Luedke, Tracy J., and Harry G. West (eds.), *Borders and Healers: Brokering Therapeutic Resources in Southeast Africa*, Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 2006, 223 pp., 0 253 21805 5, $24.95 (paper).

This engaging collection of ethnographic essays explores how the powers of healers in southern Africa are bound up with their work of transcending and maintaining borders of various kinds. As Steven Feierman points out in the afterword of the volume, the collection conveys a strong sense of the particular regional history of southern Africa, as a place where conceptions about the body and healing practices have long circulated in distinctive ways. The politics of healing in the region extend to the precolonial past, when healers involved in regional associations such as Mwari and Mbona transcended the boundaries of contemporary polities by drawing people from multiple places of origin to sustain collective health and the fertility of the land. It remains quite common for healers in the region to claim that they have acquired their powers from beyond familiar borders, whether from distant countries or from the ultimately unknowable world of the spirits. In extending the tropes of border crossing and border maintenance, the contributors to this volume explore the capacities of healers to negotiate, reinforce or undermine a wide range of social and metaphysical distinctions while confronting legacies of colonial violence and experiences of sharpening inequality. Taken as a whole, the collection demonstrates how healers’ work of re-negotiating borders tends to obstruct the instrumentalist agendas of states and other modernizing institutions, even as healers’ involvement in government and professional associations has given rise to new politics of affliction and healing authority.

Thus, Harry West’s chapter critiques the construction of ‘traditional healing’ in Mozambique, showing that healers formerly deemed ‘subversive delinquents’ under the socialist FRELIMO regime have been recast as ‘low-cost local human resources’ (22) according to the neoliberal logic of the postwar Mozambican state and international donors. West takes issue with Edward Green (*Indigenous Theories of Contagious Disease*, 1999), an American medical anthropologist who has successfully advocated the creation of AMETRAMO, a traditional healers’ professional association in Mozambique, for approaching ‘indigenous knowledge’ of disease as an idiom for biomedical knowledge. In a series of three vignettes of healers’ careers and practices, West shows that healers’ knowledge is ‘more a way of discovering and/or experiencing the world than it is data about the world’ (37), and that their perceived powers derive from their transgressions of borders between the ostensibly discrete categories of indigenous and scientific, traditional and modern practices. Elsewhere (*Kupilikula: Governance and the Invisible Realm in Mozambique*, 2005), West discusses how popular characterizations of healers as ‘knowing a little something’ mediate their relationships with clients; I am not sure that West’s depiction here of such talk as an ‘entrepreneurial maneuver’ (39) does justice to healers’ claims that their powers come from the spirits, or in general terms to constructions of personhood among healers and clients. Complementing West’s piece, Tracy Luedke’s chapter discusses how some AMETRAMO leaders have appropriated the methods of the state in order to police rival healers and church leaders. Drawing on Patrick Chabal and Pascal Daloz’s discussion of ‘ordered disorder’ in African politics (*Africa Works: Disorder as Political Instrument*, 1999), Luedke argues that Christianized *aneneri* prophet-healers in Mozambique are ‘therapeutic entrepreneurs’ (46) who build constituencies based on clientship. While Luedke demonstrates that these healers’ endeavors help to constitute and reproduce multiple models of political authority, I
worry again that the framework of ‘entrepreneurship’ tends to obscure distinctions among such models rather than clarify their moral grounds.

David Simmons’s chapter on tensions over the professionalization of healers in Zimbabwe documents how the ZINATHA healers’ organization promotes the commoditization of ‘African medicines’ while making claims to their authenticity. At a time when Zimbabwean media are accusing healers of ‘cashing in’ on the crisis in public-sector health care, Simmons argues that government scrutiny of healers’ therapies has led them to conceal their practices, and to suspect officials and medical doctors of trying to steal medications so as to enrich themselves. Moving more fully away from an entrepreneurship model, James Pfeiffer discusses how sharpening inequalities in Maputo have sparked popular aversion to curandeiros who demand payments for healing while enhancing the attractiveness of Pentecostalist and independent churches. Pfeiffer relates how church members’ conversion stories center less on rejections of ‘the past’ (cf. Birgit Meyer, Translating the Devil: Religion and Modernity among the Ewe in Ghana, 1999) than on disillusionment with the commodification of traditional healing. In the context of contemporary moral panics surrounding perceived promiscuity and prostitution, Pfeiffer suggests that women may be joining churches so as to evade accusations of promiscuity buttressed by the diagnoses of curandeiros. In general, Pfeiffer argues, the recent turn to the Holy Spirit among the poor of Maputo underscores the social costs of the free market experiment.

In his chapter on Pentecostalist churches in Botswana, Rijk van Dijk focuses on the relevance of their transnationalism for healing. Pentecostalist churches in Botswana appeal to migrants from other African countries confronting xenophobia, as well as to middle-class Batswana who are uncomfortable with ‘traditional’ practices but who nonetheless desire spiritual protection. In a highly original move, van Dijk situates Pentecostalist movements not in the context of globalization but rather in terms of an older literature on regional cults (e.g., Richard Werbner (ed.), Regional Cults, 1977). Van Dijk points out that these churches offer transnational identities to their members while framing their afflictions in terms of regionally specific cosmologies and concepts of personhood. For instance, Pentecostalist churches provide ritual protection against muti to expatriate Ghanaian hairdressers in Botswana, safeguarding them from malign influences in their customers’ hair. ‘In addressing these ills by creating uniform ritual practices,’ van Dijk concludes, ‘there is ultimately no message for the ‘world’; the message is rather for the migrants of different African cultural backgrounds’ (123).

The final three chapters of the volume focus on more discursive aspects of boundary maintenance and transgression in relation to healing. Julian Murchison describes local gossip in southern Tanzania about a woman who gave birth to a box containing AIDS medicines. Murchison interprets such gossip as a method of constructing discursive boundaries around the agency of spirits, whose knowledge cannot be subsumed by science. Stacey Langwick examines the writings of Leader Stirling, a Scottish mission doctor instrumental in the expansion of biomedicine in colonial southern Tanganyika, in order to show how medical practice ‘came to be ideologically as well as materially invested in the binary between biomedicine and its others’ (144). Stirling depicts landscapes in which people are at the mercy of the forces of nature, where clinics must be built in order to establish proper boundaries and to regulate the movements of doctors, patients and their kin. Finally, Christopher Colvin discusses how psychiatric trauma discourse has moved into South Africa in conjunction with the efforts of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Colvin points
out that the compartmentalized psychological models of international trauma specialists are at odds with clients’ stories about deprivations experienced in the present, and that trauma storytelling is not typically open to local idioms of distress. In general, trauma therapy is ‘something that closes rather than opens the discourse and establishes hierarchical social relationships between expert and patient’ (181–182). It might be added that trauma storytelling may not be locally perceived as doing much for the future, while other established forms of expressing distress may involve sufferers in more open-ended relationships with one another.

This collection successfully incorporates some very insightful essays into a thematic whole, and will prove rewarding to specialists and advanced undergraduates.

Frederick Klaits  
Duke University  
University Writing Program  
Box 90025  
Durham, NC 27708  
USA