

Zohra Mohamed Teke wanted to know why an aspiring clinical psychologist became a sangoma, and discovered some interesting facts about the profession which is so revered in Africa.

Sangoma Lockley is a healing connector

JOHN Lockley is a sangoma. He is one of the few white men in South Africa to be initiated in the Xhosa tradition of sangomas.

Ironically, Lockley, who also holds an honours degree in clinical psychology, does not like being referred to as a "white" traditional healer – despite the international following his stature has attracted. "I didn't choose to be a sangoma."

"I had a dream as a young man during apartheid which I believe was my calling. I was 18 years old and was serving as an army medic after the Angolan war."

"I experienced the 'twaza' or 'calling illness' as it is known in South Africa. After years of suffering one disease after another, including tick bite fever and being swept out to sea and a near fatal car accident, I went from one doctor to another without getting any joy. "I exhausted the so-called 'white' options and eventually after drifting between my studies in clinical psychology and spending three months at a Buddhist retreat in South Korea I met well known Eastern Cape sangoma Mum Gwevu.

Lockley was unable to answer his calling to train as a sangoma because of apartheid laws. It was only after the fall of apartheid that Lockley began his 10-year apprenticeship with Gwevu.

The transformation, he says, was incredible.

His health improved, and he was welcomed into the community, and soon after was given his initiated name Ucingolwendaba – meaning messenger or connector between people and cultures.

To be a sangoma means to be a healer, to answer the cries of suffering in the world around us. The international language of healing is such that you cannot heal on one day and then put a curse on someone the next.

Lockley immersed himself in the Xhosa culture, living with his teacher and her family in the township in an effort to understand and fulfil his calling.

I questioned him about the response of people to a white sangoma.

Lockley who comes across as a modest man who does not want to offend others, is defensive and challenges the significance of his colour, arguing that his work and not his race should be the focus.

"Do you think it is okay for a black person to become a lawyer, priest or a doctor?"

"So if it is okay for black people to enter Western culture and society why is it not okay for white people to enter traditional African culture?"

"I never heard of anyone questioning Desmond Tutu's authenticity as an English priest, an Anglican priest."

"The reason is obvious, he works as a man of God and heals his community."

"At the end of the day, our actions speak loudest."

"I work at spreading awareness about the beauty of traditional Xhosa culture, and I work to help my community, teacher and other sangomas in the township. In South Africa, this question is a bone of contention. However I do find that most people are compassionate when they see the quality of my work and they look past my skin colour," he says.

He acknowledges that, despite his protests about the media's fascination with his colour, it is precisely this which raises public attention and achieves his goal of raising awareness of the role of real sangomas.

A white traditional healer is simply unheard of, never mind a white clinical psychologist. As he reflects on this, Lockley realises it is something to celebrate, and his stature as one of the first white sangomas is an achievement to be proud of.

"You're right," he admits. "I would not achieve my fame if I were not a white sangoma. That is what makes me different and I can't blame the media for that."

Lockley is passionate about what he does, and says his biggest challenge is trying to change public perceptions about traditional healers, which he explains falls under the international banner of shamanism – involving traditional ancestral knowledge, including the use of medicinal plants.

"To be a sangoma means to be a healer, to answer the cries of suffering in the world around us. "The international language of healing is such that you cannot heal on one day and then put a curse on someone the next. "If someone calls themselves a sangoma and at the same time advertises that they can help people to get even with their enemies, or bring disharmony or bad luck on opponents, then they are not sangomas," he adds. Interestingly, Lockley was recently called out to a sheep farm in the Karoo by a farmer after a domestic incident on the property. The farmer, he explains, was struggling to help her em-



THE RITE STUFF: Sangoma John Lockley cleanses a Karoo farm worker.

ployees cope with alcohol abuse. "She felt that part of the problem with the alcohol dependency was that people had lost some of their old traditional values and that if she could bring in a traditional sangoma it would help raise the spirit of her community and help improve the community's sense of who they are."

Herbs

"So following months of discussions with me, I visited the farm last week, armed with my collection of medicinal herbs."

"I performed a traditional ceremony. "In the Xhosa and Zulu language there is no word for depression, only *umoya phantsi* –

spirit energy down, or *umoya phezulu* – spirit energy up.

"So the job of the Sangoma is to raise the spirit energy of the individual or community."

"So our goal is *umoya phezulu*."

"We do this through administering medicinal plants to wash, drink and sprinkle around the home as a kind of African feng shui."

"We also do this through rhythm, song and prayer."

"At the end of it all, the entire farming community felt cleansed."

"Unlike psychologists and modern medical doctors, no sangoma stands alone."

"We are intricately linked with our community, and our community of sangomas, those

we trained under and those we trained with."

Despite his dedication to his profession as a sangoma, he adds that the challenge has been to change the mindset of people in Europe and the States where he spends part of his time.

"Traditional African healing, which is what I do, is received with a fair amount of speculation and reserve."

"Sadly in the Western world, African healing involving herbs is placed in the realm of witchcraft and black magic."

"So part of my job is educating people as to what African spirituality involves."

Yes, there is black magic, but that is not the work of sangomas.

"I conduct workshops on traditional Xhosa healing and consult privately at R400 an hour."

"I teach people to connect with themselves, their dreams, one another, 'community' (*ubuntu*), and nature."

"I do this through rhythm, songs, dancing, medicinal plants, prayer and meditation."

"In South Africa I work with my teacher in the township in the Eastern Cape."

"I hold traditional ceremonies where we honour the ancestors of the Xhosa people for maintaining and keeping alive the sacred teachings of the sangoma people," explains Lockley.

"That in essence is what it's all about."

Women smarter than men, says Trivial Pursuit challenge

BETH HALE

LONDON: It's a question that has fuelled many an argument: who's smarter, men or women?

Now, thanks to the admittedly unscientific experiment of a game of *Trivial Pursuit*, we have the answer.

And it's bad news for the men, with the women nudging ahead to clinch victory.

As the fairer sex celebrates and the chaps nurse their wounded pride, it should be pointed out that this wasn't just any old round of *Trivial Pursuit*.

The makers of the game organised an online version that took place on a global scale, in nine languages.

They lasted for five months and saw about 15 121 731 questions asked and answered – although not all of them correctly.

To clamp down on cheating, there was a 20-second time limit on answering the questions.

The balance of power shifted repeatedly between the sexes, which were sometimes just a few correct answers apart, but ended with the women clinching victory.

They correctly answered 4 088 139 compared to 4 077 596 by the men. Welcoming the result,

former maths expert of game show *Countdown*, Carol Vorderman, said: "It's a magnificent result for women. The game is all about multi-tasking and women are obviously the leaders in that field."

"The women always match the men on the tough subjects in *Trivial Pursuit*, though I wouldn't go so far as to say it was a foregone victory."

Unlike the board game, question is determined by the roll of the dice, players in the online game were able to select the subjects that appealed to their "inner genius".

In a sign of the times, most of the questions selected were from the entertainment category. The second most popular topic was science and nature, followed by sports and leisure and history. Arts and literature, geography and

people and places were least popular.

Entertainment was a piece of cake for the women, who answered twice as many of these questions as men and had a 56.8 percent success rate. The second best category for women was science and nature, but they struggled with questions from the people and places category, answering only 41.7 percent correctly. Men did best in science

and nature, answering 57 percent correctly, and scored 56.7 percent for entertainment.

Sports and leisure, where they answered twice as many questions as the women, was only their third best subject.

Participants had been invited to take part at www.trivialpursuitexperiment.com with questions in English, French, German, Spanish, Dutch, Finnish, Norwegian, Swedish and Danish.

Overall, Britain answered 954 000 questions.

Katreena Lines, of Trivial Pursuit, said: "The online experience invited everyone to show off their inner genius. Our congratulations to the women."

Now *Trivial Pursuit* is planning a new experiment – the Battle of the Generations.

It will pit the under 30 "tech-savvy" crowd against the over 30 "life-savvy" from mid-March. – Daily Mail

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Sarah Brown defends her man

LONDON: Sarah Brown stepped into the bullying row engulfing Downing Street yesterday in a sign that she will play a key role in the campaign to help her husband cling to power.



GORDON AND SARAH BROWN

Making her most overtly political public remarks to date, Brown defended the British Prime Minister against allegations that he has abused Downing Street staff and she tried to depict his forceful personality as an asset.

"Gordon's the man that I know and the man that I love," she said. "People have heard me talk about him and they probably know everything that I would have to say about him. I know him as a strong, hard-working, decent man and he isn't anything else." In an apparent veiled swipe at Tory

leader David Cameron's cultivated public image, Brown said of her husband: "What you see is what you get with him."

Labour strategists say Sarah Brown, a former PR executive, will be asked to follow

in the footsteps of Michelle Obama and become her husband's election campaign 'closer'.

Michelle was known as 'the closer' during the US presidential campaign in 2008 for her ability to win over undecided voters.

Allies of Gordon Brown are drawing up plans for his wife to tour the country with him in the election campaign. She is also expected to be asked to do solo events.

Gordon Brown's supporters hope she will help "soften the edges" of his dour public persona. – Daily Mail