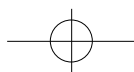
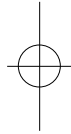
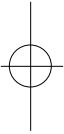




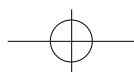
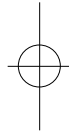
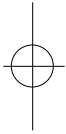
# Healing the Modern in a Central Javanese City



*Carolina Academic Press*  
*Ethnographic Studies in Medical Anthropology Series*



Pamela J. Stewart  
*and*  
Andrew Strathern  
*Series Editors*



# **Healing the Modern in a Central Javanese City**

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**Steve Ferzacca**

The University of Lethbridge,  
Alberta, Canada

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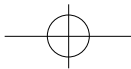
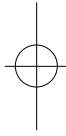
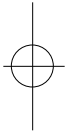
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## Series Editor's Preface

# Medical Anthropology Series: "Healing the Modern in a Central Javanese City"

**Pamela J. Stewart and  
Andrew Strathern**

It gives us much pleasure to introduce this third volume in the Carolina Academic Press Medical Anthropology Series. Steve Ferzacca's work on the kaleidoscopic varieties and interrelations of practices for dealing with sicknesses and health conditions in the city of Yogyakarta in Java transports the reader into the bustle, excitement, complexity, and depth of the urban scene in South-East Asia. Far from being concerned with a simple, integrated "cultural system," Ferzacca's study takes us into a realm commonly faced by anthropologists today, the domain of constant change, marked by transformations in the meanings of modernity, postmodernity, and tradition. The Indonesian government under President Suharto strongly promoted "development," but at the same time supported the idea of Javanese "traditional culture," including medicines, as a way of coping with a range of diseases seen as "Western" (because of their association with introduced patterns of living that are considered "Western"), such as hypertension and adult-onset diabetes. The kind of tension between the "traditional" and the "modern" which was thus set up is classic in many situations around the world, and what we find is exactly the kind of complex mixing of behaviors and practices in many fields of social activity which Ferzacca shows us here for Yogyakarta. A particular inflection of these trends has occurred in Indonesia because of the specific aims of modernization and development, perhaps influenced by the ideas of civil servants and academics trained overseas, including in the U.S.A. These then stand in counterpoint to another drive, that is, to avoid "Westernization" and to preserve Indonesian/Javanese culture, as a mark of national identity. Clearly these aims can be conflicting. Ferzacca's study shows how people, from

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physicians working in clinics and hospitals, through to indigenous specialists, on to the ordinary people who are experiencing illness, try to thread their way between such possible conflicts. The ethnography is detailed, evocative, and compelling, and Ferzacca uses it to comment astutely on many definitional and analytical issues in medical anthropology at large, for example in his commentaries on the well-known work of Arthur Kleinman and Kleinman's idea of the medical system. With a situation so much in flux as is found in Yogyakarta, all medical practitioners and patients are to varying degrees involved in continuous attempts to communicate with one another in both "traditional" and "modern" idioms; and, although the physicians operate in terms of biomedical theories and techniques they need also to operate *inside of* the laypersons' categories of thought; while traditional practitioners are happy to include terms such as "paranormal" to describe their healing activities. Biomedical ideas about disease and pathogens blend with or jostle indigenous ideas about the causes of illness in terms of a different "naturalistic" theory of the world which Ferzacca describes as "a logic of fluid signs," involving ideas of the flow of winds (*angin*) through people, notions of bitter versus sweet tastes, and an extensive use of body massage and the ingestion of elixirs. In the broadest sense this theory of the body, which extends seamlessly from the physical to the social realms as a part of a whole cosmos, may be described as humoral. Ferzacca, however, finds the emphasis here to be on ideas of flow and blockage rather than on the dimensions of hot and cold found in some other contexts of humoral ideas. We can suggest that the notion of balance between forces, vital to humoral systems, is also important in Yogyakarta. As well, we find some emphases that are common in other South East Asian and indeed in some Pacific contexts. One is the importance of smell as a sensory indicator; another has to do with the significance of fasting; and a third with the notion of *rasa* as sap, which Ferzacca describes as a Javanese philosophy of embodiment and which for the Javanese is synonymous with life. *Rasa* is clearly an important "humor," comparable to the idea of *kahyék* among the Temiar people of Malaysia described by Marina Roseman in her book "Healing Sounds from the Malaysian Rainforest" (Roseman 1991). It is also comparable to ideas about "water" or "grease" among the Duna and Hagen people of the Papua New Guinea Highlands (see Strathern and Stewart 1999 and Stewart and Strathern 2001) or the concept of *nu* among the Hua people of Papua New Guinea as described by Anna Meigs (Meigs 1984). One of the strengths of Ferzacca's rich ethnographic presentation is that it can be used to make cross-cultural comparisons with places such as Papua New Guinea (see Strathern and Stewart (2000) for an example of this sort of comparative work).

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In terms of the concomitants of “modernity,” Ferzacca’s references to urban gangs and the value they place on fearlessness is reminiscent also of the surreal world of images that links together clan warriors and gangsters in peri-urban parts of the Papua New Guinea Highlands. Modernity here has to be understood both as a conscious model of the people themselves and as an analytical concept introduced by the ethnographer. “Healing the modern,” the author’s title, thus also refers to a process of which the people are highly conscious. Although western theories about modernity and society find their way freely into the Javanese situation, the particular interpretation of what modernity is and means is one that has been *adapted from* those western models. Similarly, while the biomedical paradigm and its theory of curing disease can be distinguished clearly in principle from the experience of illness and the approaches to healing via complex ideas of social being that hold among the Javanese, in practice the interpretations of both disease and illness are ones that are given a particular Javanese resonance. This in turn helps to explain why the Javanese themselves do not operate with a clear disease/illness distinction. Yet, as an analytical category, it is clearly discernible “there” in the case materials themselves.

This book is suffused with high energy and displays many ways in which it brings its materials to life or makes them “flow” (as life should according to Javanese notions). As is often the case, much of its appeal lies with its case materials, and among these the extended vignettes which appear throughout the text of how the author came to develop his insights are particularly helpful, we feel, for his undergraduate readers. Readers may also gain a good grasp of the general themes of the book by looking towards its end at the accounts of work by particular healers (who wanted their names attached to the narrative as a part of their own demonstrations of their art). These healers themselves embody in their practices all the contradictions they also seek to heal: as when Pak Gembong offers his power as a gift and yet he himself engages in ostentatious displays of wealth. They also correspond to Fredrik Barth’s theory of the entrepreneur as one who creatively brings together previously unrelated spheres of exchange, extracting profit thereby; or to Pierre Bourdieu’s model of the interrelations between symbolic and material capital. Ferzacca himself also shows this same creativity in his book. He brings many, rather unexpected, threads of discussion together, and weaves for us a new way of looking at the Javanese life-world and at medical anthropology itself

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