

Abstract

This thesis introduces a critical analysis of a self-proclaimed alternative to modernity. Based on a case of selected, so-called non-conventional medicine within the context of the Czech Republic between 2013 and 2017, I explore how a specific bodily practice like Ayurveda works in this environment. Since it is sought and employed in the everyday lives of an increasing number of people, even in such modestly sized post-socialist country, it resembles similar tendencies generally described in the globalized world (especially from the middle class upwards) in recent decades.

Drawing upon (auto)ethnographic research, which originated at a school for future Ayurvedic practitioners and continued into informal meetings— sometimes at the homes of practitioners, I introduce Ayurveda as a specific way of body becoming. Starting with how the body and wellbeing is discursively established within the space of schools, I nevertheless focus mostly on individual practice. I look at how Ayurvedic epistemology is employed and how it enables recognition of one's own body, and subjectivity as interconnected with the surrounding environment. I follow how, as a result of this process, this recognition conditions a certain self-empowerment, especially regarding the establishment or maintenance of one's own wellbeing. I emphasise it provides benefits to practitioners, who remain loyal to Ayurveda even though they do not, for example, necessarily heal their bodies or social relations. Finally, I also show how this newly accessed agency heightens a contemporary self-management imperative. This way, I argue that Ayurvedic practice resembles the dictate of neoliberal subjectivity.

Even though in theory, Ayurvedic practice, i.e. this way of living, provides a certain alternative—an escape from universalism and general alienation, promoting an approach to wellbeing that respects individual characteristics and needs and that functions in conjunction with the surrounding bio-social environment—in practice it does not fulfil this premise. I argue that this is because, in connection with existent social pressures on self-care, it does not posit individuals as equal with other participant entities within a given ecosystem, but as being at the centre of it. Finally, it therefore works in practice as a very efficient tool for modernist domination.