

DONALD JORALEMON AND MARY B. SUNDAL

EXPLORING MEDICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

FIFTH EDITION



Exploring Medical Anthropology

Now in its fifth edition, *Exploring Medical Anthropology* provides a concise and engaging introduction to medical anthropology. It presents competing theoretical perspectives in a balanced fashion, highlighting points of conflict and convergence. Concrete examples and the authors' personal research experiences are utilized to explain some of the discipline's most important insights, such as the idea that biology and culture matter equally in the human experience of illness and disease and that medical anthropology can help alleviate human suffering.

This text has been thoroughly updated for the fifth edition, including new material on intersectionality, reproductive health, and public health (including Covid-19); additional material on theory and methods, including rapid ethnographic assessment; and additional ethnographic case examples and anthropological scholarship.

It contains a range of pedagogical features to support teaching and learning, including images, text boxes, a glossary, and suggested further reading.

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Exploring Medical Anthropology

Fifth Edition

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and patience.



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Contents

<i>Preface</i>	<i>xi</i>
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>xiii</i>
1 What's So Cultural about Health, Illness, and Disease?	1
<i>Culture in Medicine</i>	2
<i>Cultural Metaphors of Contemporary Biomedicine</i>	4
<i>Development of Medical Anthropology</i>	6
<i>Medicine as a Social Process with Functional Purpose</i>	7
<i>The Applied Roots of Medical Anthropology</i>	8
<i>Medical Anthropology Today</i>	8
<i>Summary: Placing Medical Anthropology among the Social Sciences of Medicine</i>	10
<i>Suggested Readings</i>	11
<i>Notes</i>	12
<i>References</i>	13
2 Anthropological Questions and Methods in the Study of Health and Healing	17
<i>Studying Ethnomedicine in Uganda</i>	17
<i>Research Questions</i>	17
<i>Karimojong Agro-Pastoralists</i>	18
<i>Research Methods</i>	19
<i>From Fieldwork to Analysis and Interpretation</i>	21
<i>Studying Biomedicine in the United States</i>	21
<i>Organ Transplantation as an Anthropological Subject</i>	22
<i>Research Questions</i>	23
<i>Research Methods</i>	24
<i>Summary: The Anthropological Vision</i>	25
<i>Suggested Readings</i>	26
<i>Notes</i>	26
<i>References</i>	27

3	Recognizing Biological, Social, and Cultural Interconnections	30
	<i>Theories as Frameworks</i>	30
	<i>History and Biology of Cholera</i>	30
	<i>The Epidemiology of Peru's Cholera Epidemic</i>	32
	<i>Evolution and the Ecological Framework</i>	33
	<i>Cholera and the Evolutionary Framework</i>	34
	<i>Medical Anthropology Embraces the Ecological/Evolutionary Model</i>	36
	<i>Political Economy of Cholera</i>	37
	<i>Interpretive View of Cholera</i>	38
	<i>Summary: Taking a Broader, Inclusive Perspective</i>	40
	<i>Suggested Readings</i>	41
	<i>Notes</i>	41
	<i>References Cited</i>	42
4	Anthropological Contributions to Pandemic Studies	45
	<i>Emerging and Reemerging Diseases</i>	46
	<i>Transitions</i>	47
	<i>Three Pandemics</i>	48
	<i>SARS: The First Pandemic of the Twenty-First Century</i>	48
	<i>Covid-19: An Unprecedented Pandemic</i>	49
	<i>Ebola: Out of the Forest</i>	50
	<i>Studying Pandemics</i>	50
	<i>A Political-Economy of Pandemics?</i>	51
	<i>Syndemics</i>	52
	<i>Summary: Global Germ Governance</i>	53
	<i>Suggested Readings</i>	54
	<i>Notes</i>	54
	<i>References</i>	55
5	Healers and the Healing Professions	57
	<i>Ethnomedicine</i>	58
	<i>Illness and Disease Causation (Ethnophysiology)</i>	59
	<i>Explanatory Models (EM) and Health Care Sectors</i>	60
	<i>Relationships between and within Health Care Sectors</i>	61
	<i>Authority of Healers</i>	62
	<i>Becoming a Healer: Karimojong Case Example</i>	63
	<i>A Call to Healing</i>	64
	<i>Summary: Karimojong Indigenous Healer in Action</i>	65
	<i>Suggested Readings</i>	66
	<i>Notes</i>	66
	<i>References</i>	67

6	Biomedicine as Ethnomedicine	69
	<i>Brief History of Biomedicine</i>	70
	<i>Outcome of Biomedical Healing</i>	70
	<i>Challenges and Critiques of Biomedical Authority</i>	71
	<i>Biomedicine as Global Medicine</i>	73
	<i>Alma Alta and Primary Health Care (PHC)</i>	73
	<i>Biomedicine and PHC</i>	74
	<i>Summary: The Future of Biomedicine in the United States?</i>	76
	<i>Suggested Readings</i>	76
	<i>Notes</i>	76
	<i>References</i>	77
7	Medical Anthropology and the Global Drug Economy	80
	<i>When a Pharmacologist Turns Whistleblower</i>	80
	<i>HIV and Public Health Priorities</i>	81
	<i>Commodification of Illness and Disease</i>	83
	<i>Female Viagra: Gender Equality or Disease Mongering?</i>	84
	<i>Summary: The Future of Drug Research in Medical Anthropology</i>	86
	<i>Suggesting Readings</i>	87
	<i>Notes</i>	88
	<i>References</i>	88
8	Applying Medical Anthropology	90
	<i>Medical Anthropology in International Development</i>	90
	<i>Anthropological Troubleshooters</i>	91
	<i>The Return of Applied Anthropology</i>	92
	<i>Work of Applied Medical Anthropologists</i>	93
	<i>HIV/AIDS Prevention in the DRC</i>	93
	<i>Community Participatory Involvement in Ecuador</i>	94
	<i>Applying Medical Anthropology in the United States</i>	95
	<i>Cultural Competency: Whose Culture, Whose Responsibility?</i>	96
	<i>Applied Medical Anthropology under Attack</i>	97
	<i>Summary: Applied Medical Anthropologists Respond</i>	98
	<i>Suggested Readings</i>	99
	<i>Notes</i>	100
	<i>References</i>	100
9	Anthropology and Medical Ethics	104
	<i>Medical Ethics: A Comparative Framework</i>	105
	<i>Question of Ethical Universals</i>	106
	<i>Manifestations of Bioethics in Public Life</i>	107

<i>The Social Sciences and Bioethics</i>	108
<i>Anthropology of Bioethics</i>	109
<i>Medicalization of the Sonogram</i>	109
<i>Anthropology in Bioethics</i>	110
<i>The Case of the Non-Heart-Beating Cadaver</i>	110
<i>Bodies for Sale?</i>	112
<i>A Look Back and a Glance Ahead</i>	113
<i>Advantages of Medical Anthropology</i>	113
<i>Summary: Future Directions in Medical Anthropology</i>	114
<i>Suggested Readings</i>	114
<i>Notes</i>	115
<i>References</i>	116
<i>Glossary</i>	119
<i>Index</i>	124

Preface

Medical anthropology studies the human experience of illness and disease from cross-cultural, historical, and evolutionary perspectives. It provides a point of connection for biological, cultural, and applied research. No other anthropological specialization holds as much promise for the integration of biological and cultural views of humankind.

Among the social sciences that study health, illness, and disease (e.g., medical sociology and medical economics), medical anthropology is the new kid on the block. However, despite its comparative youth, the field has already made significant theoretical and empirical contributions to our understanding of the cultural embeddedness of medical knowledge and practice; the dynamics of the healer's role; the impact of general political and economic forces on the health of individuals and communities; and the interplay between social structures (e.g., political and economic arrangements), ecological settings, and disease-causing agents.

Because of these contributions, medical anthropologists now teach in major medical schools and serve as consultants in hospitals, clinics, and on national and international health projects. Most anthropology departments have at least one medical anthropologist, and undergraduate and graduate classes in the field typically have robust enrollments.

This book is a concise and personal introduction to medical anthropology. We have not set out to write an exhaustive survey of the field or to summarize medical anthropology research from around the world. Rather, we keep the focus on regions and topics with which we are familiar and limit ourselves to a few insights of anthropological research on health, illness, and disease. Specifically, we use ethnographic material from Uganda and the United States to illustrate the following points:

- 1 *Biology and culture matter equally in the human experience of illness and disease.* Every aspect of the illness experience, from the individual's recognition of symptoms to assessments of treatment outcome, is shaped by the cultural frameworks of the sufferer and of those to whom they turn for help. A **biocultural** perspective is essential to avoid reductionist views of disease.
- 2 *The political economy is a primary epidemiological factor.* A society's economic system and the political structures that support it play a critical role in the kinds of health risks people face and the treatment resources they have available.
- 3 *Ethnography is an essential tool for understanding human suffering due to illness and disease.* Both as the foundation of a cross-cultural database and as a research method, ethnography is the sine qua non of a holistic understanding of sickness and healing.

- 4 *Medical anthropology can help alleviate human suffering.* Anthropological research can assist in the planning, execution, and evaluation of health interventions by providing cultural information on the community and individuals involved, as well as on the medical practitioners and health care institutions that undertake such interventions.

Exploring Medical Anthropology is now in its fifth edition. We have thoroughly updated all chapters with several significant changes. First, we incorporate in-depth ethnographic research among the Karimojong of Uganda throughout this book and extensively in our discussions of medical pluralism (Chapter 1), how anthropologists tackle research (Chapter 2), and ethnomedicine (Chapter 5). We revised the previous chapters on the 1991 Peruvian Cholera epidemic into a single chapter (Chapter 3) and pulled out and expanded the discussion of biomedicine as ethnomedicine into its own chapter (Chapter 6). We also completely revised and updated the chapter on pandemics to feature Covid-19 (Chapter 4). Finally, we have updated the remaining chapters on pharmaceuticals (Chapter 7), applied medical anthropology (Chapter 8), and medical ethics and conclusion (Chapter 9).

Throughout the text, you will find updated case examples, research, and suggested readings with an intentional focus on BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) scholarship. Finally, the fifth edition incorporates a bibliography for each chapter rather than the book as a whole.

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Donald Joralemon

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Mary B. Sundal

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