

Spiritualities and Healing in Global and Transhistorical Perspectives

Fondazione Giorgio Cini
Harvard Divinity School
Ca' Foscari University of Venice
HEAL Network for the Ethnography of Healing



Giuseppe Arcimboldo, *Summer*, 1563, oil on panel. Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.

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Abstracts

“The Zar Ritual: Spirits, Healing, and Cultural Heritage in Southern Iran,” Maryam Abbasi
(Institute of Cultural and Social Anthropology, Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences, and Theology, Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg)

In southern Iran, the Zar ritual is a set of cultural practices used to treat people who are believed to be possessed by spirits. Zar participants believe in reincarnation and that after death, the spirit of a person exists in the air for 300 years. During this time, the spirit may fall in love with a living person, enters his/her body and becomes his/her second, third, or fourth spirit. Individuals believed to be afflicted by possession are typically required to participate in the Zar ceremony. This ritual involves the invocation of spirits through the use of musical instruments or poetic incantations, with the aim of establishing communication and discerning the spirits' desires. This ritual was introduced to the Persian Gulf region between the 17th and 19th centuries, during a period of African migration to the area, both through voluntary immigration and forced enslavement. Over time, the Zar ritual and its practitioners have encountered various reactions from the local and mainstream society. Sometimes, they have been considered as superstitious or incompatible with Islam, resulting in the imprisonment of practitioners and in other times it was replaced medical treatments or visits to holy shrines. Today, however, the Zar ritual has become recognized as part of the cultural heritage of Hormozgan Province. This presentation explores the historical context of the Zar ritual in Iran, drawing on my ethnographic research conducted in Hormozgan Province between 2010 and 2016 and examines how this ritual has evolved and been adopted by individuals from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds. Additionally, it aims to understand the significance of the ritual in the everyday lives of its participants.

“Mental Healing, Nation Building and Alternative Modernities in Early 20th-Century China,” Luis Fernando Bernardi Junqueira (Department of History and Philosophy of Science, University of Cambridge)

Originating in late 19th-century Britain, psychical research was a discipline concerned with the scientific investigation of phenomena such as hypnotism and faith healing. Promising to extend the boundaries of science beyond the material realm, the field garnered the attention of leading scientific and intellectual communities worldwide. Its introduction into China from Japan and Western countries in the early 1910s coincided with a period of dramatic social changes: the collapse of the imperial state in 1911, followed by decades of civil war and foreign imperialism. With their country at the brink of collapse, Chinese intellectuals posited that saving China required comprehensive social and political reforms, central to which was the “reconstruction” of the Chinese psyche. Within this turbulent context, hypnotism—a method that would eventually become nearly synonymous with psychical research—captivated Chinese reformers. They viewed it as a powerful tool for modernising the nation “from the inside out,” asserting that material progress was meaningless without a profound mental transformation of the Chinese people. Hypnotism was thus championed not only as a means to reshape the Chinese mind but also as a corrective to what they perceived as Western materialistic attitudes to life. By the early 1920s, the widespread enthusiasm with hypnotism spurred the (re)invention of multiple mental healing practices and spiritual movements that positioned the mind as the fundamental substance of reality. This enthusiasm culminated in the rise of “Spiritual Science” (*xinling kexue* 心靈科學), a movement that aimed to interweave spirituality, traditional knowledge and the exploration of the mental realm as an effort to revitalise Chinese civilisation and the world. This paper explores the political and therapeutic appeal that hypnotism exerted over early 20th-century Chinese elites. It highlights the diverse alternative and mental healing practices it inspired and their lasting impact on contemporary Chinese conceptions of health, spirituality and the mind-body relationship.

“Experimental Music as a Sustainable Care Model,” Zeynep Bulut (SARC: Centre for Interdisciplinary Research in Sound and Music, School of Arts, English and Languages, Queen’s University Belfast)

In April 2020, when lockdowns were introduced due to the COVID-19 pandemic, hundreds of people from around the globe joined the virtual Worldwide Tuning Meditation, led by artist and healer IONE and musicians and interdisciplinary artists Claire Chaise and Raquel Acevedo Klein, on a weekly basis. The project was produced by MUSIC on the REBOUND, an online music festival created by Raquel Acevedo Klein to support the artists affected by the pandemic, and hosted by International Contemporary Ensemble, a collective of musicians and interdisciplinary artists cofounded by Claire Chase, Joshua Rubin, Rebekah Heller, and Ross Karre. Through a sonic experience, the Worldwide Tuning Meditation gathered people together in a time of isolation and uncertainty. *Tuning Meditation* is a deep listening and sonic meditation devised by composer Pauline Oliveros. The meditation is guided by a verbal score that instructs participants to take a deep breath, release the breath first with an air sound and then with a vowel sound, listen to the sounds that other participants make, and tune their voices and singing accordingly. Deep listening meditations, alongside other experimental music practices, prompt focused and multi-sensory, collaborative and interactive, as well as unnoticed and expanded ways of listening to the sounds that surround us. Engaging with everyday rituals and habitual processes, such practices facilitate reflecting on how we form and transform our interactions with our physical and social environment. Drawing on Oliveros’s deep listening meditations, as well as on her contemporaries’ verbal scores such as the scores by Yoko Ono and Alison Knowles, this paper will examine whether or how experimental music practices facilitate individual and collective healing, and offer alternative, resilient, and sustainable care models for public health, which are different from neoliberal narratives of self-help and wellbeing.

“Health Practices in Afro-Brazilian Religions: Navigating Science, Ecology, and Public Health Crises,” Giovanna Capponi (Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro)

This research explores how Afro-Brazilian religions such as Candomblé and Umbanda engage with environmental and biomedical sciences, not as opposing systems of knowledge but as epistemological collaborators in addressing health challenges. While secularization theories have reinforced a dichotomy between modernity and religion, recent anthropological research highlights their entanglement as dynamic and dialogical modes of knowledge production. Health crises—including COVID-19, dengue outbreaks, and growing mental health concerns—have driven significant ritual transformations. Temples have adapted their practices to align with biomedical recommendations, suspending rituals involving still water to prevent mosquito proliferation, and reducing physical proximity and promoting social distancing during the pandemic. These shifts illustrate how Afro-religious communities negotiate tradition and public health imperatives. At the same time, practitioners increasingly incorporate biomedical and psychotherapeutic approaches as complementary to their healing rituals. Herbal medicine, spiritual cleansings, and body-oriented therapies have been reframed in dialogue with scientific discourses, reinforcing the interdependence of physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being. In this context, trance possession—central to Candomblé and Umbanda—has also been framed as enhancing psychological resilience and emotional regulation through the connection with entities and deities, further reinforcing the therapeutic dimension of ritual practices. Through ethnographic fieldwork and theoretical analysis, this study examines how Afro-religious practitioners reinterpret healing traditions in response to ecological, epidemiological, and political pressures. It highlights how ritual innovations, shaped by contemporary crises, generate new narratives of the sacred in the face of contemporary ecological, political, and health crises.

“Secret Words Revealed: Gender, Tradition and Change among Italian Folk Healers and Segnature,” Francesca Conti (The American University of Rome)

This contribution investigates the decision-making processes of contemporary Italian folk healers. It aims to analyze the personal choices, experiences, and challenges involved in continuing folk healing traditions in contemporary Italy. Two case-study are examined: on the one hand, the male healers of the Cancelli family’s, who have remained in their village of Cancelli, near Foligno, in order to continue their centuries-old family tradition of healing sciatica and back

pain. This family's story and legacy are presented as an archetypal expression of resilience and *restanza* (Teti, 2022). On the other hand, Germana Tartari's groundbreaking decision to publish and share the secret words of the *Segnature* she inherited from her grandmother (Tartari, 2023) represents a revolutionary shift within the tradition of the *Segnature* of the Bologna region, which has traditionally been rooted in secrecy and exclusivity. Methodologically, this study is based on interviews and field observations with both Maurizio Cancelli—the current healer of the Cancelli family—and Germana Tartari. Their stories and decisions are compared to explore how different personal trajectories can form diverse paths and typologies of lineages. The analysis suggests that despite their apparent differences, both decisions ultimately share and serve the same objective: preserving folk healing traditions and heritage in contemporary Italy.

**“*Au creux de l'oreille* / In Your Ear: The Curative Potential of Arts During the Pandemic,”
Felicia Cucuta (Harvard University)**

Exploring the healing potential of arts during a traumatic moment in the recent past, the Covid-19 pandemic, my paper focuses on the Deleuzian perspective of art “comme une entreprise de santé”¹ (health enterprise) and interrogates the intersection of performance studies and ethics of care/kinship. Using *Au creux de l'oreille* (In your ear, 2020-21)² as a case study, the initiative of the Theatre de la Colline in Paris under Wajdi Mouawad's directorship, I will explore the ethics of care (J. Tronto) and kinship (K. Nelson) in which the project is deeply rooted through its ritualistic function. This initiative that “contaminated” other cultural institutions in Europe (Belgium and Italy) and North America (Quebec and Ontario) prompted artists associated with La Colline to express their care by volunteering to offer live telephone readings which provided the remote audience not only with a sense of connectedness, but also distraction from the international health crisis. Furthermore, from April 2021, *Au creux de l'oreille* Acte II was extended beyond the first lockdowns to health institutions such as hospitals and psychiatric facilities in the Ile-de-France region³. In clinical psychologist Sonia Amazit's report,⁴ the patients' feedback highlighted that the initiative was experienced as a form of care that contributed to a better hospitalization, which underlines the understated impact arts have on healing and curative care. My paper argues that personal or communal trauma imply an embodied practice through ritual or performance. By incorporating and holding onto trauma, such initiatives reinterpret care envisaging theatre as a ritualization of care: the ritual does not stay in the past, it relates to the experience of those who remain, trying to function with trauma or loss. Even though arts cannot cure illnesses, artistic initiatives can, in their attempt to deal with trauma, create a sense of kinship, contribute to healing and help the audience survive as a community. Thus, my case study provides an important insight into the curative potential of art and the possibilities of theatre in our socio-political present.

1. Gilles Deleuze, *Critique et clinique*, Les Éditions de Minuit, 1993.

2. “Au creux de l'oreille”, La Colline - théâtre national, <https://www.colline.fr/publics/au-creux-de-loreille>

3. <https://www.colline.fr/spectacles/au-creux-de-loreille-acte-ii>

4. https://www.colline.fr/sites/default/files/article_au_creux_de_loreille_un_souffle_poetique_par_sonia_amazit.pdf

**“Spirituality as Decolonisation: Co-Option and Embrace in Argentine Feminism,” Pilar
Morena d'Alò (Newcastle University, UK)**

Within the Argentine Green Tide feminist movement, elements of women's spirituality seem to have taken an important role in supporting and fostering emancipatory politics. In the words of Veronica Gago, prominent scholar and activist of the Green Tide, spirituality has become essential for feminist mystique and force of insurgence. Spirituality emerges as a specific set of traditions (tantra, herbology, tarot reading, astrology, and dancing) that come together around a political possibility for emancipation. The Argentine feminist spirituality is particularly centred around the figure of the Witch and a natural knowledge (of plants, bodies, and sexuality). The Green Tide can be placed in an international feminist political landscape increasingly attentive to spirituality, healing, and alternatives to the Western model of knowledge. But in the Argentine feminist movement, spirituality stands for decolonisation as a more just way of being in the world. As I expand on the spiritual practices that make the Green Tide spirituality, I explore how this feminist spirituality deploys colonial tropes of indigeneity. These contribute to portray the Green Tide feminists as indigenous as the spiritual practices they attribute to indigenous populations. While advocating for an alternative epistemology, the Green Tide spirituality unknowingly reproduces racial tropes and elides over the legacies of settler colonialism in the country. As feminists invoke

the “witches they couldn’t burn” as their ancestress, indigenous healers are accused of worshipping the devil and lynched for being “witches.” Overall, I illustrate how the Green Tide feminist spirituality is produced as a “re-enchanting of the world” against the Western model of knowledge. However, I argue that the Green Tide feminist decolonial spirituality is possible through racial/colonial tropes of indigeneity that risk leaving unaddressed the racial colonial history of indigenous peoples in Argentina and their contemporary struggles.

“Taking Belief Seriously? Looking at the Intersections of Psychiatry and Spiritual Healing in Ghana Through an Old-fashioned Category,” Cecilia Draicchio (KU Leuven)

Drawing on long-term ethnographic research on experiments of collaboration between community psychiatry and spiritual healing in rural southwestern Ghana, in this paper I propose to look at the articulations of these different constellations of practice and meaning through the prism of an anthropological old-fashioned category: *belief*. Both in medical anthropology and the anthropology of religion/religious studies, eminent scholars have warned us against the use of the concept of belief, highlighting the many limits and pitfalls it entails: from the problematic clear-cut distinction it establishes between what is knowledge/science and what is not (Good 2008) to the equally problematic secular idea of religion as something necessarily “interiorised and private” (Meyer and Houtman 2013: 2). Nevertheless, *belief* has been a keyword in the history of anthropology and continues to be used, sometimes uncritically, in formal and informal ethnographic accounts. In Ghana, people’s *beliefs* on “mental illness” are constantly evoked in multiple ways in current debates on mental health care in Ghana among policymakers and psychiatric practitioners as well as in the everyday discussions of ordinary people. In line with recent attempts at rehabilitation (Luhmann 2010, Mair 2013, Aulino 2022, Eves 2022) and inspired, most of all, by the use that my Ghanaian interlocutors make of the terms “belief” and “believe,” in this paper I propose to interrogate the potential of this category by putting in dialogue perspectives coming from medical anthropology and the anthropology of religion. Highlighting the doubleness of the concept and its constitutive relationship with doubt, I suggest that *belief* could prove surprisingly illuminating to understand how people (patients, relatives, practitioners) navigate different therapeutic resources and meanings during healing processes in the Ghanaian context – *and beyond*.

“Tracing the Pomander: Aromatic Medicine, Colonial Extraction, and the Becoming of the Body in Early Modern Europe,” Silke Felber (University of Arts, Linz)

This paper, developed within the framework of the ERC project OLFAC (<https://olfac.kunstuni-linz.at/>), examines the Pomander—a scented object used to ward off disease and bad air—as a mediating and prosthetic technology that materializes shifting epistemologies of health, embodiment, and governance in the early modern period. While often reduced to an ornamental curiosity, the Pomander, I argue, epitomizes a microcosm of competing medical, cosmological, and economic paradigms—a site where conflicting models of disease and therapy, astrological influences, religious beliefs, alchemical principles, and emergent mechanistic ontologies converge. Its segmented chambers—filled with aromatic substances such as nutmeg, musk, and amber, and engineered to balance bodily humors and shield against miasmatic contagion—inscribe a mode of bodily governance in which the regulation of air, breath, and smell becomes central to governing both individual and collective life. At the same time, these scented chambers situate the Pomander within violent economies of colonial extraction, in which, as Amitav Ghosh (2021) shows, the pursuit of botanical commodities is inseparable from extreme imperial violence and environmental devastation. As a result, the Pomander becomes both a site of embodied regulation and an instrument of governance, linking medical practice to the material legacies of colonial exploitation. Drawing on Jane Bennett’s (2010) notion of vibrant matter and Elizabeth Grosz’s (1994) concept of prosthetic objects, I conceptualize the Pomander as a material articulation of epistemic entanglements—both an extension of the body and a (re-)configuration of its sensory and social functions. While Bennett’s work highlights the agentic capacities of materiality, this analysis emphasizes how such vibrancy is historically and politically conditioned, embedded in regimes of extraction and coercion. As Grosz argues, prostheses not only confirm existing bodily structures but also generate new modes of bodily capacity, reorganizing the interface between the body and the material world. The Pomander encapsulates this dual function: it reinforces contemporary gendered, classed, and ethnicized conceptions of the body by mediating olfactory exposure, shaping perceptions of air and contagion, as well as constructions of the Other. By situating the Pomander within these overlapping registers of medicine, spirituality, coloniality, and material

culture, this paper offers a re-reading of early modern aromatic technologies as infrastructures of epistemic control, economies of health, and the disciplining of sensory experience. In doing so, it interrogates how olfactory regimes operate as sites of power, shaping not only early modern understandings of disease and embodiment but also the colonial logics that continue to govern the entanglement of medicine and global capital.

“Ancestral Medicines, Biocultural Conservation, and the Politics of Recognition: Indigenous Spiritualities as Pathways to Healing the Future,” Maria Fernanda Gebara (Yorenka Tasorentsi Institute) and Leticia Yawanawā

This presentation explores the intersections of Indigenous medicine, spirituality, and governance by analyzing the outcomes of the 1st Ancestral Knowledge Sharing Meeting, held in Amazonas, Brazil, in July 2024. The idea for this meeting, which brought together representatives from 24 Indigenous nations, emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic, recognizing the vital role Indigenous medicine played for these communities during that time. The gathering highlighted the ways in which traditional medicine is not merely a health practice, but a cosmological system deeply tied to land, spirituality, and political sovereignty. The discussions centered on the increasing threats posed by biopiracy, the commodification of sacred knowledge, and the challenges of integrating Indigenous healing practices into national health policies without undermining their epistemic and ontological foundations. The event also foregrounded Indigenous women’s leadership in biocultural conservation and the articulation of new governance mechanisms, including the formation of a National Indigenous Knowledge Sharing Network and proposals for biocultural protocols to safeguard traditional medicines from exploitation. By positioning Indigenous healing systems within broader debates on spirituality, alternative medicines, and contemporary crises—including the COVID-19 pandemic—the presentation critically engages with the politics of recognition: the ways in which Indigenous medicines are either validated or excluded by state and biomedical institutions. Drawing on ethnographic documentation and interviews, it argues that Indigenous healers are not merely responding to external threats but actively reshaping the legal, ethical, and spiritual frameworks within which their knowledge circulates. Through this analysis, the presentation contributes to discussions on medical pluralism, Indigenous sovereignty, and the epistemic challenges posed by the institutionalization of traditional healing within the logic of capitalist modernity.

“Enchanting Remedies: The *Donne de Fora* and the Blurred Lines Between Magic and Healing (16th–20th Centuries),” Claudia Stella Geremia (Harvard University)

This study explores the enigmatic figure of the *donna de fora*, a unique phenomenon in early modern Sicily, where women accused of witchcraft were simultaneously perceived as supernatural beings, akin to fairies. Drawing from inquisitorial records (1516–1782) and nineteenth-century ethnographic accounts, this research traces the historical evolution of the *donna de fora*, their societal roles, and the ritual practices attributed to them. The article employs a multidisciplinary approach, integrating archival sources, anthropological studies, and oral traditions to analyze how these women were viewed by both the Church and local communities. The *donna de fora* were believed to engage in nocturnal gatherings, particularly on Saint John’s Eve, where their spirits would leave their bodies to meet with higher-ranking fairies. This study examines seventeenth-century trial records and the Edict of the Diocese of Girgenti (1656), shedding light on the intersections between folklore, gender, and religious persecution. Furthermore, it investigates the late-nineteenth-century works of ethnologist Giuseppe Pitrè, who documented Sicilian supernatural beliefs and ritual practices, offering a comparative perspective between inquisitorial narratives and local traditions. By reassessing previously unexplored diocesan archives, this article aims to challenge existing historiographical interpretations, revealing the *donne de fora* as a case study of female agency, collective rituality, and the shifting boundaries between magic and heresy in the Mediterranean world. Ultimately, this research highlights the persistence of oral traditions and their role in preserving alternative forms of knowledge despite institutional repression.

“Magico-Religious Proximity and the Aesthetics of Healing in Cypriot *Yitíes* and *Yiatrosóphia*,” Theodoros Kyriakides (University of Cyprus)

This paper examines magico-religious aesthetics of healing in Cyprus. It does so by

ethnographically and historically exploring the central role of Cypriot healing spells (*yitíes*, stemming from the ancient Greek *goeteia*) and medicinal recipes, manuals, amulets, and remedies (*yiattrosóphia*) in both vernacular religion and Christian Orthodoxy, as well as their connection to cosmological narratives surrounding “evil” and the “evil eye.” While *yiattrosóphia* serve as medical compendia which integrate herbal remedies with Christian healing practices, material culture and lore, *yitíes* function as ritualized incantations or spells, often involving the manipulation of unseen forces used for healing or harm. While *yiattrosóphia* seemingly follow a more empirical and rationalized approach to healing, like *yitíes*, they acknowledge that illnesses can be caused by malevolent forces such as evil, jealousy, and bewitchment. Taken together, *yitíes* and *yiattrosóphia* provide a holistic domain of medicinal, ritual praxis, aimed at managing cosmic forces and affects that condition sociality, vitality and health. A key challenge for scholars of religions is understanding the relationship between localized vernacular magical, medicinal systems, and ritual traditions, such as *yitíes* and *yiattrosóphia*, and centralizing processes of Christian institutionalization. Building upon previous research that conceptualized the interplay between magic and Christianity in Cyprus as a process of “cosmological capture” (Kyriakides 2023), this project investigates how Christian narratives and practices historically integrated non-Christian healing and medical traditions within religious schemas and hierarchies. Taking the ethnographic and analytic intersections of *yitíes*, *yiattrosóphia*, and Christian Orthodoxy as a point of departure, this study explores the material, spatial, and ritual practices of magico-religious proximity that have historically shaped the aesthetics of healing in Cyprus. Here, “proximity” does not indicate magico-religious syncretism but rather an intentional and ongoing process through which Christian institutions and doctrines condition perceptions and practices of healing within Cypriot society and vernacular religion.

“The Work of Energy in Mind-body Practices: A New Medicine? The Cases of 5 Rhythms and Core Energetics,” Géraldine Mossière (Institute of Religious Studies and Department of Anthropology University of Montreal)

Semantics based on energy are widespread among alternative medicines where it usually draws on some understandings of quantum physics. My ethnographic inquiries show that in these groups, the notion of “energy” refers to the idea of a vital force animating all living beings. Whereas this idea first appeared in the 17th century with the development of European sciences, it is based on the vitalist views that were formulated by physicians like Barthez to offset the mechanical view of the body introduced by rationalist physicians like Bernard in the 19th century. In this presentation, I explore 5 rhythms (5R) and Core Energetics (CE) as two mind-body practices that renew principles of vital energy with manipulations of vibrations, frequencies, and electromagnetism with the aim to restore individuals’ aliveness. While 5R was created by Roth in the 70s in the wake of the movement of the human-potential in Sedona, CE is an offshoot of the bioenergy movement and Reich’s notion of orgone that developed in the margins of the psychoanalytical tradition. After presenting how energy is involved in CE and 5R collective rituals with invitations to non-verbal free-form movements, I show that experiences of healing and well-being follow from guided awareness of sensations, emotional release and expansion of consciousness. I then discuss how these somatic attention to the self compare to biomedical views of the body, emotions, senses, person and health. Although it is commonly agreed that the biomedical field partly consolidated by differentiating itself from holistic practice, I argue that holistic and spiritual views of the mind-body are increasingly entangling with biomedical approaches, in the wake of several factors like medical pluralism, the inclusion of spiritual caregiving in health systems, the introduction of integrative approaches in biomedicine as well as the North American trend of “humanization of care” that shares with mind-body practices some roots in humanist psychology and psychoanalysis.

“Magic and Healing in Southern Italy: Spiritual Pizzica as a Magical Practice,” Giovanna Parmigiani (Harvard University)

This paper explores “spiritual pizzica,” a contemporary reinterpretation of the Southern Italian ritual of tarantismo, as practiced by alternative spiritual communities in Salento (Italy). Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork, it examines how participants seek healing and well-being through experiences of magic and what they call an “expanded present”—a temporal and affective state where linear time dissolves and relational intensities unfold. Spiritual pizzica fosters well-being through enchantment, attunement, and altered perception, offering insights into how non-rational, affective, and magical modalities of participation in the world are enacted and made meaningful in contemporary spiritual healing contexts.

**“Doctors, Saints, and Spirits: Therapeutic Itineraries between Spirituality and Biomedicine,”
Emily Pierini (Sapienza University of Rome)**

This paper explores 19th century doctors, renowned for their contribution to social medicine and currently worshiped by those who seek healing from afflictions. It focuses primarily on the worship of Dr José Tomás de Sousa Martins in Portugal, with Dr Giuseppe Moscati in Italy as a comparative case, examining how these figures transgress the conventional boundaries between the spiritual and biomedical domains, to weave together biomedicine, faith healing, and mediumistic practices, in their fluid roles as doctors, saints, and spirits. Then, by analysing the “iconic paths” (Canals, 2024) associated with Dr Sousa Martins in particular, through a visual ethnographic approach focussed on materiality, it will highlight the key role of religious and diagnostic images in shaping the devotees’ therapeutic itineraries across what they perceive as complementary domains in times of health crisis.

**“Jewish Healing: Sounds, Body, and the Global Culture of Wellness,”
Jessica Roda (Georgetown University)**

Since the pandemic, there has been an unprecedented rise in retreats, workshops, and courses dedicated to wellness, healing, and spirituality within ultra-Orthodox Jewish circles. These programs, often integrating musical and alternative medicine components, are offered both in-person and online by ultra-Orthodox or formerly ultra-Orthodox Jews. These facilitators, trained either within or outside their religious communities, adapt secular and indigenous knowledge from places like Brazil, China, India, and Peru to fit an Orthodox Jewish context. My research explores the global economy and culture of wellness within ultra-Orthodox communities, investigating how and why these practices are translated into a religious framework using the language of healing (body and mind) and trauma. Music, sound, and medicinal plants are central tools in this process. This study also adds complexity to the concept of a global wellness culture by highlighting how these ideas and practices are locally transformed and adapted. Additionally, it examines the human experience concerning healing, pain, and trauma (Rudnycky 2009, Ammerman 2013, Seeman and Karlin 2019, Mossière 2022), and the role of sound in this context (Dingle and al. 2019, Hallam 2015). In this paper, I will focus on the translation and adaptation of breathwork practices by ultra-Orthodox facilitator Fally Klein, and examine how she mobilizes a discourse on the loss of indigeneity within Judaism to legitimize her practice.

**“Non-Ordinary Experiences During the COVID-19 Pandemic,”
Bettina E. Schmidt (University of Wales Trinity Saint David)**

The COVID-19 pandemic in combination with the lockdown issued by several countries led to rather unexpected insights about the importance of non-ordinary experiences. The idea for the research on non-ordinary experience came in response to a newspaper article about the way how a BBC journalist responded to an interviewee stating that he had a religious experience while in the hospital with COVID-19. In order to attract a wide range of participants, whether they see themselves religious, spiritual or non-religious, we decided to use the term non-ordinary that captures all kind of experiences. However, the responses to our surveys led us in a different direction. The research comprised off two small-scale surveys and a few selected interviews as well as further data from emails sent to us after the pilot phase. It became evident already in the first phase that the strict division between personal faith and medical treatment resulted in patient’s unwillingness to speak about the experience to anyone, even when the experience impacted on their health. We also saw the emergence of clearly defined narratives of spiritual experiences during the pandemic, from a shift in one’s sense of spiritual connection, encounters of spiritual figures and near-death experiences to the interpretation of COVID-19 as spiritual contagion. Further we identified different types of experiences, such as encounters of divine bliss to anger. Reflecting about these experiences we propose an extended typology of the fruits of religious experiences that acknowledges the impact negative experiences can have. The proposed paper reflects on the data and the impact of these experiences during the pandemic on wellbeing, highlighting hence the significance of them.

**“Rite and Treatment in Ayahuasca Religions and Urban Neo-Shamanic Ayahuasca Groups,”
Piera Talin (Ca’ Foscari University of Venice)**

Ayahuasca is an Amazonian psychoactive substance used by indigenous groups in shamanic settings for purposes of healing, divination, community cohesion, and shamanic fights. In its global expansion, ayahuasca is at the centre of a multiplicity of ritual and therapeutic practices, including religions and modern spiritualities, ritual healing, traditional healing systems, alternative medicines, and pharmaceutical innovations. Both in local cultures and globalized contexts, ayahuasca use has a multifaceted role, producing different assemblages of ritual and therapeutic practices. This presentation focuses on how ayahuasca is ritually used for the treatment of addiction, as it illuminates the intersections between ritual and healing, and the complexities involved in the relation between spirituality and medicine. This paper is based on multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Italy, the Netherlands, and Brazil. In particular it focuses on ethnographic examples from ayahuasca religions in Italy and in forest and urban areas in Brazil; neo-shamanic ayahuasca groups supporting homeless addicted people in São Paulo; and the medicalization and commodification of ayahuasca potential efficacies in the Netherlands. The research is also informed by comparative study between the ritual use of ayahuasca for the treatment of addiction and the “sub medical” use of the African plant iboga and its extract ibogaine, in Europe. There are different elements characterizing the many ways spirituality and healing, ritual and therapeutic practices are mixed in the field of ayahuasca, and in particular its transnational and cross-cultural dimension. The role of community life, altered states of consciousness, and ritual structure and its aesthetic dimension (e.g., music, performance, objects) is crucial in understanding the interplay between spirituality and healing in ayahuasca practices. With its specificities, the globalized diffusion of ayahuasca sheds light on the dynamics between religion and medicine, and how spiritualities and healing systems change in their circulations at a global level.

“Mystical Consciousness and Healing: Modern Eastern Orthodox Mystics between Transcendence and Community,” Tatiana Tiaynen-Qadir (Tampere University) and Ali Qadir (Tampere University)

Scholars tend to connect the category of “mysticism” to isolated, personal transcendence and cloistered communities. As a result, they often overlook the socially embedded nature of mystics including healing practices. Institutional authorities often sought to erase mystical healing by equating it with “irrational” folk superstition. This was especially so in aggressively modernizing and scientized contexts like 20th century Soviet Russia. However, the fact is that mystics have often acted as healers, occupying a liminal position between institutional and folk religions and operating on the margins of repressive regimes. Indeed, healing has been a consistent, communal practice by mystics, including in and around the Eastern Orthodox church. This paper starts from a culturally embedded account of mystics and asks how we should reconceptualize the categories of “mysticism” and “healing” in the context of Orthodoxy. Focusing on the cases of two modern Orthodox mystics, St. Matrona (d. 1952) and *starets* (elder) Nikolai Guryanov (d. 2002), this paper illustrates how healing is an important expression of what McGinn terms “mystical consciousness,” transcending ordinary consciousness. Hagiographies of these mystics generally conceive of them as “living in divine union.” Both claimed that they derived their healing powers from this mystical union. Matrona healed thousands in Moscow and her home village under extreme persecution of Orthodoxy by Soviet authorities, while Nikolai survived Stalinist prisons to become widely popular as a spiritual elder on the island of Talabsk. They unpacked “spiritual causes” of a disease, and combined traditional healing (water, herbs, touch, etc.) with prayer, confession or Eucharist. These accounts connect to similar stories of transcendence and communality about mystics in other traditions, making a case for further comparative studies. Liminality of healing practices of these mystics, merging Orthodox praxis with folk religion and holy foolishness (*porodstvo*) also calls for reconceptualizing of healing in Orthodoxy and beyond.