



## Sangoma Trance States

By Ingo Lambrecht PhD

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Exploring Indigenous Consciousness Disciplines in South Africa. What does happen in the mind of a trancing sangoma, the traditional healer of South Africa? Dr Ingo Lambrecht, a renowned clinical psychologist and a sangoma himself, explores this question, not only through his own personal experiences, but also through the words of powerful sangomas. This book skilfully interweaves personal experiences with scholarly research, into an unusual tapestry that carefully maps the specific trance states of sangomas. It explores some of the consciousness disciplines available to sangomas. The powerful sangomas not only share with Dr Lambrecht their own maddening pain during their spiritual initiation, but also speak of their effective techniques, practices and psi effects whilst in different trance states. The specific mapping of sangoma trance states is compared to other indigenous shamanic practices around the world. From this meticulous integrative work, a model of sangoma trance states emerges that has been endorsed by sangomas as being close to their own experiences of mastering their altered states of consciousness. A unique book.

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

Dr Lambrecht shares his experiences and the place of trance in his own journey in a comfortable, free-flowing narrative style that brings life and perspective to the subject matter, making it accessible with a down-to-earth and rational element.??

This work demonstrates that there can be a mutually inclusive and integrated model incorporating the psychobiological and spiritual aspects of trance.

Jean-Francois Sobiecki. B.Sc. Bot. (Wits), B.Sc. Hons. Ethnobot. (UJ),  
Dipl.Clin.Nutr. (Aus).

Centre for Anthropological Research  
Faculty of Humanities, University of Johannesburg, South Africa

#### From the Author

The origins of this book arose in a flash of insight and through the long work of intense study. It reflects both my personal experiences as a sangoma, a South African shaman, and my research. In fact both poles of understanding, the personal and the academic, have never been separated in my own pathway to being a sangoma. The synthesis of this dialectic of understanding has hopefully provided some insights into what it means to be a sangoma.

The strategy in this book, therefore, is to acknowledge the rich web and net of knowledge other much greater writers and thinkers have provided. Many nodules of knowledge could be explored, but given the restraints of space, this meant that at times I could sadly only hint at other connected areas, whilst having to leave other information out. For this reason, the endnotes present a subtext, an underworld web of textual possibilities, which allows you to follow up on certain strands of knowledge. Likewise, endnotes allow for a smoother read. My aim has been to balance the more philosophical musings with personal experiences of sangomas, sometimes my own. The book is not another personal story about being a sangoma, but rather it is a means of understanding sangomas through merging various strands of knowledge, some academic, some personal accounts from very experienced sangomas. My voice is just one amongst many.

The sangomas of South Africa have been neglected within the shamanic literature, both because of a lack of information around African shamanic practices, and because the trance states that these healers enter are usually construed as being mediumistic or possession trance states. Such trance states are usually conceptualised as not being shamanic in nature. I question the dichotomy between 'possession' and 'shamanic' trance states. The main aim is to establish the nature of the sangoma trance states. I will suggest a model and will contextualise sangoma trance states by accessing a network of writings available on the various relevant topics.

In South Africa, the Zulu word isangoma (in this text the i, a noun prefix, is generally omitted) is the title most generally used by patients, traditional practitioners and biomedical doctors to describe a certain traditional South African medical healer. For the sake of convenience, the noun prefix i, (plural -ama), will be generally omitted in this account. I use the word 'sangoma' to refer to a specific South African traditional health practitioner who enters trance states as part of learned and practised consciousness disciplines. I am aware that some linguists may argue about the semantic purity of 'sangoma' and query its authenticity.

However, I have adopted the language of the sangomas used in various townships and rural areas right across South Africa. Most of those whom I encountered could communicate in English. Almost all sangomas, whatever their ethnic group (Tsonga, Sotho, Xhosa or Zulu), were accustomed to selling their medicines using Zulu vernacular names with some Xhosa and Tsonga words thrown in the mix.

Another point I wish to make is that I refer to all sangomas as female. Firstly, the 'his/her' term is tedious, and it is also a reference to the fact that most sangomas are women. It is a form of respect, given the fact that to be a black woman in South Africa often being doubly repressed, first because of race and then because of gender. This is to acknowledge black women and the political struggles of the many sangomas.

I explored ways of investigating sangoma trance states. Sangomas in South Africa are briefly contextualised. The aim was not to investigate sangoma trance states merely in terms of cultural, religious or medical factors, but to explore the consciousness practices and disciplines of the sangomas. Cultural and religious factors are of course highlighted as they become relevant. Various models of trance states are reviewed.

Besides defining altered states of consciousness, psychological and neurobiological models of trance states are critiqued, an important foundation to understanding sangoma trance states and techniques used to induce them. From the stories of the sangomas, four major trance states have emerged. Each is explored with regard to experiences, meaning and induction techniques. This is followed by a cartography of the trance state, the implications of which focus on the power and knowledge relations of sangoma trance states as consciousness disciplines. I use an analysis of power-knowledge relations to reveal the discipline and technology used during these trance states, which explores the trance body of the sangoma as well as the associated trance psi powers. Throughout the text, the resonating voices of the sangomas underline the significant contributions they have made to understanding the four major trance states presented in terms of their psi effects.

#### About the Author

Ingo Lambrecht PhD is a registered consultant clinical psychologist with over twenty years' experience. He completed his training in psychotherapy through the Sherwood Institute, London and has training and work experience in a variety of settings both in South Africa and New Zealand. He has a collaborative and integrative approach in brief solution-focused therapy, as well long-term individual psychotherapy, and extensive experience in running groups. He has worked with people from diverse backgrounds - children, adolescents, adults, couples and families that present with a large range of issues and difficulties. A significant part of his practice is dedicated to supervision of other health professionals.

Besides his PhD in psychology, MA in Clinical Psychology, and MA in Comparative Literature, he has been a clinical leader at Headway, a traumatic brain injury clinic in Johannesburg, South Africa, as well as the clinical leader at the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service in Hawke's Bay (HBDHB) in New Zealand. He worked as a clinical psychologist with people struggling with severe psychosis at the Buchanan Rehabilitation Centre in Auckland District Health Board (ADHB), and for years he has been at Segar House (ADHB), a specialist service for personality disorders. As a clinical advisor to He Kamaka Oranga (M?ori Health Service, ADHB), he is currently a consultant and project leader on the integration of various M?ori mental health services.

He regularly attends international and national conferences and publishes professionally. His special interest lies with the complex clinical work regarding the cultural-clinical interface for indigenous people.

If you would like to know more about me and my qualifications and publications, please email me at [ingoraban@gmail.com](mailto:ingoraban@gmail.com).

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