

Call for Papers

(closes: 1 February 2016)

12th International Conference of the SIEF Working Group Ethnology of Religion:

Alternative and Religious Healing in the Modern World

22-24 September 2016 in Amsterdam

Humans want to enjoy well-being, good health, happiness, and a ‘balanced’ life. The human body and the human condition, however, do not always fully comply with this endeavour. For all that deviates from a balanced or harmonic state—illness, disease, malaise, discomfort, suffering—some kind of treatment is usually required to bring body and self back to health and harmony. However, when the regular health care systems stand empty-handed or seem inappropriate or ineffective for the patient, alternatives are promptly searched for. Are then alternative healing practices to be seen as expressions of backwardness, ignorance or gullibility, or are they actually more an example of the subjectified self-dependence of people in modernity and the development of the individual as consumer in all aspects of 21st century life? To what extent does this development relate to ‘secularization’, or better ‘unchurchisation’, or indeed to a lack of trust in science and materialism alone?

The 2016 conference of SIEF’s Ethnology of Religion working group is focused on the contemporary religious, spiritual, complementary and alternative healing practices in the Western world. As alternative, religious and integrative healing practices are not taken very seriously by a societal majority—usually only those who explicitly undergo or apply them are exponents—we regard it highly relevant to research such healing worlds. Paradoxically, however, depending on the definition of the healing domain, many people in contemporary society arguably actually practice in daily life various basic forms of healing—from yoga to Zen to mindfulness. Perceived in that light it can be claimed that in reality such practices are becoming ‘mainstream’ rather than ‘alternative’. ‘Alternative’ and ‘religious’ healing practices are for this conference taken as one as, at least in part, they stem from the same thoughts and deliberations. The conference therefore wants to explore and discuss contemporary avenues of healing practices within the alternative/spiritual/religious domains of Western society. We welcome papers that have either a more theoretical stance and/or bring analyses based on fieldwork or comparative ethnography.

The organizers are especially (but not only) interested in papers related to the following streams and issues:

- Streams: theory; comparative ethnography; the spiritual/alternative and healing; 'Asian'/'new age' healing; historical perspective.
- The boundaries and crossovers of the religious/spiritual domain and of the domain of alternative healing: Where does religion, spirituality and meditation end, and where does healing start? Or is it better to take them as one 'belief' domain?
- Establish comparative identifications, ethnographic descriptions and analyses of new forms of healing practices; the meanings of such practices and the representations of those.
- Which shifts or changes can be discerned in modern, popular healing practices? Relation traditional, indigenous healers and immigrant healers?
- Connections and conflicts between formal medicine and the alternative, complementary healing practices; national differences in the medical profession's attitudes to and tolerance of CAM (complementary and alternative medicine).
- Who are the participants ('patients'), what are their experiences and their ideas on healing and motifs of healing; why do people embrace rejected and mocked forms of healing?
- What are the methods and rituals of faith and alternative healers in (recent) past and present?
- What are the relations between the unchurchisation in Western society and the growth of healing practices?
- Why are North Americans more open towards faith healing, and why are alternative practices institutionalized in many medical centers there, while in Europe a more crusading mentality against alternative (and less towards: religious) healing prevails?
- Etc. etc.

As a follow up to the conference, an edited **volume** on contemporary healing practices is planned to be published, and will be based on a selection of the papers presented.

This **Call for Papers closes on 1 February 2016**. Proposals (for a max. 20 minutes presentation) should be sent to: peterjan.margry@meertens.knaw.nl

The evaluation and selection of the paper proposals will be communicated before **1 March 2016**

The conference will be held in Amsterdam on **22-23 September 2016**

An excursion in relation to the conference will be organized on **24 September**.

Financial support for delegates is not available.

Contact: Prof. dr. Peter Jan Margry, Meertens Institute / University of Amsterdam

Website: <http://www.rahrp.org/cms/>