



IBEI RESEARCH SEMINAR

17 April 2015, 2pm
Room Fred Halliday 24.133 – IBEI (1st Floor)

Prof. Peter Stamatov
Yale University - IBEI

Revisiting the Capitalism-Humanitarianism Nexus: Expanding Imperial Markets and the Origins of the Global Prohibition Regime against Slavery in Eighteenth-Century Britain

Is the rise of modern humanitarianism structurally connected with the rise of capitalism? Many scholars have suggested as much. Some, relying usually on Marxist thought at its most prophetic, have "unmasked" humanitarianism as a disguised helper of capitalist exploitation. Others, by contrast, have emphasized the role of expanding markets as a structural precondition of moral concern for distant strangers. I revisit the question of the connection between humanitarianism and capitalism by returning to a crucial point in the crystallization of modern humanitarian norms and practices: the turn of the nineteenth century when a movement for the abolition of the slave trade took shape in Britain, the pioneer and leader in capitalist development. The rise of abolitionist norms and practices are best understood as a political and cultural process of "humanitarization" or framing in distinctively moral terms of the complex roles and interactions of a developing and increasingly capitalist market and economy: redefining geographically distant individuals at the "bottom" of complex commodity chains as fully human and deserving rights; defining previously unproblematic economic practices such as the trade in human beings as immoral; stigmatizing private consumption and investment practices that support the slave trade; and condemning the direct and indirect involvement of the state in the support of these economic practices. None of these interrelated processes of political "humanitarization" of the economy can be derived causally from a "deeper" economic logic of capitalist development. The origin and development of modern humanitarianism is better understood as a culturally autonomous dimension of modernity with distinctly political overtones.

Prof. Peter Stamatov

Peter Stamatov is sociologist and author of the award-winning *The Origins of Global Humanitarianism: Religion, Empire, and Advocacy* (Cambridge University Press, 2013). His other work includes several academic articles studying from a historical perspective topics like social movements, ethnicity and nationalism, and art and politics. Currently, he is finishing a book manuscript entitled *Contested Profits of Empire* that examines the genesis of movements for economic justice within the context of the British Empire. He is Associate Professor of Sociology at Yale University and Visiting Professor at IBEI.

Institut Barcelona d'Estudis Internacionals

Ciutadella Campus (Universitat Pompeu Fabra)

Mercè Rodoreda Building - 24

Ramon Trias Fargas 25-27 / 08005 Barcelona

T. (+34) 93.542.30.40 www.ibeio.org

(please, confirm your attendance csanchez@ibeio.org)