

# Activist Religion, Empire, and the Emergence of Modern Long-Distance Advocacy Networks\*

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Running Head: Religion and Long-Distance Advocacy  
Word Count: 14,970

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\* Direct all correspondence to Peter Stamatov, Department of Sociology, Yale University, P.O. Box 208265 New Haven CT 06520-8265, peter.stamatov@yale.edu. The article reprises themes developed in my doctoral dissertation “Long-Distance Humanitarianism: England, 1780-1880, in Comparative Perspective” (UCLA). Comments by Rick Biernacki, Rogers Brubaker, Phil Gorski, Andy Junker, Mick Mann, and Laurence Winkworth are gratefully acknowledged.

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## **Abstract:**

Considering long-distance advocacy as a distinctive institution, this article examines the genesis and history of networks engaged in representing the interests of distant others. This history reveals the importance of religious values and organizational structures for the formation of modern forms of transnational advocacy. At least since the beginning of European overseas expansion in the sixteenth century, long-distance networks have advocated the interests of the indigenous populations entering the orbit of European imperialism. These networks grew out of the cultural and organizational resources of a distinctively activist religion institutionalized by Catholic religious orders within the Iberian imperial context. Led by a specifically religious interest in the salvational status of distant strangers, religious specialists radicalized in the course of their contention with other imperial actors and mobilized to defend the interests of indigenous people. The very same process of religious radicalization drove the emergence of the first modern long-distance advocacy network, the movement against colonial slavery initiated by Quakers and evangelical Christians in late eighteenth-century England.