwari system closely conformed to Tipu Sultan’s revenue administration (Beaglehole 1966; Stein 1985, p. 18), many recognized that the ryotwari system self-consciously generalized attractive elements of Indian society. As Munro himself wrote: “The object of the Rayetwar settlement is to make the Rayets of other districts like those of Canara—enjoying their lands as private property at a fixed

Bayly (1989, p. 85) suggests that this uneven reflection represented identification by Scottish administrators like Munro with lowland Scottish yeomen.
rent—Some Rayets in every district are now in this condition—all may be brought to it gradually” (quoted in Beaglehole 1966, p. 133). Madras opponents of the ryotwari system, including the civil servant Lionel Place, also vigorously disputed Munro’s claims to have uncovered actual Indian documentation supporting his claims to continuity, and the extent to which Munro fabricated such evidence remains unsettled (Stein 1989, pp. 68–71). John Hodgson of the Madras Board of Revenue similarly thought that Munro’s “present ryotwari ‘rules’ merely imposed the practices of one part of Madras—its backward dry zone—over the rest of the presidency” (Stein 1989, p. 214).

Beyond simply rejecting the accuracy of Munro’s historical precedent, proponents of a permanent settlement in Madras also disputed Munro’s interpretation of the present day. They argued that while zemindars might not be common in Madras outside of the Northern Circars, analogous classes were. Munro himself seemed to admit as much when he wrote that while there were few zemindars in Madras, “there are many who are something similar to them” (quoted in Le Fanu 1883, p. 234). One such group was the poligars, and at the turn of the 19th century the Madras authorities began granting them zemindari tenure. 25

But while the Madras Board of Revenue thought the poligars were potential zemindars, Munro perceived them as a military threat to British rule. As collector of the Ceded Districts gained from the Nizam of Hyderabad in 1800, he therefore set out to liquidate the poligars completely by deliberately raising revenue demands to unsustainable levels. For his pains, he was so strongly reprimanded by the Madras Board of Revenue that he likely would have been removed and his administrative career severely damaged were it not for his work supplying the Company army in its war against the Marathas (Stein 1989, pp. 82–90). Thus, in the early 1800s, EIC officials could look at the same social group in Madras and see wildly different things depending on their conception of what that society was. The zemindari system’s advocates saw the poligars as potential improving gentry, while Munro saw them as despots oppressing their ryots.

Finally, Madras opponents of the ryotwari system also proposed their own settlement based on historical precedent in Madras but analogous to the zemindari system. This system was called the mirasi settlement and was developed by Lionel Place in the Chingelput between 1794 and 1799. The mirasi system resembled the zemindari system, insofar as mir-

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25 “The anglicized poligar is palegadu in Telugu, paleyagararu in Kannada, and palaiyakkarar in Tamil. The word means one who holds a village or group of villages on condition of rendering military service to some superior . . . as Munro admitted at times, poligars had the status of local lords whose credentials were derived from prebendal entitlements granted from the time of the Vijayanagara king Krishnadevaraya” (Stein 1989, p. 85).
asidars were intermediaries in revenue collection and held rights to the land, but it had the added virtue of being based on the “ancient habits and institutions” of the inhabitants, as Place claimed (1799; in Firminger 1983, 3:151).26

The claims of the mirasi system’s historical foundation in Madras did not blunt its proponents’ assumption that Indian society was still fundamentally similar to British society. John Hodgson, for example, quoted “An Introduction to the History of British India” to justify continuing the zemindari system in Tinnevelly in 1807, writing that, despite their claims to ultimate sovereignty over land, “the Hindoo kings were, in fact, merely the nominal proprietors of the soil; and the grants of land which they dispensed to their subjects, were given in perpetuity, without any claim, either expressed or implied, of an absolute paramount right in the property. The landholders [mirasidars], therefore, were in reality, the proprietors of the ground they possessed and cultivated; and the tenure by which they held it, very much resembled out soccage tenure in England in the present day” (1807; in Firminger 1983, 3:346). Hodgson’s comparison with English subjects, derived from Indian precedent, allowed him to conclude that the zemindars were still similar enough to English landlords to seek to improve their agricultural holdings (1807; in Firminger 1983, 3:482). Like supporters of the zemindari system, Hodgson thought that agricultural improvement could only be secured if the rule of law were absolutely guaranteed. Thus, after the Board of Control ordered the implementation of the ryotwari system in Madras after 1812, one of Hodgson’s key objections was that it collapsed civil, legal, fiscal, and military authority into a single individual (Stein 1989, p. 215). His view of the appropriate role of government was well expressed in another 1807 minute that quoted Adam Smith’s Wealth of Nations: “The principle attention of the sovereign ought to be to encourage, by every means in his power, the attention both of the landlord and of the farmer, by allowing both to pursue their interest in their own way, and according to their own judgment; by giving to both the most perfect security, that they shall enjoy the full recompense of their own industry” (1807; in Firminger 1983, 3:497). Thus, the dynamics of administrative contention and politics in Madras provide more evidence that favors the refraction model. The reflection model would expect that intensive debates in the administration would occur over which form of administration was a better fit for Indian society and more effective at

26 While the ryotwari and zemindari settlements referred to the actors with whom the government interacted, mirasidars were holders of traditional lease rights to collect revenue for the state. Hodgson suggested that the mirasi system was functionally equivalent to the zemindari (1807; in Firminger [1914] 1983, 3:471), and Munro attacked it as such in his 1824 minute. However, the two represented very different classes in Madras (Irschick 1994, chap. 3).
extracting revenues. This analysis has shown, however, that while administrators certainly used the rhetoric of revenue maximization and social stability, they repeatedly and deeply disagreed about the very nature of Madras’s agrarian society even as they sought historical precedent for their respective systems.

Refraction throughout India

The first two sites for evaluating the reflection and refraction models represent progressively broader empirical terrain. The analysis of the Bar'amahal considered a single district, while the administrative politics of Madras encompassed an entire presidency. The reflection model, however, could still apply to the long-term development of Indian revenue administration, confining refraction to a few decades of uncertainty in Madras. To address this possibility, this section expands the range of materials under consideration to the origins of the zemindari system in the 1770s and debates about the emergent village settlement in the North-Western Provinces during the 1850s. It uncovers a pattern of repeated refraction, as officials disagreed about the nature of Indian social structure and selectively generalized aspects of it that they found attractive.

Refraction occurred in Bengal as the zemindari system emerged against Warren Hastings’s revenue administration from 1772 to 1784 (Ascoli 1917; Marshall 1987; Travers 2004, 2007). Squeezed by perceptions of Bengal’s economic decline following the British assumption of the diwani and a devastating famine in 1770, in 1776 Hastings attempted a survey of local revenue registers to better understand agrarian relations in Bengal’s mo-fussil, or hinterland. He was opposed by an administrative faction and a broad coalition of Indian society in Bengal who resisted interference in revenue administration.

Philip Francis, who helped develop the Bengal Permanent Settlement, led the faction of civil administrators opposing Hastings’s survey. He and Hastings both “tried to marry the twin imperatives of local custom and universal reason” (Travers 2004, p. 540) but did so differently. Francis based his arguments in the universal applicability of the laws of political

27 Before the survey, Hastings also attempted in 1772 to auction tax contracts on estates to allow market forces to determine the value of lands.
28 Two recent works have qualified the simple opposition between universality and particularity in the confrontation between Hastings and Francis. Travers has given more full-throated voice to Francis’s grounding of his views in the idiom of “ancient constitutionalism” (2007), and Wilson (2008, chap. 3) locates the emergence of abstract notions of universal property in Bengal after the debate between Francis and Hastings, with the subsequent appropriation of Francis’s ideas by Cornwallis and Barlow in the 1790s.
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economy but also cited Indian precedent (Travers 2004). Hastings reversed this order of priority, strongly emphasizing the survey’s basis in particular Indian circumstances but also citing English laws for his survey (Travers 2004, p. 532). Thus, Hastings and Francis gave different priority to the applicability of “general propositions,” in turn revealing different presumptions of Indian similarity and difference. A 1772 exchange clearly reveals this essential contrast in their views:

[Hastings wrote] “More used to the practice of business than to speculation, I beg to be excused from discussing these propositions [concerning revenue administration] as general and abstract questions; and instead of considering them as principles, which are equally applicable to any country, I wish to confine them merely to the revenue of Bengal.” To this Francis replied . . . “With respect to general propositions . . . I have yet seen no reason to admit that principles, unquestionably true in every other country, should not be applicable to Bengal. It is in the nature of justice and good government to deduce its arrangements from some undisputed points of original right. It is in the nature of arbitrary power to make exceptions.” (Quoted in Guha 1963, p. 97)

But again, even Francis’s “undisputed points of original right” pointing toward a zemindari settlement had to cite some local precedent. Francis built this precedent by refraction; like administrators in Madras two decades later, he generalized what he found attractive in Indian society. Francis gathered information about Bengal’s mofussil from Company administrators sent out as part of Harry Verelst’s abortive 1769 administrative reforms (Ascoli 1917, p. 31). Two of these officers, Charles William Boughton Rous in Rajshahi and George Ducarel in Purnia, provided radically different views of Bengal’s social structure (Guha 1963, pp. 47–57). Purnia had just been decimated by famine and economic decline and had few candidates for zemindars, while Rajshahi was governed by a single large landholder, Rani Bhabani. Ducarel consequently proposed direct settlement with the ryots but was overruled by the Bengal council on the recommendation of the Mughal revenue advisor to the British, Muhammad Reza Khan (Guha 1963, pp. 50–51). Rous, by contrast, was deeply impressed by “the station and Honour of the Zemindar” Rani Bhabani and recommended a permanent settlement with zemindars to the council (Guha 1963, p. 57). Francis corresponded with both and knew of both alternatives but emphasized Rous’s alternative over Ducarel’s, foreclosing a precursor of the ryotwari system in Bengal.

Thus, Francis refracted information from different areas in Bengal in terms of his conceptualization of the reach of the laws of political economy. But even after the ryotwari system became the new orthodoxy in India, reinforcing the need for subsequent systems to justify themselves in terms of Indian precedent, the process of refraction continued. This debate oc-
curred as administrators tried to extend the ryotwari system into the newly settled North-Western Provinces in the 1820s, and focused—as with earlier debates examined here—on the nature of agrarian society in Madras.

This disagreement is evident in George Campbell’s *Modern India* (1852) and John Bruce Norton’s *A Letter to Robert Lowe* (1854). The nature of Madras’s social structure was at the heart of their argument. Campbell advocated a settlement developed in the North-Western Provinces in which “perfect” self-policing villages shared tax liability communally. Campbell argued that this system had been in place since the Mughal Emperor Akbar’s rule in 1707 and closely fit the historical precedent in the Punjab. This village system of revenue administration relied on the image of a “perfect” village community closest to its original form in the North-Western Provinces but realized in various states of decay elsewhere in India (Campbell 1852, pp. 338–39).

Campbell’s reach into Indian history to find a “perfect” object for administration—a village community—allowed him to attack the ryotwari system’s appeal to historical precedent even in Madras. Campbell argued that Munro had mistaken the society he saw when developing the ryotwari system:

> Most of the communities were in a disorganized and impoverished state; they could only have been brought back to working order by much care, attention, and cherishment; we had yet had little experience of them in their perfect state; and therefore did not understand them; and the other system secured theoretically more exact justice and a larger revenue, without regard to the difficulties of its working. Hence, in a part of the country where the communities were not perfect [because of widespread warfare in Madras at the time], there arose (in the commission in which Monro [sic] commenced his services) strong arguments in favor of Rayetwar. (Campbell 1852, p. 310)

In attacking the ryotwari system, Campbell went beyond a simple comparison with the North-Western Provinces. In his view, village communities had existed “to a greater or lesser degree of perfection” (Campbell 1852, pp. 349–50) throughout Madras only to be “overridden” (Campbell 1852, p. 309) by the ryotwari system. To show this, Campbell returned

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29 Both authors were experienced civil servants, Campbell from the Bengal Civil Service, assigned to the North-Western Provinces, and Norton in the Madras judicial administration.

30 Of course, the concept of “village community” espoused by Campbell was itself subject to the process of refraction examined here, especially as the ryotwari system was increasingly influenced by utilitarian perspectives in the 1830s (Stokes 1959; Dewey 1972).

31 While arguing that the North-Western Provinces realized perfect village communities, Campbell also complained about the instability of agrarian society when the British arrived (Campbell 1852, p. 322).
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to Munro’s dispute with Lionel Place and the Madras Board of Revenue over the mirasidari system developed to opposed the ryotwari approach:

whoever compares the two statements—the present facts in the [the North-Western Provinces] and the theories of the past held by the Board of Revenue in [Madras]—must admit that the Board of Revenue were in this much right, and that Sir T. Munro was wrong; that the state of things described by the Board was not incredible, but credible, as actually existing and having long existed; that the controverted constitution [of the village community] was no creation of modern governments, but a characteristic institution of the people. . . . I am no witness risen from the dead, no theorist of the past, but I have been actively employed in charge of several districts of a large province, where the state of things described by the Madras Board’s theory is in perfect and universal operation, and I not only say that it will work, but that it has worked and does work, for I have touched the coin collected as I have shown with a wonderful regularity. (Campbell 1852, p. 352)

Thus, in defending the North-Western Provinces from the extension of the ryotwari system there, Campbell extended the attack to ask whether village communities “could be brought back to their original perfection in Madras” (Campbell 1852, p. 352) itself.

Norton’s rebuttal to Campbell, part of a broader liberal call for reform in Madras, was simple: Campbell had mistaken the presence and nature of village communities. He first argued that village communities were themselves artifacts of oppressive tax demands, forcing ryots to take up poor lands collectively to meet high assessments (Norton 1854, p. 208). But more importantly, Norton argued that the nature of the village communities themselves was oppressive to the ryots, even in the North-Western Provinces, where Campbell considered them “perfect”:

the joint-rent system became a source of the gravest oppression; Ryots were compelled to sign their names in the village list, those who had found more profitable employment elsewhere, were taken bodily away by the Revenue officers to cultivate the fields alleged to belong to them. . . . I for one, do not believe that there is a community in India where equal rights for all are recognized. The lower class is powerless: and where the native revenue officers interfere, there exists in fact a Government enforced serfdom. . . . I should wish much to ascertain whether a similar state of things does not prevail in the North-Western Provinces. (Norton 1854, pp. 207–8)

Thus, Campbell and Norton, like those before them, radically disagreed over the nature of Indian social structure. The village community for Campbell was an administratively convenient and morally positive object that needed to be restored; for Norton, it was a source of instability and a result of oppression.

Drawing back the analytic perspective to encompass administrative disputes from the 1770s to the 1850s thus reveals repeated disagreement among administrators over the nature of Indian society. This contrasts
the relative explanatory usefulness of the refraction and reflection models in this setting in sharp relief. British administrators repeatedly generated views of Indian society based not only on claims about what it should be but also what it was. Considered at its widest focus, contrasting views of Indians as similar and different and their consequences for the development of state administration appear less a local quirk of Company attempts to formulate administration and more a process endemic to British colonial rule in India.

CONCLUSION: ORGANIZATIONS IN THE COLONIAL STATE

This essay proposed that instead of reflecting social structure, state officials refract it in order to govern. When administrators’ grasp of society is uncertain and they present competing interpretations of what it is, these refractions anchor alternative forms of state administration. In early colonial British India, refraction explains significant variation in the organization of land revenue administration. As seen in the Baramahal, throughout Madras, and indeed across India, administrators contended over which view of Indian society was correct. In Bengal, Francis’s triumph and accreditation in the Bengal Permanent Settlement reinforced a view of Indians as fundamentally similar to the British. In Madras, meanwhile, Munro’s ryotwari system championed a view of Indians as fundamentally different from the British. Moreover, administrative politics, and not adaptation to Indian social structure, resolved contention between competing interpretations of Indian society. In other words, what mattered was which coalition of administrators accrued enough authority to force cloture, even if that cloture might be temporary and geographically limited.

The refraction model extends the reflection model, but it also supplements the substantive content of emerging theories of colonialism and revisits orthodox theories of state formation (Lakatos 1970, esp. pp. 155–57). The refraction model directly points to the connection between the colonizers perceptions’ of subject populations (Said 1979, 1994) and the organizational forms of colonial state administration. But along with recent sociological studies of colonial administration (Barkey 1994; Go 2000, 2008; Steinmetz 2007, 2008), this analysis supports efforts to downshift the analysis of colonialism from abstract universals into the concrete political, institutional, and cultural processes in particular places and times (Comaroff 1989; Cooper 2005). Even though it is preliminary, this analysis also serves to highlight the rich empirical terrain that is still too little analyzed by scholars of the state, political processes, and the organization of power.
The refraction model was developed to illuminate important aspects of colonialism, but it also suggests fresh directions for the study of state formation as a whole. As noted earlier, refraction and reflection overlap empirically when administrators agree on the nature of society. Although administrative disagreement in modern states over the fundamental nature of social structure is rarely as obvious as in their colonial counterparts, this has not always been the case. In fact, there is strongly suggestive evidence that even European states viewed their subject populations in terms of similarity and difference (E. Weber 1976; Osborne 1994; Mehta 1997; Armitage 2000). To borrow and modify the meaning of Skocpol’s phrase, it seems as though all states have at times been more or less “imperial” (1979, p. 48). Moreover, a central point of this analysis has been that divergent administrative opinion about the nature of society does not obviously resolve into a best fit between administrative perceptions and social structures. Thus, studies of state formation need renewed focus on the processes by which a dominant image of society is institutionalized within a state’s administration (Corrigan and Sayer 1985; Brubaker 1992; Clemens and Cook 1999).

Analyzing and explaining these institutionalization processes are complex tasks, but refining our understanding of state administrative politics is a good starting point. Administrative politics determine organizational outcomes in the foregoing analysis, and while their full exposition lies outside this essay’s scope, it does suggest promising directions to follow. For one, following Steinmetz’s (e.g., 2007) analysis of administrative variations in the German empire, it is clear that administrative opinion was not equally distributed in India in either a geographic or social sense; administrative opinion about the nature of Indian society was different in Madras and Bengal, as it was different among factions of administrators within both presidencies. Clearly, therefore, one important task is to achieve a more precise mapping of the social space of administrative opinion as it mutated and transformed over time. But simply grasping the shape of administrative opinion is not enough. It must be supplemented, first, by further research on administrative careers, as officials gained promotion and status in reward for “successful” governance (e.g., Carpenter 2000, 2001) as well as further power to determine policy within the administration itself. Second, as Munro’s empowerment after his sojourn to London clearly shows, the appellate process linking administrators in India with their London superiors is clearly an important feature of colonial administrative politics. More work needs to be done on just how and when officials within the Company’s administrative apparatus appealed to London and with what results (Schattschneider 1975). Finally, attention needs to be paid to variations and transformations of officials’ senses of identity and their own agency. The ryotwari and zemindari
systems made different ethical demands on administrators, and subsequent research might push further into the ways in which these divergent senses of self were linked to the organizational forms of state administration and ultimately state formation (Anderson 1991).

Finally, stepping back from its substantive focus, the refraction model’s analysis based on officials’ interpretive frames for understanding society also provides a venue to further explore how and when “culture matters” (Swidler 1986, 2003). This research has recently focused on micro-appropriations and deployments of cultural frames from both pragmatist (Biernecki 2005; Gross 2009) and cognitive (Vaisey 2009) approaches, but the refraction model emphasizes the crucial role institutions play in organizing and enforcing administrators’ conceptions of the world (Swidler 2003, pp. 160–80; 2008, pp. 617–18). Indeed, this analysis suggests the continued need for historically grounded, empirically specific, and analytically satisfying analyses of how realms of social order arise, become institutionalized, and transform (e.g., Taylor 1989; Bourdieu 1996), and how such social orders shape actors and their organizations of rule (Berger and Luckmann 1966; Hacking 2002).

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