

CONTINGENT HORIZONS

The York University Student Journal of Anthropology

VOLUME 7, NUMBER 1 (2021)

DISTRUPTION

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Contingent Horizons: The York University Student Journal of Anthropology. 2021. 7(1):15-30.

First published online June 24, 2022.

Contingent Horizons is available online at ch.journals.yorku.ca.

Contingent Horizons is an annual open-access, peer-reviewed student journal published by the department of anthropology at York University, Toronto, Canada. The journal provides a platform for graduate and undergraduate students of anthropology to publish their outstanding scholarly work in a peer-reviewed academic forum. Contingent Horizons is run by a student editorial collective and is guided by an ethos of social justice, which informs its functioning, structure, and policies. Contingent Horizons' website provides open-access to the journal's published articles.

ISSN 2292-7514 (Print) ISSN 2292-6739 (Online)

EDITORIAL COLLECTIVE Cameron Butler, Jillian Fulton-Melanson, Celia Ringstrom, Jocelyn Torres, Mikayla Hjørngaard, Kathe Gray

COVER PHOTO Palbi Sharma Bhargava

Fortune Telling, Healing Stones and the Evil Eye

The Impact of Alternative Self Care Rituals on Psychological Harm on the Neoliberal Body and Personal Well Being in Athens, Greece

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The Greek economic crisis caused chaos in the lives of citizens and as a result many individuals suffer from anxiety and stress. Neoliberal markets have assisted in facilitating alternative self-care rituals to help citizens of Athens take control of their mental health. These markets provide alternative healing services and products to treat individuals from everyday stress and anxiety. This research project utilizes ethnographic methodology to understand how self-care rituals, such as coffee cup readings, evil eye exorcism, healing stones and evil eye merchandise play a significant role in improving mental health in the lives of adult Greek citizens. The interlocutors report that the use of alternative self-care rituals have positive therapeutic benefits in their lives. These products and services embody a rich cultural history, but over time are questioned and stigmatized due to the rationality in relation to current scientific advancements. This paper explores the sociocultural significance of alternative self-care rituals and understanding of mental health in Athens, Greece. This study is an effort to show despite the stigma towards alternative healing methods, these methods deserve our attention as they report to have a significant impact on consumers lives and identities.

KEY WORDS Greece, economic crisis, holistic health, fortune telling, mental health, healing stones, evil eye

People come here because they know when nothing works, we have an answer. Rose quartz is for attracting love and amethyst is for protection during difficult times. It helps you throughout your life, it helps to protect you from the unknown and evil eye. There's a stone for everything and it's the answer to all your troubles. Since the crisis, we had more people coming in to ask for help to improve their situations. They come here because they know these stones heal and they work. Their problems are no more.¹

I examined the amethyst stone the store owner, Apollo, handed to me while he went on to further explain its healing properties. I followed him to the front of the store where he brought my attention to a side table made of a large sparkling amethyst geode holding up a glass tabletop. Apollo told me the story of a client who was impressed by how amethyst had changed her life. She asked to get custom side tables made so she would be protected at home. Apollo ended the story by saying, “[l]ife will now only get better and those who

use the stones know that. I am certain of it.”² He went on to explain how business significantly increased after the disruption caused by the Greek financial crisis. The individuals who came to his shop were suffering and looking for answers to make their lives better. When there was nothing else to help them out, they came back to holistic healing methods either referred by friends, family members, strangers or because of their own research. Apollo stepped aside to pull out some books illustrating the healing properties of a variety of stones; each and every stone or crystal on earth embodied a powerful healing force. It was evident in Apollo’s explanations and well-researched books: there was a stone for *everything*, and it *healed* all the problems or concerns anyone had.

As I browsed through these books, I began to think about an incident that happened this morning. The fire alarm in my apartment went off because a friend was burning sage to cleanse the apartment. The ritual she explained was used to get rid of negative energies. Eventually, the fire alarm stopped but after hearing Apollo’s stories and browsing through these books, I began thinking about how burning sage was another way to relieve stress, providing a sense of certainty and comfort. My friend, Liza, was not the only one in my class who actively participated in this ritual, and all those who did happened to convince others of its *magical* properties.

Just like burning sage, the healing stones were used by the many citizens of Athens who came to the store to relieve their self-diagnosed anxieties and stresses due to the aftermath of the crisis. Other popular practices used were evil eye merchandise, evil eye exorcisms and Greek coffee cup readings. Each of these methods held a deep significance for individuals and as reported by my interlocutors, these products and rituals only made their lives *better*. These products and services were all powerful tools shaping the lives of the individuals who used them, especially when there was disruption in their lives.

. . .

The economic crisis in Greece caused drastic changes in many lives and citizens are suffering as a result. The financial crisis is spoken in terms of economic and political factors, but less is spoken about the impacts it has on the well-being of people (Knight 2017, 168-167). Not only is the crisis directly impacting the economy, but it is leaking into citizens’ personal lives, impacting their cost of living and mental health. This is evident in other Greek studies all depicting the correlation between the economic crisis and mental health (Panourgia 2016; Efthimiou et al 2013; Dallas, Barousta, and Dein 2020). Individuals are not able to live as they did due to cuts and have lost a sense of normalcy in their everyday life. The economic crisis has caused prices to inflate in the country while drastically reducing salaries of citizens leaving them with less than half of what they used to earn (Panourgia 2016, 113-128). There is a lingering insecurity with the unpredictability of daily life tasks such as relationships, safety, and stability that contribute to a decline in mental health (Panourgia 2016; Efthimiou et al 2013).

Due to the stigma towards mental health and the economic crisis resulting in greater psychological impact (Tzouvara, Papadopoulos and Randhawa 2016, 12), individuals in this study have reported to take matters in their own hands. The stigma is associated with fears of social discrimination (Tzouvara, Papadopoulos and Randhawa 2016, 1-2) and as result there is an increase in suicide (Antonakakis and Collins 2014 in Tzouvara,

Papadopoulos and Randhawa 2016, 12; Panourgia 2016). They realize their situation is causing them harm and in order to combat it they have turned to alternative healing practices. These holistic methods have been used by individuals as a means to feel better, bring luck, or bring change to current situations (Carlos 2018; McClean 2006; Seremetakis 2009). The turn towards these methods could be linked with biomedicine not meeting their own needs or due to the stigma attached with self-diagnoses of dealing with feelings of stress and anxiety (McClean 2006; Efthimiou et al 2013; Herzfeld 1981). Conducting and participating in these rituals helped to alleviate illness and healed them in all domains of their lives: socially, biologically, spiritually and psychologically. Interlocutors reported their use and belief in these practices sparked when they had reached a tough period in their lives because of the economic crisis. Despite having these rituals available through generations, the *value* of them, as interlocutors reported, was realized when they turned to these rituals during their darkest times.

Using an anthropological methodology to understand these alternative care practices will incorporate a cross-cultural approach to further dwell into the issue of mental health in Greece. A cross-cultural understanding provides the framework to look at the benefits, commonalities, and limitations between alternative healing and biomedicine (Millman 2011, 88; Micozzi 2002; Kleinman and Hahn 1983). This ethnography shows how different forms of alternative healing caused a significant impact in the lives of users. It allowed them to have a space where they could be open to share their problems and alleviate them without feeling any shame or worry. A commonality that strings these rituals together is meaning and trust, which are *key elements* to help heal in both alternative healing and biomedicine (Welch 2003; Millman 2011; Micozzi 2002). There are many different reasons why this path for healing is chosen by individuals; some of those reasons are religion, socioeconomic status, and societal and cultural influences (Carlos 2018; McClean 2013). Each culture views mental health differently and has beliefs set based on these views. Despite biomedicine being a dominant paradigm for health, it is not the only answer to mental health related problems, and does not take into consideration social and cultural influences (Millman 2011, 81). In Greece, culture is an influential factor for mental health and instead of getting therapy many individuals rely on family and friends (Dallas, Barousta, and Dein 2020, 723). It is important to understand the causes of illness and the techniques that can be used to treat them, as this in return can help build more efficient integrated models of health care.

As I navigated the city of Athens from my apartment to various shops and cafés, I was interested in learning about my interlocutors' personal stories of how they used different practices as a means to cope through difficult times. Moreover, I came across articles and media posts depicting the transformation that alternative healing methods had on the lives of people in Greece, and as a result many healing stone shops came into business as well as cafés offering fortune telling services. This article explores different alternative self-healing methods and practices that the citizens of Athens employed to alleviate their stresses and anxieties. Through examining the narratives of my interlocutors, this research will explore the significance and roles that these alternative healing practices had on their lives, the socio-cultural and political significance of these practices, and how these alternative healing practices can broaden our understanding of mental health and biomedicine. I argue that the increasing interest and participation in alternative self-care

practices reflects wide-spread anxieties about the economic situation in Greece; people are turning to practices such as healing stones, evil eye exorcisms and fortune telling in order to achieve a sense of personal control over their well-being. Further, these practices are being reshaped through neoliberal ideologies of individualism as there is an insurgence and demand for neoliberal markets providing services and merchandise for self-care as a direct result of the economic crisis. The contributions of this study will help to understand cross-cultural self-care rituals and perspectives on mental health. These different practices can reach the attention of others to help them cope and help medical professionals learn other ways to help their patients besides the traditional biomedical approach. As one interlocutor put it, “[s]ometimes we don’t know the answers to many things and these so-called *superstitions* or *magic* are used as an alternative in the hope of gaining new information and gain therapeutic or healing benefits.”³

Methods

In order to grasp the understanding of the alternative healing practices used by my interlocutors, I employed the methods of participant-observation, and informal and semi-structured interviews. To determine my key locations for this study, I researched nearby stores or cafés that offered fortune telling services or sold healing stones. My field sites were primarily located at the Healing Stone shop, Café, and various evil eye merchandise vendors. From there, my secondary research locations arose from shop owners referring me to other individuals they thought would help me gain further insight into alternative healing methods. In addition, I called these locations ahead of time to determine if there were any language barriers, and to my luck many of these locations employed their very own interpreter.

I came to Athens as a part of a study abroad program at my university and was unfamiliar with the city other than reading about ancient Greece and exploring travel blogs. My interest in exploring alternative healing methods dealing with stress and anxiety stems from my interest to learn about coping with mental health and my personal life. Furthermore, many of my friends and family have adopted unique self-care methods to deal with their everyday stress and anxiety that they have encouraged me to try as well. I was familiar with crystals, evil eyes and fortune telling based on my own cultural understanding, however, I wanted to learn and understand their personal and cross-cultural significance, how they worked and their specific use in the Greek culture.

Adapting to life in Athens was not as difficult as anticipated due to the cultural difference and language barriers. This was because I familiarized myself with cultural norms, dynamics, and interactions among the participants to provide a comfortable and risk-free environment for interlocutors to engage in. However, issues arose at times when I asked individuals about their uses of alternative healing methods because—unbeknownst to me – the topic of my research was taboo. This was due to many reasons like the rituals being considered outdated customs, the belief the rituals would not work if they were spoken about out loud, the pressure to fit into *modern* society, and for some it was a secret they wished not to share. After this discovery, I thought it would be difficult finding participants, but interlocutors were interested and felt it was important for people to finally realize these rituals and products have positive benefits. I met and built rapport with many

participants by *deep hanging out* at these shops, who came from a wide range of professions, such as doctors, students, business owners, and teachers. They all had come to consume these rituals or gather particular products as recommended to them as a way to deal with their stress and anxieties.

During my time in the field, I heard many narratives of people paying a lot of money to individuals who turned out to be *con* fortune tellers. These individuals were fooling people into believing they would help them and get rid of their misery, but instead contributed to their problems. While some laughed and called these incidents a good lesson for the individuals who believed in fortune tellers, others empathized with their pain. An interlocutor described the situations of betrayal as being devastating and losing hope for humanity. “People just take advantage of poor lost souls” he said.⁴ Others I met said they did not want to fall into the trap fortune tellers created so they avoided them at all costs and warned me to do the same. Some individuals were confused about why I cared about alternative healing methods and suggested I see a professional biomedical doctor instead because “they treated *real* problems.”

Participant-observation initially began by quietly observing my surroundings and examining interlocutors’ behaviours and expressions when they visited shops and cafés to receive alternative healing products and/or services. This allowed me to better understand these healing alternatives and develop an unbiased perspective of these methods, which helped me better develop my research questions for when I immersed myself in the field as a participant rather than observer.

I was an outsider in Athens studying abroad for the summer, but in these spaces, I was connected with citizens of Athens as I became a subject of my own research. There were a few circumstances when interlocutors felt I needed to be protected from the evil eye and rushed to conduct exorcism for me. I found these circumstances interesting parts of the journey that helped me think more about the process of these rituals and beliefs as I became part of them. It was confusing for me at first and I wondered if something I said was lost in translation, but like the sage burning performed by Liza, the underlying intentions were good.

These methods helped me gain a deeper look into the lives of my interlocutors as well as examine specific care rituals and products. The research questions focused on the narratives that led my interlocutors to embrace alternative health practices and how these practices impacted their everyday lives. I spent time speaking with both shop owners and consumers, as getting insight on both sides would help me to get a view of understanding how one feels, thinks, and acts in curating and consuming self-care rituals.

Discussion

This section explores three different alternative self-care rituals practiced by interlocutors: evil eye merchandise and exorcisms, healing crystals, and Greek coffee cup readings. These narratives demonstrate the role alternative healing methods play in the lives of individuals and the significance it holds for them.

The evil eye ritual, healing stones, and coffee cup readings were passed down by generations as a form of healing (Korkman 2013; Dallas, Barousta, and Dein 2020; McClean 2013; Carlos 2008). The objects used in these methods, whether it be stones, charms, or

coffee cups are relevant in their time and place (Tsang 2004, 94-95). The use of these New Age beliefs is to ward away the bad and bring in the good and used in a complementary manner in combination with Greek Orthodox beliefs (Roussou 2011; 8).⁵ This is seen in the use of the evil eye exorcisms as they are a part of religious beliefs and have been adapted into present times (Roussou 2011; 8-10). The use of New Age practices in lieu of Greek Orthodox practices depicts the creation of individualistic versions of religious practices instead of collective practices, as people are influenced by old and new beliefs and practice (Roussou 2011; 85-90). Throughout Greek history, alternative methods of healing have been used to treat mental and biological illness (Dallas, Barousta, and Dein 2020; 721). Services like coffee cup reading, healing stones, and evil eye merchandise are becoming a part of an emerging neoliberal market for the New Age (Heelas 2008; Korkman 2013). They are called New Age despite having a long history because these previous rituals were adapted to the present world. These are practices involving holistic and multi-sensory exchange (Seremetakis 2009, 340-347). Crystal and spiritual healing through engagement with clients' experiences bring out effective healing and thus having a good healer and believing in the healer's abilities is crucial for the healing process (McClellan 2013, 62-63).

Feelings of hopelessness in addition to stigma towards mental health has a detrimental impact on psychological health. There is a stigma attached to mental health and illness due to the negative attitudes of the public and society (Papadoulos and Tzouvara 2014, 1-2). The stigma is a result of societal ideologies making it difficult for individuals to take control of their mental health by seeing a professional or even acknowledging their mental health concerns. This shows the Greek economy only cares for their capital, as human beings are being treated as commodities and there is no acknowledgement towards human care (Panourgia 2016, 122-123). The loss of normalcy and living in a state of uncertainty has resulted in an increased suicide rate, for example, in elderly people who feel they have no control over their lives anymore and that they are pressured in a way to end their lives in order to escape the situation (Panourgia 2016, 122-126). Specific disorders like depressive and anxiety-bound disorders cause suicidal risks as well (Patel and Kleinman 2003; Efthimiou et al 2013).

Section 1: Evil Eye

Walking on the cobblestone streets of Athens, I saw evil eyes all around me. Whether they be attached to bags, bracelets, posters, scarves or anywhere else, these often blue and multi-colored symbols followed me everywhere. These eyes held a deeper meaning for the people of Athens, they were not just tourist merchandise but cultural symbols. They are known as the *evil eye* or in Greek are referred to as *mati* (Greek Boston 2016). The concept of the evil eye has been present since the sixth-century BC, and is described as a stare a person may pass due to feeling envious of another person causing them to be harmed or to experience misfortune (Greek Boston 2016). In other words, if a person experiences any misfortune or were feeling ill "it is probably because someone gave them evil eye."⁶ The harm itself can manifest in a variety of ways like physical pains such as headaches, job loss, or an unstable mind.⁷ The evil eye curse is manifested in physical forms aligning with the evil eye givers' intention. A café owner, Zeus, warned me, "this isn't something

to take lightly--the evil eye impacts all aspects of someone's life and is the reason for their suffering."⁸

I recall an incident while wanting to learn more about the evil eye, I had become victim to it. I walked into Zeus' café one evening seeking a chocolate dessert. His café was the best for desserts—it had everything! As I peered through the glass display carefully examining what to pick, Zeus began asking me about school. I knew the owner quite well by now, as I would visit the café quite often. Whether it was a frappé before class, a snack or dessert – I often found myself there. While he was packing up my dessert, I asked him if he knew any local fortune tellers that I could visit. At first, he did not understand why I would be asking such a question. I reminded him it was for the research project I was working on and if he knew anyone who could help.

Zeus told me he did not believe in any of those things but if I had any concerns about my future or present, it might be because I have gotten the evil eye. I was confused and worried, had I got the evil eye? He told me the evil eye is to blame for all my worries in life and reassured me all my worries would be resolved once I undertook an exorcism to ward off the evil eye's curse. He has performed it many times and could relate to what I was going through, promising me that within five minutes I would be healed. I tried to explain to him I was doing this for research and not to worry about the evil eye for me. But something seemed lost in translation: he was concerned for me and was now *sure* I had gotten the evil eye.

Zeus was now on a phone call with someone and speaking quickly in Greek. It turned out he had called his wife and told me to wait. My dessert run had turned into something chaotic—*what had I gotten myself into?* Zeus continued his conversation on the phone pausing briefly asking me to say my entire name. I watched him repeat my name back to his wife over the phone and later end the call. He told me not to worry anymore or think about fortune tellers, especially the “palm reading gypsies”⁹—stay away, he warned. Zeus told me that within five minutes I would feel much better, but I may get a headache and that is just an after-effect of the evil eye removal. It is sign that the evil eye has been warded off. He then directed me to take an aspirin if needed. I asked him about the telephone exorcism and Zeus explained a woman conducts the ritual using water and oil while whispering the prayer into a man's ear to complete it. I thanked him for helping me out and he offered—if I ever felt sick again—to repeat the ritual for me. I left the shop in confusion and tried to make sense of what happened. I tried to retrace the experience in the café to recall my body language or words I used that gave off any sort of distress. I was taken aback—they did this whole ritual just for me, a stranger, who they realized was going through some trouble.

This event reminded me of a previous incident that happened the week before to my friend and I while heading to airport. The main door leading outside our apartment was jammed and we tried, to no avail, every which way to open it. In fact, after several failed attempts we accepted our fate: we were not going to Santorini that weekend. We told the Uber driver who was waiting outside that there was no way this door was going to open, and she could leave. The Uber driver, a woman named Amara, told us to stand back and take a deep breath while she tried opening the door one last time. Miraculously, the door opened. During our car ride, Amara told us she had used a prayer often used to ward off

the evil eye and that is how our door finally opened. Amara admitted the evil eye was a tradition forced upon her and she did not really believe in it. She explained that evil eye prayers were a way to show affection and security towards your loved ones. Amara resorted back to it during her current situation as result of the economic crisis. To Amara the evil eye prayer provided comfort and hope for things to get better. My travel companion asked her if she could tell us the prayer and its meaning but Amara was hesitant. Amara felt by telling us the prayer she would lose her *power* to remove evil eye curses but assured us if a man was present, she could whisper it to him, and he could tell us. Unfortunately, no man was present, so we were not able to learn the prayer.

Taking Amara's point into consideration I asked Zeus some questions about the evil eye ritual. For starters, I wanted to know about the words uttered for the prayer, but he told me he could not tell me the prayer because it would lose its magic. He reiterated the evil eye was real and gave me some examples of how it protected his family. Zeus told me if his family did not perform this ritual then his family would be in great trouble because of the crisis, but that this ritual saved them. He believed in the power of the evil eye curse but was skeptical about fortune telling, which is also said to use metaphysical forces towards the betterment and protection of individuals. Reflecting back on my experience, I did feel better and more energetic. This could have been due to the ritual or the awe for the altruism to help relieve me from the evil eye Zeus believed I had. The ritual was indeed special, and it felt nothing less than *magic*.

Zeus and Amara made me reflect on these incidents and wonder why I was getting the evil eye. I thought about who I could be getting the evil eye from or what made them think I had the evil eye more generally. I headed to a shop that sold evil eye merchandise referred by a friend who, just like Zeus and Amara, credits the evil eye exorcism and merchandise she wears and sells as the reason she was not severely harmed in the crisis. The shop carried all sorts of different colored evil eyes like blue, red, and green. The eyes were found on many different kinds of products the shop sold but it was the jewelry that particularly caught my eye. I was casually talking to an associate about the charms in the shop and she began talking about the evil eye in greater detail. The associate, a woman named Alexa, told me about the evil eye and the role it played in her life as well as the lives of many fellow Greeks.

This shop was started by her father who would create various structures with the symbol of the evil eye as it was a famous mark. Since then, the shop has been open for many years, passed down from generation to generation and now she was in charge with her daughter. She described the evil eye as something that held great significance in the Greek culture. It provides a sense of protection and good luck for the individual who possesses these charms with evil eyes on them. Alexa also wears these charms to protect herself from any evil eye curse and says it has worked well for her. She was certain it worked well because she had personally experienced it and so have others who come to her shop, meaning it would work well for me, too. She mentioned that if there was ever a day she forgot to wear her charm, she would feel worried and stressed about the loss of protection until the charm was back with her.

Wearing the evil eye charm makes her feel safe, stress free, and as she mentioned, is a key reason why her shop was saved from the impact of the economic crisis. Alexa explained she strongly believes if it were not for years of protection through selling evil eye

charms to help others, wearing the charms, and evil eye exorcisms she conducted when needed, her family would be suffering greatly from the crisis. Instead, her store was running well and was even in a better position than prior to the crisis. Many individuals came into her store to get charms to help them during those difficult times and she expressed a sense of gratitude towards helping individuals improve their conditions by supplying evil eye charms. Individuals come by thanking her for being around because without her they would still be suffering from the anxiety and stress caused by their situations. Her store still runs well today, and she feels protected and optimistic about the future for Greeks.

Section 2: Healing Stones

I was introduced to the concept of healing stones back in Canada as it has become an increasingly popular way for individuals to improve their psychological health. The use of healing stones dated back to ancient times in Greece promising to heal and restore the balance in one's mind, body, and soul connection.¹⁰ The popularity of healing stones as reported by the shop owner spiked after the crisis. An interlocutor, Apollo, owned a healing stone shop in Athens. I do not recall any time business was slow, rather the opposite—he was always busy. Apollo owned the shop for several years and was well versed on finding the right stone to heal individuals from any situation or difficulties they would encounter. Like Alexa, Apollo told me there was a boom in the business after the crisis as many people resorted to finding natural ways to better their situations.

Apollo's father was a geologist who loved stones and brought beautiful stones to share with the public. He told me there was a growing interest in the use of healing stones around the 90s to the 2000s, as more people were keen to learn the meanings of the stones. Apollo uses healing stones and has placed them all over his home. Apollo mentioned he kept clear quartz and rose quartz in his home because they are known to bring in positive energy and love. He further elaborated on positive energy being good fortune that wards off negative energies.

Many Athenians stopped by the shop, buying various healing stones aligning with their concerns to be resolved. The stones are displayed all through stores and made into products like tables, jewelry, and polished stones to put in vases or bags. Apollo emphasized the stones helped individuals holistically and even doctors currently practicing biomedicine believed in the power of such stones. He brought this up often during our interview and offered to connect me with the doctors if I needed reassurance. Apollo mentioned that doctors who use healing stones prove its value, as those who are expected to have the answers do not always, and they too need help sometimes. Apollo told me not to mistake this as a placebo because it is nothing of the sort—these stones are natural healers. The stones are said to have a deeper connection that can only be understood by the consumers who believe in the power of the stones.

Apollo illustrated an example of a woman who had symptoms of depression and anxiety. She had lost her job due to the crisis and worried how she would be able to get back on her feet. The medical aids she was taking were of no help and it was not until she started using healing stones she noticed a positive difference in her life. She came into the shop and Apollo suggested stones for her to use according to her situation. The woman left with hope and in a couple of months of keeping the healing stone with her, she was now free

from depression, anxiety and she even had a new job. Apollo stressed, “because she used healing stones it changed her life! Her life is now better than it ever was!”¹¹ He reiterated the healing stones actually work if you believe in the power they possess and embrace the connection you have with the stone.

The crisis has increased the interest in healing stones and Apollo is happy to help individuals remove their problems with the stones sold in his store. Whether it be black tourmaline for wealth or using amethyst to ward away the evil eye, he was well equipped to help everyone. I noticed while we were talking many people were eagerly waiting to have a word with him so they could find the perfect stones to rid their anxieties and stresses. While they waited, people shuffled through books, made photocopies, and were ready to devote themselves to the mystical powers the stones held. This place reminded me of a pharmacy, but one for spiritual healing, and as Apollo said, “we are helping people in the ways physicians cannot.” He definitely did help, as this shop continued to fill with people ready to heal thanks to the power of the stones and of course, Apollo’s wise guidance.

Section 3: Coffee Cup Reading

Coffee cup readings, also known as tasseography (Chrysopoulos 2015), date back to old traditions in Greece. The ritual is conducted using Turkish coffee made by the fortune teller or in this case by the barista. The cups used are regular espresso cups not containing any symbols, and a fresh batch of coffee. The person who wishes for their fortune to be told is instructed to drink the coffee in the cup, leaving the sediments at the bottom to settle. The fortunes were personalized as individuals drank from the cup and the residue left behind gave insights into the future. The cup is then flipped upside down to reveal an array of symbols left to be interpreted by the fortune teller. This also meant each experience was unique to each individual.

I found a café known for its coffee cup readings and their coffee. This café had a clean white marble interior and a barista bar on the first floor. The second floor was where the fortune telling took place. The café opened after the crisis to help individuals with their problems as anxieties and stress levels were elevated. Since then, it became popular among the public to help relieve their problems by taking better care and control of their situations.

I observed people in the coffee lounge area eagerly waiting for their turns to be seen by the fortune teller. They drank their coffees with a look of despair hoping to seek solutions and understand what was happening in their lives. It felt like the same tension found in a waiting room at the doctor’s office—anticipating the result of one’s fate as if it was a question of life or death. Alongside I observed the clients walking down the stairs after their appointment with the fortune teller. Those who were finished with their appointments came down with huge grins and rays of optimism as if a weight had been lifted off their shoulders.

This particular day, I decided to get my own fortune read to learn more about the clients’ experience. I observed and made conversation with those around me as I waited to experience the fortune teller. It did not hit me until I was called up for my appointment that this empty cup with leftover coffee residue would predict my future. I was not sure what the fortune teller would tell me nor was I prepared to hear anything devastating and

hoped my experience would mirror the joyful clients who zoomed passed me. This empty espresso cup was somehow the root to my future and was a sacred object revealing all truths when put in the hands of a wise fortune teller.

I walked up the stairs with my interpreter for the appointment. She asked me questions about myself and how I found out about the coffee shop. We arrived in a room secluded from the café shop and it felt as if I was entering a different dimension. The room was filled with tarot cards, fortune telling posters, healing stones, evil eyes and now, a new addition, my empty espresso cup. The fortune teller asked me a few questions about my birthday, age, and where I was from. I had an interpreter for my appointment because the fortune teller did not know much English. The way the fortune teller and translator were speaking with me felt as if we were friends rather than strangers in an awkward power dynamic where she held all the knowledge of my life and I was there to listen. I felt some truths of my future may be lost in translation unlike the other clients. The wording of the predictions made them more personal rather than applicable to everyone. Some of her comments regarding my past and present I agreed with and others not so much, but I hoped her comments of the future would be true. I left the session thanking the fortune teller and explaining my project to the translator who was happy to help me with my work.

While walking down the stairs the translator told me something important. She said the fortune teller did not learn to do these predictions but possessed a power she discovered when she was growing up. She has been doing this for many years because she wants to help others with their problems especially after the devastating impact of the economic crisis. She explained the fortune teller was a healer for everyone but unfortunately, she is not able to see her own fortune as she is only gifted with seeing the futures of others. After my conversation with the translator and experiencing the coffee cup reading for myself, I wondered what returning and new clients thought of this experience and what it meant for them.

I came back to the café often to learn more about the clients' experiences. All of the individuals I spoke with agreed that this was very therapeutic for them. A woman I met named Ida described her therapeutic experience by saying, "the fortune teller knows everything, and she wants the best for me. I trust her and she always helps me resolve all my worries – no one else would understand but she gets it, she gets me".¹² To her this was more like a therapy session where individuals would seek out the *expert* to help them talk through their worries and come up with a solution. Instead of the client foretelling their problems to the fortune teller, she told them what was wrong while the client listened. This comparison reminded me of psychotherapy, particularly talk therapy, where individuals would talk out their issues with the therapist hopefully feeling a bit better than they had prior. Many interlocutors admitted the fortune teller helped them relieve all their stresses and feelings of anxiety. They feel they now have more control over their situation and are able to make the change they have been wanting. It provides them with courage and optimism that everything will be alright.

Ida's view of the fortune teller mimics a therapist with whom people build reliable relationships and are certain their expertise will free them from their issues sooner or later. But some had disagreed--they thought the fortune teller was ridiculous and cunning. "They are all cheaters!" one of my interlocutors exclaimed.¹³ He continued saying, "If you have issues, they are caused by someone who has given you the evil eye—that is something

worth believing in because it is true and there is a cure.”¹⁴ When used purposefully the act of fortune telling was improving the mental health of interlocutors as they reported to me.

Just like evil eyes and healing stones, the coffee cup reading was a service strung together by belief and an invisible force helping individuals deal with their anxiety and the stresses of life in a way they found helpful. The power of belief along with objects being used for healing is what causes the changes. Either someone believes in the magical force with all their faith or they are *half-believers*, individuals who are hesitant to say whether they believed or not and are stuck in between (Tsang 2004, 100). The power of belief and the altruism is what seemed to thread these self-care rituals together allowing individuals to feel healed after their use. It enabled interlocutors to gain the control they lost in the times of uncertainty. This claimed magic is an effort to gain control over one's life and a way to provide security (Brune 1983, 55-58). These beliefs have been found to be more adaptive for an individual than maladaptive as they provide a sense of hope for protection, security, and positive change (Vyse 2013, 76). These self-care modes are a part of holistic health, meaning they focus on the mind, body, and spirit connection (American Holistic Health Association 2016). These tools and practices for self-care provide individuals with security, protection, and a positive change in their well-being. They were protected and saved from the severe impacts of the crisis because they believed. In order to better understand the significance and rise of alternative healing methods it is important to explore the narratives of users. McClean (2013, 61-62) speaks about learning more about the effectiveness of rituals like healing stones by taking a qualitative approach. This provides a depth of insight to learn more about the subjectivity, experience, legitimacy, and personal effect it has on clients and the healers' perspectives. This approach is adapted for this article as the narratives of interlocutors describe their personal uses and effectiveness of these practices providing progress change and protection from the crisis in their lives.

Conclusion

In the wake of the economic crisis, people look toward the future, turning to various practices to improve their security and personal well-being. Due to the stigma attached to mental health many people are not able to seek care for their concerns. Rather than seeking medical aid to guide them through treatment of stress and anxiety, some individuals resort to alternative treatments. As the interlocutors in this research project indicated, when these alternative self-care rituals were used they positively improved the mental health issues for their clients and themselves. Many people who used these practices have said they work, and that biomedicine was not needed for their healing. But that is not to say that we should dismiss it entirely because when things do get out of hand it is important to seek help of medical professional. The findings of this research indicate an alliance to be made with cultural self-care rituals and biomedicine to improve the way mental health is understood and treated in Greece. Many people have taken up various forms of alternative self-care as they turn towards these practices before going to a medical practitioner.

The purpose of the paper was to explore alternative self-care practices adopted by Athenians after the economic crisis to aid in the betterment of their psychological well-being. These practices are not accepted by everyone and are often dismissed due to stigma

or being called *foolish*, *voodoo*, or *fake*, they did have an impact on the lives of those who believed in them as well as those who did not. These rituals and products provide comfort, therapeutic relief, and hope to interlocutors that their current situation will be better. All of these healing stones, coffee cups, and evil eye rituals meant something. The alternative self-care rituals were more powerful than the stigma of the people holding it back. Individuals built an emotional connection allowing them to understand and learn the significance of these healing methods. By exploring alternative ways of healing, different from what is considered to be familiar, there are more solutions. The metaphysical forces or magic referred by interlocutors helped them to heal and transformed their current state for the better.

Note

This content was presented previously at the Student Conference on Greece at York University on March 22, 2019.

References

1. Apollo, interview with the author, Healing stone shop, Athens.
2. Apollo, interview with the author, Healing stone shop, Athens.
3. Interlocutor, interview with the author, Healing Stone shop, Athens.
4. Taxi driver, informal conversation with the author, taxi ride, Athens.
5. These beliefs are “new age” as they are not a part of the dominate Orthodox Greek beliefs but have been incorporated alongside them.
6. Zeus, informal conversation with the author, café, Athens.
7. Zeus, informal conversation with the author, café, Athens.
8. Zeus, informal conversation with the author, café, Athens.
9. Zeus, informal conversation with the author, café, Athens.
10. Apollo, interview with the author, Healing stone shop, Athens.
11. Apollo, interview with the author, Healing stone shop, Athens.
12. Ida, interview with the author, Café, Athens.
13. Interlocutor, informal conversation with the author, Café, Athens.
14. Interlocutor, informal conversation with the author, Café, Athens.

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