CMA Reading #1

Prompt – Summary bullet points

Medical Anthropology in Disciplinary Context: Definitional Struggles and Key Debates

* Medical Anthropology first started being driven from outside influences at the end of World War 2 (international and public health markets). Historical context to define the field.
* Many had the opinion that Applied Medical Anthropology turned those anthropologists into ‘technicians’
* Conflict about the name, because ‘medical’ makes it seem as if they focused on biomedicine. But it is understood that medicine refers to any system of curing or healing, no matter what specific techniques are involved
* It was organized with strong Cultural Anthropology influences – the original goals did not mention biomedicine, but all mentioned communication
* Difference between etic and emic(former is universal construct, latter is not). Disease is etic, illness is emic. Dichotomic view on what they were studying
* Another shift away from cataloging cultural practices, artifacts and ideas to identifying and understanding the various forces within a given cultural milieu that shape health and health-related experiences, ideas and actions.
* 1980’s saw a shift towards more social-critical research. Influenced by revolutionaries. Denounced past ignorance of social and political economic factors in medical anthropology’s thinking.
* Now, there are concerns that career making research projects are defined in terms of social and cultural theory produced elsewhere than in anthropology – reinventing the wheel, or that the research is ignoring the foundation of anthropology itself
* The division between medical anthropology and other fields of anthropology have been noted as bridgeable; but divide between academia and those working outside of academia is a bit harder (organizational factors ?)
* Author notes that a subdiscipline more attuned to past arguments and achievements might be better equipped for positive future growth (pay attention to the history and learn from it while moving forward)