**Title:**Ritual Exchange in Timor-Leste: Regulation, Resistance, and Social Inequality in the Post-Independence Era

**Convenors:**

Susanna Barnes, University of Saskatchewan, susanna.barnes@usask.ca

Alberto Fidalgo-Castro, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, alberfid@ucm.es

**Description of the chosen format:**

**Description of the panel:**

This panel seeks to explore the implications of the perceived or real intensification of customary exchanges, specifically "lia mate" (death rituals) and "lia moris," (life rituals) in Timor-Leste since its independence. There has been a growing call for state involvement in regulating the form and content of these exchanges, as they are often perceived as draining household resources, exacerbating community tensions, and contributing to gender discrimination and inequality within East Timorese society. We aim to examine how various interventions, both regulatory and resistance-oriented, state and non-state, have sought to shape or reaffirm these exchange relations in contemporary East Timorese society. In this panel, we invite participants to reconsider and reflect on the role of exchange mechanisms in the context of mounting social and economic inequality. We pose critical questions for exploration: What is the extent and scope of ritual exchange in contemporary Timor-Leste? Who does it involve and how are these relationships articulated? Do ritual exchanges exacerbate economic inequality, or can they function as mechanisms for redistributing resources? Do they serve as platforms for the reinforcement or renegotiation of social and gender hierarchies? What roles do both the State and non-state actors (including the Catholic and Christian (Protestant) Churches play in the regulation of these exchanges, and what is the underlying significance of their involvement? Furthermore, we encourage contributors to explore related phenomena such as sorcery accusations, domestic violence, and theft, considering how these may function as means of either resisting or reaffirming the significance of customary exchange in everyday life. By scrutinizing the intricate interplay between rituals, governance, and the state, this panel seeks to foster a deeper understanding of the dynamics at play in Timor-Leste and similar contexts. We invite researchers to share their insights, research findings, and perspectives, contributing to a comprehensive dialogue on the multifaceted dimensions of customary exchanges and their impact on societal norms, wealth distribution, and socioeconomic disparities.

**Brief description and explanation of the chosen format:**

Double sessions panel (2 x 90 min) of 6 people with a discussant. The panel will be open to presenters to submit their papers. A Q&A will follow each presentation, encouraging audience engagement. The double session format allows for a more comprehensive exploration of diverse topics, with a short break for networking between sessions.