

IBEI RESEARCH SEMINAR

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Room Fred Halliday – IBEI (1st Floor)

Prof. Damon Mayrl
Universidad Carlos III de Madrid

God In The Administrative Machine: Religion And The Construction Of Public Education In The United States And Australia, 1830-1880

Compared with the schooling systems of other nations, American public schools are notoriously decentralized and sharply delineated from non-state education. This paper considers the origins of these peculiar features through a comparison with Australian schools, which, like American schools, began in a decentralized manner, but later consolidated administrative authority in centralized state bureaucracies. In this paper, I highlight the role of religion and religious conflict in shaping these divergent administrative trajectories. Religious dynamics gave rise to contrasting state-building projects — a bottom-up “building with God” project in the United States, and a top-down “ecclesiastical displacement” one in Australia — which in turn contributed to divergent administrative outcomes. In the United States, a harmonious relationship existed between Protestant clergy and public educators, such that the construction of public education was seen, to a great extent, as an extension of a religious mission. This mission was further colored and given urgency by rising tensions between Protestants and Catholics, which spurred localized clerical and educational activity in the decades before the Civil War. In Australia, by contrast, a conflictive relationship between denominational and public schooling sectors, and competition among the various denominations, led to the evolution of a byzantine and inefficient system of educational administration in the 1860s. Attempts to rationalize this system while reducing opportunities for religious conflict to spill over into educational administration led to the progressive centralization of educational authority into official ministries.

Prof. Damon Mayrl

Damon Mayrl (Ph.D., University of California, Berkeley, 2011) is Visiting Professor of Sociology at Universidad Carlos III de Madrid. He works in the areas of comparative-historical sociology, the sociology of religion, and political sociology. His research investigates how institutional forces transform religious beliefs, the political behavior of religious groups, and religion’s position in society over time; as well as how politics and public policy have been influenced by religious actors and their ideas. His dissertation, which was awarded Honorable Mention for the Theda Skocpol Dissertation Award by the Comparative-Historical Sociology Section of the American Sociological Association, and which he is currently revising for publication as a book, examines patterns of secularization in Australian and American education since 1800. His writings on secularization, religion and higher education, and sociological theory have also appeared in *Social Forces*, *European Journal of Sociology*, *Sociological Inquiry*, and *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*.

Institut Barcelona d’Estudis Internacionals

Elisabets 10 / 08001 Barcelona
T. (+34) 93.412.11.89 / F. (+34) 93.304.00.71
www.ibe.org / csanchez@ibe.org
(please, confirm your attendance)