

Searching for a 'new magical world'.

The contradictions of CAM and New Age therapies in the West

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Abstract

Complementary and alternative medicines (CAM) and New Age therapies (NAt) are increasingly widespread in the West. Although the variety of therapies they recommend is very extensive, as is the variety of beliefs and practices, there are common ideas shared across both such as the concept of holism and the notion of energy. The case studies examined in this paper, Vittorio and Sol, both suffered from severe personal problems that caused a state of general malaise. They managed to address them through the holistic world. Through their experiences it is possible to highlight the contradictions of CAM-NAt in the West. While on the one hand these represent a form of resistance to capitalist culture, on the other there is a risk that CAM-NAt could end up reinforcing capitalistic logic through the establishment of an 'individualistic holism'. The only solution to this situation seems to be a focus on the exercise of personal critical faculties, and an openness to different ways of conceiving the body, the health and diseases, but without, however, being drawn into the moralistic and individualist view that sometimes accompanies these.

Keywords: CAM; New Age; folk medicine; hegemony; Reiki, crisis of presence.

Introduction*: folk medicine, CAM and New Age therapies

In¹ a certain historical moment, accompanying the process of medicalization and imposition of biomedical hegemony, arose the need to find a term capable of encompassing the practices and the beliefs of the population with respect to the idea of therapy. During the nineteenth century, folklorists (Black 1883; Zanetti 1892) and physicians (Pitrè 1896) begun to collate remedies, habitus and traditional therapies related to health and illness under the name of ‘folk medicine’². Up to the 1980s folk medicine was still quite widespread in Italy and Spain, especially in small villages and rural areas (Bartoli & Falteri 1983; Seppilli 1983).

Nevertheless, in the last forty years several cultural and social mechanisms (the development of the healthcare system, medicalization, secularization, globalisation, and the entrance of women into the world of work) has affected the decline of ‘the classic model of folk medicine’. By this expression I am referring to the socio-cultural elements linked to the phenomenon and the context of folk medicine historically which have largely disappeared since the 1970s and 1980s, such as the diffusion of this practice in rural villages, the symbolic importance of the healer for the community, the oral transmission of practises, and the initiation of the ‘gift’. This does not mean that folk healers have vanished altogether, as some recent works testified in the case of Catalonia (Perdiguero-Gil & Comelles 2015), Ireland and Britain (Moore & McClean 2010), and Italy (Ricco 2013) but that the tendency is one of the gradual disappearance of this model. Even if folk medicine is not in decline, the form in which it has been commonly practiced is changing through revitalisation and reinvention (Moore & McClean 2010).

Despite the obvious hegemony of biomedicine in the West (Menéndez 1981), different forms of attention to health coexist and overlap. Example of medical pluralism are everywhere. Kleinman (1980) showed that in Taiwan, the professional sector consisted of both biomedicine and traditional Chinese medicine, and Leslie (1976), who conducted research in India, pointed out that Ayurveda and biomedicine flourished side by side alongside different traditions. In Europe, medical practices usually classified as CAM are also becoming part of the health system, for example acupuncture in Emilia Romagna (Italy) (Bicocca et al. 2009), Switzerland and Malta (Fønnebo et al. 2012).

But what exactly does the term CAM refer to? Giving a definition of CAM is rather complex because the terminology usually includes both medical systems (traditional Chinese medicine, Ayurveda, Unani) and a very wide range of therapies and practices related to traditions of different origins (acupuncture, Reiki, homeopathy, Bach flowers, naturopathy, Qi gong, reflexology and so on).

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² Other terms used are traditional medicine, ethnomedicine (in english), medicina popolare/medicina popular o medicina tradizionale/medicina tradicional o etnomedicina (in italian and spanish).

Keeping this in mind, the term is quite problematic as well as, obviously, ethnocentric because the concept of 'alternative' refers to what is not the common medical system in the West, that is to say biomedicine.

Another term which is challenging to define is 'New Age'. It refers to a movement born in the United States in the 1960s which incorporated a belief in the coming of a new cosmic cycle (the Age of Aquarius) which would bring peace and universal well-being. New agers believe in reincarnation, karma, and channelling, the latter being a capacity that it is believed that some individuals have to channel information from disembodied entities. According to Gordon Melton & Lewis (1992), New Age antecedents are: swedenborgianism, Mesmerism, transcendentalism, spiritualism, Cristian Science/New Thought, Eastern Thought and parapsychology. I would add that psychoanalysis and folk medicine could also have had some kind of influence (Anonymous, 2017).

Though it is thus essential to bear in mind that CAM and New Age must not be considered as synonymous, properly because there is no precise definition of what constitutes CAM and what does not, there are some elements that do allow parallels to be drawn, and a relationship identified, between most (not all) of New Age therapies (NAt) and CAM.

I agree with Bakx (1991), Moore & McClean (2010) who identify that folk medicine inspired some of these therapies. My opinion is that the reason is that both CAM, New Age and folk medicine share the ideas of holism and energy which are fundamental in the way these represent the body and the illness. Thanks to this connection new agers end up becoming a good part of the audience and of the clients for CAM (Gordon Melton et al. 1991). Due to this link and for practical reasons, in this paper, I frequently mention CAM and NAt (CAM-NAt) as if they belong to a unique ensemble. As holism is one of the main features that most of the practices defined (by Western) alternative or New Age share, I also refer to CAM-NAt as holistic practices.

Several studies have found that middle-class women (Kligman 1998; Ross 2012; Woodhead 2007) are those who are most frequently drawn to CAM and NAt. The economic level is relevant because most therapies are quite expensive and this is an important divergence from folk healer therapies, which are mostly free. In this sense, the first are perfectly in line with the capitalist system and the consumer society, while the second are more related with the type of solidarity described per Durkheim (Moore & McClean 2010).

In this article I intend to analyse the evolution of 'the classic model of folk medicine' through a dialogue with both complementary and alternative medicine and New Age therapies in Emilia-Romagna (Italy) and Catalonia (Spain) where I carried out my Ph.D fieldwork between September 2012 and July 2015. The data were principally gathered through qualitative methodology, interviews (59), several participant observations at rituals (trance, exorcism, folk healing rituals), therapies (Reiki,

energetic balancing, Bach flower, digitopresion, Tarot, reflexology) or ceremonies (family constellation therapy), and focus groups (2).

The foci are the case studies of Vittorio and Sol who for different reasons used Reiki³ (alongside other therapies) as a way to resist and combat social and physical suffering. Before examining the ethnographic data, it is necessary to consider two essential features of alternative medicine and New Age therapies, that is to say the concepts of holism and energy. Both can help us to understand the role of CAM-NAt within the movement against certain features of biomedicine, as well as the capitalist system.

Holism and energy

The concept of holism, i.e. union between body and mind, is included as a key part of both CAM and New Age. The goal of holistic practices is to overcome what it sees as the Cartesian dualism and the reductionism which restrict health determinants only to physical and organic factors, and deny health's personal, social (Granero Xiberta 2003), emotional, and biographical components. A cure achieved through holistic practices is claimed to be a complete healing of the individual which overcomes the dichotomy between the illness and the disease and tries to see both as due to the 'physical, emotional, mental and spiritual aspects of the patient's experience, as well as to social factors and the influence of the wider environment' (Hanegraaff 1996, 43).

Another fundamental concept is that of energy, which often represents the key to interpreting health and illness. For most of CAM-NAt practices an imbalance of the energetic fluids is what generates the rise of pathological problems, and thus a harmony of energies is necessary in order to promote the healthy condition of the individual. However, this theory is hardly a novel one. Hippocrates wrote that the origin of disease was an imbalance of the humours. Moreover, according to ancient Greek medicine, the body has an innate ability to recover and heal itself through diet, physical activity, adequate rest or specific therapies through the use of plants, baths, diuretics and sangrias (Roberti et al. 2012). Loux (1993) believes that the success of current energy therapies comes from this old popular conception of the free circulation of fluids and the principle of the permeability of bodies.

The idea that underlies the concept of energy is that of an inner force which can increase or decrease depending on the circumstances (Granero Xiberta 2003). The therapist or the healer regenerates the diseased areas and harmonizes the flows, discharging or restoring energy by the laying on of hands. This regeneration itself is what is sought through contact with certain stones, water, trees

³ The origins of Reiki can be traced back to the figure of the Japanese Mikao Usui, who was inspired by the reading and interpretation of Buddha's teachings concerning the power of healing at the end of the nineteenth century. The technique came to the West through Hawayo Takata, an American-Japanese woman who decided to learn Reiki after the unexpected healing of a serious tumor through this therapy. After that experience, she spent much of her life spreading Reiki all over the world (especially in Hawaii, where she lived, and in the United States).

or mystical places. The origin of this theory of a relationship between man and the cosmos comes from the Chinese concept of 'qi' (in India 'prana'), which represents the vital 'energy' or 'force' that makes up the whole universe. The principles of Chinese medicine and Taoism are at the root of many therapies that Westerners have defined as alternative, such as the doctrine of the five elements or the principles of Yin and Yang.⁴

However, the most interesting aspect of the concept of the way people use the word is not the manner in which it recalls Eastern tradition, but that the term 'energy' ends up being a generic and indeterminate notion (Dei 2012). It may have a religious connotation or a spiritual dimension, be defined as a supernatural force, can sometimes be represented by so-called 'energy objects', namely human beings (Cornejo Valle and Blázquez Rodríguez 2013) or transcendental realities, most often called 'light', 'energy', 'unity' (Heriot 1994), or referred to as spirits or supernatural entities. This terminology is used to refer to a kind of substance that brings together all things in the universe. This substance is not simply physical but also filled with spiritual energy.

Vittorio: from patient to therapist

Vittorio is 44 years old and lives in a village in the province of Parma (Emilia Romagna – Italy). He is a thin man, with dark hair and a moustache and goatee. I met him casually during a family constellation therapy session I attended in 2015. At that time I was doing fieldwork in Italy and I was looking for people who were in that liminal space between healers and therapists.⁵ During the first interview we talked about his youth and his approach to the New Age world and to CAM; I soon found out that he had a difficult story behind him. Vittorio grew up between the second half of the 1980s and the first half of the 1990s. In those years he began to take many kind of drugs, including the most dangerous of them all: heroin. I remembered that in that period heroin had begun to spread exponentially in Italy; it was not exceptional at all to see syringes in public parks, even in bourgeois neighbourhoods. Many young people became addicted to the drug and never escaped it. Vittorio is one of the exceptions, one of the few that managed to overcome his addiction to heroin. At the age of twenty, he decided that the only way out of his difficulties was to admit himself to a rehabilitation centre for drug addicts, where he remained for three years. There he developed artistic faculties, particularly as a potter, and learned to live without drugs. When he was discharged as clean he had to face shame and stigma within the social context in which he had grown up. All these factors generated in him (and in many others) a great fear of relapsing. In this situation, isolation seemed to him to be the only 'escape route', at least initially.

⁴ The principle of balance is also present in other ancient medical systems as Unani (Lain Entralgo 1978) and Ayurveda (Zimmermann 1989).

⁵ Concretely, I was looking for healers or therapists who used folk medicine together with CAM practices. This was very interested to me due to several phenomenon of resignification and revitalisation.

At that time balance did not exist for me, I sought imbalance. I started with a collection of hepatitis infections, then the rehabilitation centre, and so on. When you look back you know you've got through so much, but not everything. So you enter into a different reality, like 'okay I'm going to go out tonight and if I find my old friends it will be messy [because] all my friends are 'that kind of friend' [i.e. people who take drugs] because I've built a life with those sorts of relationships, then you decide to stay on your own, as I'm not so much fun when I'm sober [...] then you begin to get paranoid, thinking 'I'm alone', so you're drawn into doing certain things and you start to be more and more lonely.

For Vittorio loneliness was a way to protect himself from an environment that, very easily, could have functionally erased another three years of his life. Vittorio was 24 when he left the rehabilitation centre and until the age of 35 suffered from severe liver discomfort, and many complications in the hepatitis he had contracted during his 'dark youth', as well as a corollary of other illnesses commonly unknown in a person of his age.

My immune system was a mess. I had flu twice a week, my vision was deteriorating and my eyes were always purple, that is, at 35 I was a wreck. I tried to contain the liver disorder, to correct it, and to overcome it, but the only thing that maybe could have helped me was Interferon. I have never taken it because the doctors told me it was common to get problems of depression as a side effect. I already suffered from depression and I had already taken antidepressant psychiatric drugs. The idea of Interferon terrified me because depression could drive me back to heroin. I was clean and that possibility frightened me because it was too serious, I said 'no, thank you'.

In order to treat his liver damage he tried various medical treatments, but these only managed to halt it, without eliminating the origin of the problem. He had refused an Interferon-based treatment because there was the risk that a depressive crisis would bring him back to drugs. To avoid this vicious circle, Vittorio chose an alternative, that of Reiki, which allow him to move forward in what had seemed an unsolvable situation.

Vittorio first came into contact with alternative medicines through the girlfriend of one of his friend, who treated him. The experience was a surprisingly positive one for him and he decided to undertake a path of personal healing, as well as developing the practice to help others. He took his first course of Reiki therapy as a patient in 2005; at that time the technique was not widespread in Italy. During treatment, the therapist acts as an energy channel, transmitting energy through their hands to the patient. There are specific courses with different levels which can be taught in this technique. Some therapists define Reiki as a process of awakening and awareness that is not based on mere abstract notions but rather on a knowledge of the intuitive aspects of mind and vibration. It can be considered as a science of universal energy, with its own laws established over time through experience (Iosif 2003).

Vittorio decided to attend the first level of Reiki to become a therapist, having tried the treatment himself. Although he did not treat serious illnesses, he noted that his patients recovered and improved their psycho-physical condition. He also began a path of personal healing, focusing on perseverance, belief and acting in certain ways, whereby he managed finally to solve the drug-related problems that he had had for a long time. Reiki is now one of the main techniques that Vittorio uses

both as a patient and as a therapist. Theta healing⁶ is another technique which he utilises and finds beneficial.

In passing, it is worth noting that Vittorio's double identity as both patient and healer is reminiscent of the Jungian concept the 'wounded healer' which was picked up by Guggenbühl-Craig (1968) to indicate the idea that the psychotherapist (shaman or medicine man) may have had challenging experiences in his/her own life, and that this relationship between healer-patient could be considered as an archetype.

Sol: 'chronic sadness', social suffering and the 'crisis of presence'

Sol is a 43-year-old Catalan woman who lives in the province of Tarragona. Her story has many points in common with that of Vittorio. Sol began suffering from depressive crises when she was 23. The worst happened, sparked by episodes of bullying in her workplace. At that time she was 36 and had no children or home ownership, lived exclusively for work, and had been using psychiatric drugs for a long time. Suddenly she was unemployed. During that period she went to see a psychiatrist, which was very expensive, and he diagnosed her as suffering from obsessive-compulsive disorder. That diagnosis made everything worse for Sol's self-esteem. One summer's day, while she was at her parents' home, she stood looking at the water in the swimming pool and suicidal thoughts came to her. She had never felt this way before. Water usually transmits a sense of quietness to her and she did not understand why, at that moment, it had become associated with death. She was aware that she did not really want to commit suicide, but she did not know how to change her situation. It was then that she decided to be admitted for two weeks at the psychiatric institute at Reus.

She explained to me that her situation came from underlying insecurity, marked by depressive symptoms:

Not knowing where you are going, [...] and feeling let down by my body, not having a partner, with my self-esteem at rock bottom. Luckily, I did not fill the gap with drugs, alcohol, it's the same, in the end everything is lack of love, my parents love me, but they have never hugged me, they have never asked 'how are you doing?'. I always felt a sense of frustration.

In Ernesto de Martino's analysis of Southern Italy during the 1950s, what he terms the 'crisis of presence' is described as a way of counteracting daily insecurities. The anthropologist intended to show how the processes of domination and oppression, which were implicitly acting upon the peasantry of Southern Italy, represented a structural characteristic that manifested itself through high rates of mortality together with social, economic and psychological misery (Martínez-Hernández 2011). The

⁶ Theta healing is a recent technique based on Vittoria Stibal's healing experience, who claimed to have survived cancer through positive thinking, prayer and meditation. According to Stibal (1995), there are different brain frequencies and the so called 'theta' state is more powerful and represents a kind of trance through which self-healing can be achieved.

politically most telling aspect of this crisis was the fact that to 'abandon themselves to magism' was not considered passively, but instead represented a way of counterpoise their 'presence' to the world and so constituted a 'real' experience (de Martino 1973) which permitted the individuals to make their own mark on history and its cultural customs.

If the crisis of presence in the 'magical world' of de Martino was caused by material insecurity, frustration, impotence and fear, derived from a society that lived in conditions of particular precariousness, with general improvements in lifestyle, progress, freedom and independence, what is happening in the so called burnout society (Han 2015)? With this expression Han refers to the West, a place where individuals are experimenting the consequences of a society based on performance and optimization. They may think they are advancing in their careers, but in reality are being exploited. This society tend to suppress all differences, together with the ability to listen; consequently, many end up with illnesses as depression.

The danger of a society in search of homogenization is reflected the fear of falling behind others that many experience. Therefore, in this light depression appears as the expression of a pathological sign that, by different means, freedom today has become a form of coercion (Han 2014), as Sol says:

I am 43 years old, I am unmarried, I have no children, it's like saying I'm not following any social rule, in brackets, I do not have a job. Some time ago this situation made me worry, I experienced it as frustrating, the fact that I am not meeting expectations, but what kind of expectations? Those that society had allocated to me.

According to Sol's interpretative model, this 'chronic sadness'⁷ represents the reaction of the individual, their way of withstanding the imposition of a certain system, in other words the 'crisis of presence of the contemporary western man'. The origins of her situation can be traced back to social suffering, which represents the result of how the political, economic and institutional systems mould individuals and manage to influence their responses to different problems (Kleinman et al. 1997). As she says:

I have learned to accept this situation, I am alive, I am in good health, I have enough to eat, I can live, I can do things ... Where is the shit in life? It is not here. At that time it was me who had generated the shitty life.

Social suffering can be considered as a social factor which relates to very different conditions and situations, the common element seeming to be the consequence of the disagreeable relationship between the subject and the social order and the ways in which such a disagreement is dealt with (Quaranta 2006). As much as, according to Gramsci, 'neurosis' is attributable to the 'fabrication' of a new human type carried out by Fordist capitalism (Pizza 2009), 'chronic sadness', according to my contention, is the result of what he terms the 'hegemonic culture of capitalism'. This kind of

⁷ Taking Sol's narrative into account, I have chosen to use the term 'chronic sadness' to 'depression', because it is not so medicalised.

hegemony does not only concern the subaltern class (as in the ‘magic world’ of de Martino); the bourgeoisie itself has become trapped in the consensus network that it helped to create.

A few years ago Sol met Mercedes by chance and, thanks to her intervention, started to recover. Mercedes taught her how to treat the soul to cure the body, and to understand what the origin of her suffering was. Mercedes is one of those ambiguous figures that are the result of the communication between two worlds. She is over 50 years old, lives in a small village in the province of Tarragona and works in a care home. Her mother was a *curandera* and Mercedes learnt her skills from her. Moreover, she has worked through several courses on holistic therapies, specializing in Reiki. In Sol's case, too, this therapy represented her access route to CAM. Regardless of the type of practices employed, Mercedes believes that health problems should be resolved mainly by changing the concept of disease origin.

When we have a headache, backache..., there is a reason why they hurt, we cannot heal physical pain if we do not know why we have this pain – unless you hit your foot against the table, there is a reason for that – but if we get sick, it can be the legs, the arms, or we are losing our sight; it is necessary to ask ourselves *why*.

Mercedes has succeeded in generating a sort of new hope for life in Sol through her teachings and her proximity. Her support has helped her more than all her years of psychiatric therapy and psychiatric drugs. Thanks to her new vision of the world, as well as of health and illness, and to the reassuring presence of Mercedes, Sol has succeeded in filling a lacuna that she carried around for twenty years.

You are the creator, you are God

Many CAM-NAt practices assign not only great consideration, but also great power to the individual (especially all practices involving the concept of energy). In fact, the patient is an active participant in therapy and not only because they must respect strict or specific norms, but because their way of thinking has to be focused towards healing. Anyone who truly believes in these therapies and uses them regularly as opposed to sporadically has inevitably started to doubt certain elements of the culture with which they have grown up, in a way that closely resembles the scientific method and its way of defining health and illness. Furthermore it is also common, a kind of rejection of human beings’ and society homogeneity in favour of the uniqueness of the individual; the critique of passive complaints in favour of positive thinking; and the decline or denial of the supremacy of biomedicine in favour of the power of the mind. Some of these pillars are reflected in Vittorio and Sol's words:

With our thoughts we are the creators of beauty and ugliness, whether we want to be invaded by entities or to be in a state of unconditional love with everyone is a choice we make inside ourselves [...] If a good miracle happens. I can balance your energies, your body [as a therapist], which are automatically in balance with your emotions, with so many things, but you have to trigger the change [...]. Thinking is at the heart of everything, you begin to see life positively, you create positivity in your life, in you, and you will also give positivity to others (Vittorio).

Being happy is related to economic issues. We seek refuge in blaming society and other things, but we should not do this. We have to accept the situation, I accept the situation and I live with what I have. I will have more work when I will think more about myself, it is up to me, and everything is generated by you. It takes a lot to believe in it (Sol).

According to them, the individual represents the origin of their own happiness or unhappiness, and these states of mind can be controlled by what Vittorio defines as 'creative thinking'. Through it, people can attract positivity or negativity depending on their way of thinking. He believes that people are drawn to others that have the same 'vibration energy'. In her book on healing rituals in suburban America, Meredith McGuire (1998) mentions the case of a woman who could not get up from her bed because of severe chronic pain. To improve her health she began to meditate and came to the conclusion that the cause of her discomfort could have its origin in her way of thinking; in particular, in her habit of thinking each morning, especially at work, 'I will not stand for that'. According to 'creative thinking' the power of words is 'action'.

In addition to overcoming Cartesian dualism, the binomials between divinity and man as well as man and nature are also rejected (Hanegraaff 2000). In a secularized world where God is dead (Nietzsche 1882), human beings have to recover their ancestral power, their senses, their connection with the elements and nature and their ability to heal themselves. In a way, man itself becomes the new God, because his power is unlimited if he believes in it. In this regard, the idea of balance is not reduced to the individual themselves, but also takes into account the environment and society in which they live. The concept of balance does not simply refer to the physical health of the individual, but also to the mental, social, political, economic aspects (Horden and Hsu 2013) and to everything that surrounds them.

According to my informants, if each 'person is a world', everyone deserves a different therapy which is adapted to one's needs. This implies that a particular treatment cannot be given to everyone in the same way. Part of the success of holistic treatments in the West, in a context where individual identity is undermined by Conformism, fashion and mass culture, is exactly due to this attention to the specific characteristics of the different individuals, their emotions, feelings, and thoughts, as well as a refusal of any more mechanistic vision. Heelas pointed out that 'capitalism destroys those cultural formations which have traditionally sustained identity', and on the contrary is constructing 'an ideology of individualism which only serves to mask the fact that people are devoid of any substantive autonomous identity' (Heelas 1996, 147). We live in a society which is based on the paradox of an 'homogeneous individualism' where we are taught to be free, but at the same time are subjected to a continual bombardment of stereotypes, prejudices, and social pressures. By giving importance to the subject, these practices empower the individual and allow him to feel protected and cared for, special and comfortable in his role of patient. Thus, individuals can build up their self-confidence and trust in themselves and their abilities, move away from past errors and weaknesses, create strong identities that

surpass the earthly problems of a liquid society (Bauman 2013) and aspire to global change. In fact, the ambition of new agers lies in individual transformation as a means of social transformation. However, Baer (2001) proposes that the concept of holism in alternative healing systems is a restricted holism, which takes into consideration only the mind and body and not mind, body and society. Too much concentration on the individual's opportunities and abilities risks making us lose sight of the context, the structural problems and the hegemonic forces which are also impacting them. It is therefore evident that we need to take into account the potential of the individual bearing in mind the reality in which he is immersed, otherwise we risk justifying the social suffering produced by society.

According to Heelas (1996), the New Age movement ends up sanctifying capitalism through its belief in a benevolent world which will reward individuals if they act in 'correctly', and so justify the interplay between spirituality and materiality. In this sense, holistic health movements, while appearing to function as an alternative to the hegemonic system, in fact play into it because they end up protecting the capitalist system through the strength of the individualistic model as well as the mercantilization of health practices or what has been defined as capitalism of the spirit (Hernández i Martí, 2014).

You are guilty, you are responsible

If the individual becomes God, master of his destiny and his illnesses, what happens when his expectations do not coincide with reality? And when, instead of an achievement, there is failure? Power and responsibility have a mutual influence on one another and do not exist separately. For 'holistic people', reaching successes in different fields is a confirmation that you are doing well, that you are sufficiently balanced, spiritual, able to govern your thoughts, they are a sign that you are respecting ideological and moral norms and, therefore, that you will attract success and happiness. There are emotions and feelings, such as love, trust and positivity, which lead to good results and others, instead, that polarize negativity; among these, Vittorio believes that fear is particularly dangerous:

Everything that gives you strong emotions, in a negative and in a positive way, creates negative or positive things in your life. Fear is the opposite of love. Love is the highest form of vibration, fear is closing the heart, and closure of the heart is darkness. When you're afraid, open the doors to the darkness. You are afraid of dying and you will slowly realise your death [i.e. before it happens] and it is so with all things.

Thought, according to Vittorio, is creative and does not allow us to be weak; it does not accept complaint or panic because these cannot attract anything but negativity, pain and disappointment. As

much as rage in the context of feudal China (Hsu 2013), fear is also a moralized emotion, because it is considered negatively and it is 'medicalized' since it can cause illnesses.⁸

Behind this new spirituality, of which therapies simply represent the practical aspect, there is a worldview that believes in reincarnation and karma, so that an individual lives in the present under the influence of the actions of their past selves. Moreover, they must respect the need to lead a 'clean' and balanced life (avoiding all vices, such as smoking, taking drugs, drinking alcohol, and having sex without love). All this pressure often causes a sense of guilt. This logic itself involves the biomedical context and self-help groups, as Susan diGiacomo (1992) reveals. After her experiences as a cancer patient, diGiacomo strongly criticizes the attitude of those who blame the personality and emotional comportment of the patient as the origin of the disease. According to this attitude, the answer to the perennial dilemma of any patient, namely 'Why did it happen to me?' would have a very simple answer: 'Because you caused it!'. There is no superior magical power to blame, as in witchcraft for the Azande (Evans-Pritchard, 1937); everything is determined by the individual's behaviour and thoughts. The disease, then, can appear as a metaphor for a certain attitude, and, as Susan Sontag would say, it is no longer a punishment, but a sign of evil, of something that deserves punishment (Sontag, 1989).

Conclusions

As early as the first half of the 20th century, Fromm (1941) emphasized the process of the disintegration of the individual personality due to the progressive loss of the self. The consequence was the increase in conformism and a need for security that could only be achieved by satisfying the expectations of the others. With the phenomena of secularization, religion ceased to be a guide for correct living and this contributed to a breakdown of rules, laws and moral obligations (Moore & McClean, 2010) which had previously protected people and helped them to find explanation and hope.

Sol and Vittorio initially approached CAM and New Age therapies as patients. Their interest in this field came from their need to find a refuge, a meaning, and to address a sense of emptiness. The crisis of presence of the contemporary western man is principally a crisis of identity dictated by the characteristics of capitalist society, chiefly instability, pressure, and individualism. Before being drawn into this world, Sol and Vittorio experienced a crisis because they were not able to meet the expected standards of a homogenised society. The way in which they described the 'lack of adequacy' experienced during that period remind me the Durkheimian concept of 'anomie'. Through this term, Durkheim (1897) indicated the condition of impotence suffered by individuals when they cannot adjust to a new situation. In embracing a holistic perspective, Sol and Vittorio gave a new meaning to their existence, improved their self-esteem, and cultivated a renewed trust in the world and in the people.

⁸ In Galenism and in its Islamic world translation we already find evidence of a pathologization of positive and negative emotions. In this sense, it was believed that both fear and glee could influence different states of health (Horden and Hsu 2013).

Furthermore, they also experienced improvements in ailments that conventional medical treatments had proved unable to address.

In postmodernity, the magical world is no longer a given as a part of a subaltern culture, but instead must be sought with diligence. Sol and Vittorio believe that with strong dedication, i.e. respect of daily practices and habits, they can improve their (Ulrich, Evron, & Ostenfeld-Rosenthal, 2011) energy, health and well-being. The final purpose of new agers is a change of consciousness which can involve all the inhabitants of the planet.

In this sense, CAM-NAt followers are embedded in a process of re-enchantment of the world,⁹ which doesn't directly involve magic in the classical way of rituals and magical practices, but through the new paradigm of the holistic worldview 'which re-unites the spiritual and material dimension' (Hanegraaff 1996, 394) and create re-enchanted bodies (Ostenfeld-Rosenthal 2011).

In western society, secularization and 'disenchantment' coexist with their opposites (desecularization and re-enchantment), but for Csordas (2014) these are not contradictions in terms. If the former concern society, the latter are inherent to culture and experience. The discovery of a magical world becomes an indispensable means of fighting the capitalist system, neoliberalism and the process of medicalization. As magic and folk medicine, CAM-NAt represents a form of empowerment of the individual. The categories of hegemony and subalternity are no longer present as a form of class struggle, but more as a struggle against the system responsible for health commodification and for the fetishisation of the body. The aim of CAM-NAt in this sense is to go beyond empiricism, transcending the nature/culture binomial, retrieving analogism, the ability to feel, and using the only thing that the market apparently cannot check as a strategy of resistance: transcendence. The problem is that the market, often, controls even that. Thus the risk is that of falling back into the trap even deeper than before, through absolute truths, a sense of superiority, and a new moralism. We have passed from a belief in a God outside us to a belief in a God who is within us. For the purposes of magic and folk medicine rituals, belief was crucial for the triggering of certain mechanisms of symbolic effectiveness (Lévi-Strauss 1958), but we can note that following capitalist logic, as well as that of the CAM-NAt, is still indispensable. However, the difference is that trust must be directed towards ourselves. The self is the centre of the universe, in its uniqueness. In this regard, a few years ago Galimberti (2007) proposed an interesting reflection on the notion of the individual. According to the Italian philosopher, the concept originated in the western world and will die there. Obviously, it is not the empirical individual himself who is going to die, but rather the system of values where the subject is not a society that sees the individual as a component part, but the individual looking at society as the place of its realization.

⁹ The expression 're-enchantment of the world' is directly connected with Weber's (1905) concept of the disenchantment of the world.

Therefore, there is a risk that the 'individualistic holism' which can break down the boundaries between mind and body, and between man and nature, and thus create a kind of continuum between these, could also conceal a personal thirst for knowledge and control which would end up provoking a re-enchantment endorsing the omnipotence of the individual. This strategy is, evidently, the result of 'the hegemony of capitalist culture', through which the old condemnation of excesses and vices resurfaces, in addition to a kind of 'economic moralism' bounded by the pursuit of global physical well-being as a means of reducing world health expenditure. The danger is the emergence of a new oppressive and moralistic paradigm that, if it is taken up without a critical attitude alongside it, does nothing but reproduce old mechanisms such as closed-mindedness, extreme dependence and individualism, as well as the ability to transform itself into the origin and cause of new illnesses.

Nevertheless, it is important to take into account that people are behind social phenomena, and that they have different stories and experiences, many of which result from a situation of suffering. This is often the true motive of their actions, and not their personal interests. The task of the anthropologist is to demonstrate the complexity of different features of systems. In order to avoid the risk of rebuilding the logic of the system in the act of replacing it, it is necessary to see both the positive and the negative aspects of CAM-NAt in the West. Only in this way is it possible to empower the individual without disregarding out the weight of the social and cultural context in which they are inserted.

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