

Title:**Policing and Religion – Policing Religion in late Colonial and Postcolonial Asia****Conveners: Ruth Streicher, Marieke Bloembergen**

Following the ideal of the secular state promoted by European imperial powers in Southeast Asia, the modern institution of the police and the modern category of “religion” emerged as mutually exclusive categories. Thus the bounded concept of “religion” enabled states to govern religious traditions, inter alia, by relegating certain aspects of “religion” to the private realm. At the same time, one of the central tasks of constabulary forces was to maintain “public order” – a precondition to guarantee religious freedom in the realm of the public. In this ideal, the police (impartial and public) has been opposed to religion (partial and private). Perhaps as a legacy of this political construction, literature on policing in Southeast Asia still largely ignores its religious undercurrents, and only few scholars interested in the religious traditions of this area have inquired into the security forces.

Notably, however, colonial police forces were manned predominantly by local subjects who were themselves formed by local religious traditions. Further complicating the picture, particularly during late colonial rule, were new transnational religious reform movements that developed along with anti-colonial movements in the Southeast Asian region: these all generated suspicion of, and policing by, colonial states while at the same time inspiring spiritual seeking amongst policemen themselves. How, in short, have policing and religion in late colonial and postcolonial Asia been informing and influencing each other?

This panel explores the tensions and entanglements between policing and religion through three or four case studies in Southeast Asia, thus exposing their intricate relationship and interdependence. Two of these case studies engage the role of religion in shaping subjectivities of police officers through historical biographies (Craig Reynolds, Marieke Bloembergen). One paper delineates how the construction of handbook knowledge on religion is key to the operation of security forces in southern Thailand (Ruth Streicher).

Single Session. Presenters: Craig Reynolds, Marieke Bloembergen, Ruth Streicher