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Book Review  
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**Review of: “Mystical Black Power: The Calling to Diviner-Mediumship in Southern Africa,” by Edward C. Green, *In Women as Healers: Cross Cultural Perspectives*, Edited by Carol Shepherd McClain. Pp: 186-200. 1989. New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press.**

This article is about why women become sangomas. Sangomas, called diviner-mediums, are healers who are consulted when an illness fails to respond to home remedies or other treatments, or when the cause of the illness or misfortune is unknown. These sangomas divine the cause of the illness through interpreting the casting of objects such as bones, direct spirit possession, or with the assistance of spirits. Over half of the sangomas in Swaziland are female and most of them learn about healing from the spirits. Each of their spirits tends to have a specialized purpose and sangomas have been known to have up to fifteen spirits aiding their work.

One of the main focuses of this article is the Zulu woman Thoko who dreamt that she was supposed to go to Swaziland during a time when she was frustrated with her life due to disharmony at home and an inability to fulfill her goal of being a nurse. She traveled to Swaziland where she apprenticed to a female sangoma. By the end of her training, she had three spirits that would help her diagnose patients and suspected that one more spirit was seeking to manifest through her.

The author mentions several reasons that have been given for women becoming healers such as the sangoma diviner-mediums in Swaziland. The first of hypothesis, posited by Lewis, is that these cults attract socially marginalized people who are subordinate and underprivileged to

give them some measure of power. Becoming a healer is a protest movement directed toward the dominant sex when the women have lack other means to forward their aims. Another hypothesis put forth by O'Connell is that women join these cults as a response to acute stress and an inability to meet social expectations. Thoko may have become a sangoma because she was unable to meet her goal of becoming a healer, and because of acute stress caused by problems at home.

The author's goal in this article was to show that being called to become a traditional healer was a response to cultural problems such as stress or a way to gain more power in your community where you feel marginalized. I feel that he made this point in his article. Thoko was unable to fulfill her goal of being a nurse because of marrying young and having children, so joining a healing cult could have been a way to fulfill her goal of being a healer. According to Green, she was also having problems with her husband. She was unhappy in her marriage and this may have helped send her to the sangoma as a way to distance herself from her family for a time. It also gave her the opportunity to gain some measure of power in her community when she returned. By the end of her training she was on good terms with her husband and she became a successful healer in her community after returning home. Becoming a sangoma also may have given Thoko a sense of meaning and purpose to her life. It may have also been a protest against her husband as part of the training for sangomas required them to give up relations with their husbands accompanied by a long period of separation.

The strengths of this article were that he first defined sangomas and other healers of Swaziland. Green provided a concrete life story that could be used to test some of the assumptions or theories that purport to explain why women become healers. It may have strengthened the article had the author included more information on the exact healing practices

engaged in by the sangomas. Overall, however, this article makes an important contribution to the issue of why women in particular become healers in large numbers cross-culturally.