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The Cultural Use of the Wild Olive Tree by the *amaXhosa* People in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa

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Abstract

The cultural meanings of harvested plants have for the most part been ignored in academic research on non-timber forest products (NTFPs) in southern Africa. Historically scientists have tended to ignore the complex relationships between nature and culture. Given the country's unique political and economic past and the current search for sustainable use of natural resources, a focus on the convergence of natural science and cultural diversity is important at this time. Empirical data on cultural practices is being collected in order to develop fresh and relevant insights into the complex relationships between culture and biodiversity. The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate that the concept of culture needs to be brought into our understanding of the role of NTFPs. We document the use and value of a specific tree, *Olea europaea* L. subsp. *africana* (Mill.) P.S. Green, called *Umnquma* in the Xhosa language, for cultural purposes, by both rural and urban households.

Introduction

Recently in southern Africa, much attention has been given to the importance of wild plants for rural livelihoods, both through their household consumption and sale (Campbell and Luckert 2002; Shackleton *et al.* 2002). Cunningham's (1997) review of ethnobotanical literature from eastern and southern Africa focuses predominantly on the utilitarian use of wild plants, such as their edible use value, medicinal uses, fuelwood and charcoal use, fencing and construction use, domestic use, and commercial trade values such as wood carving. Wild harvested

plant products are generally classified as having either a subsistence consumption value or a commercial value (Goebel *et al.* 2000; Campbell and Luckert 2002) but may also have cultural functions. The significance of these has, however, been poorly documented. The majority of studies that address the cultural significance of plants focus on areas or units of vegetation, such as sacred forests, rainmaking sites, landmarks, and so on (Posey 1999; Goebel *et al*. 2000). The cultural meanings of harvested plants have for the most part been ignored in academic research in southern Africa. However, a number of southern African ethnic groups, among them the Xhosa, have, despite urbanization, displacement, and other impacts of the apartheid regime, retained the use of wild plants for cultural functions. Cocks and Wiersum (2003), for instance, show that wild harvested plant material and derived products can still hold strong cultural values in both rural and peri-urban areas.

Several studies have indicated that significant numbers of wild plant products are used in urban areas. This has been documented notably in connection with medicinal plant products (Mander 1998; Williams, Balkwill, and Witkowski 2000; Dold and Cocks 2002). Such medicinal use of wild plant products also has an important but poorly documented cultural dimension. For example, a study in the Eastern Cape Province found that 61% of the purchases of indigenous plant medicines were used for protection against evil spirits, 23 % for 'good luck', and 10% for removing poison or sorcery (Cocks and Møller 2002). Such data indicate the significance and value that commercialized wild plants have for urban communities for either utilitarian or cultural functions (Dold and Cocks 2002; Cocks and Dold 2004). In South African scholarship, much analytical attention has been given to the flow of cash and remittances from urban to rural areas, but the reverse flow of materials and symbols to urban areas has been less recognized.

South African natural science has historically tended to ignore the complex relationships between nature and culture. Given the country's unique political and economic past and the current search for sustainable use of natural resources, a focus on the relationship between natural science and cultural diversity is particularly important at this time. South African botanists therefore need to collect empirical data on cultural values of plants in order to develop fresh and relevant insights into the connections between culture and biodiversity. The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate that the concept of culture needs to be brought into our botanical understanding of the role of NTFPs. We therefore document the use and value of a specific tree, *Olea europaea* L. subsp. *africana* (Mill.) P.S. Green, called *Umnquma* in the Xhosa language, for cultural purposes, by both rural and urban households.

For the purposes of this study, the definition of culture will be based on that of the UNESCO Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2002), where culture is defined as 'the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, and that it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs'.

Study Sites

We randomly selected two typical peri-urban settlements in the Peddie District of the former Ciskei Bantustan called Woodlands and Ntloko. In both of them a large proportion of the community is reliant on cash income from adjacent urban areas and state welfare rather than on subsistence economies (Palmer 1997). The homelands were a result of resettlement policy implemented by the apartheid government. With the advent of democracy in 1994, the homelands were merged into the current South African provinces, but they still display many of the desperate conditions created during the apartheid era. The former Transkei and Ciskei homelands are now amalgamated with the Eastern Cape Province, which is characterized by a weak economy, an unemployment level as high as 45.5% (Ainslie *et al*. 1997), poor infrastructure, high population densities (Viljoen 1994), and heavy dependence on urban earnings and government welfare payments. People of the study sites mostly self-identify as members of the *amaXhosa* and *amaMfengu* ethnic subgroups of the Nguni group and speak the *isiXhosa* language.

The two villages comprise 316 households and 1817 individuals. Fifty-four percent of households (n=170) are male headed and 46% (n=146) are female headed. Fifty-seven percent (n=1041) of the population are adults of whom 21% are pensioners, 19% are employed in occasional employment, 18% are employed in fixed employment, and 42% are unemployed. The remaining 43% (n=776) are children of whom 79% are enrolled in school and 21% are below the age of six. Sixty-three percent of households practice subsistence agriculture in the form of vegetable and maize cultivation in home gardens. Only 3% of the households are engaged in commercial agricultural activities, while 33% of the households own livestock and therefore have direct access to products such as milk and meat.

Both Ntloko and Woodlands are adjacent to thicket vegetation (Albany Thicket Biome *sensu* Mucina and Rutherford 2006), which is representative of a closed shrubland to low forest dominated by evergreen, sclerophyllous, or succulent trees, shrubs, and vines typical of the hilly countryside of the Eastern Cape. This vegetation community occurs from

the Western Cape eastwards through the Eastern Cape to KwaZulu-Natal. In undisturbed areas, it is often impenetrable, generally not divided into strata, and has little herbaceous ground cover. These thickets contain a great diversity of species, among them the characteristic species *Mystroxylon aethiopicum, Plumbago auriculata, Dovyalis rotundifolia, Diospyros dichrophylla, Euphorbia triangularis, Euphorbia tetragonal*, and *Asparagus* species (Low and Rebelo 1996). Rainfall ranges between 400 and 800 mm per year.

Two urban sample surveys were conducted in the cities of King William's Town and East London among poor, middle-class, and wealthy African households. Three-hundred and four households were interviewed in suburban, township, and informal settlements in both cities. King William's Town is home to 28,090 people, of whom 56% (n=15,873) are black Africans (Statistics South Africa 2001). East London is home to 296,295 people, of whom 64% (n=190,180) are black Africans (Statistics South Africa 2001). The areas selected for the study in King William's Town were both suburban and informal settlements, namely Zwelitsha, Zones Four and One, and, in East London, West Bank, Mdantsane, Duncan Village, and Amalinda. Post-apartheid cities remain polarized in the Eastern Cape. The black townships with poor public services on the outskirts have recently seen the growth of adjoining informal settlements characterized by shack dwellings with no public services.

Methods

Several methods were used to collect the relevant data. During more than ten years of research and development activities in the study area, both authors have attended many sacrificial rituals featuring the *umnquma* plant (including the *ukubuyisa* and *imbeleko* rites described below). Access to these rituals was facilitated by a close working relationship with the families and communities. Our sense is that our participant-observation did not significantly affect the form and content of these rituals. Access to such events has obviously provided us with significant insight into the importance and significance of plant use in these rituals. The quantitative data on the significance of ritual plants was collected under the framework of a broader study on the use of wild plants in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa (Cocks 2006a). A questionnaire was administered to 100% of households of Woodlands and Ntloko. The questionnaire included questions on household demographic information, the amounts of woody plant material collected, and the frequency of collection. The first author conducted household interviews with the help of four Xhosa-speaking students during January and March 2001.

Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) techniques, such as ranking and priority exercises with groups of various gender and age categories, were also undertaken to complement interview data. The second author collected plant specimens from the thicket vegetation surrounding the two villages with local informants. He also collected voucher specimens that were identified and lodged in the Selmar Schonland Herbarium (GRA) in Grahamstown.

Information on the urban use of the *umnquma* was collected from King William's Town and East London. A Xhosa-speaking field assistant conducted interviews in the Xhosa language in each of the 304 sample households during 2003.

The Use of Indigenous Plant Products

Ninety-five percent of the families interviewed in the rural study sites used indigenous plant products in one way or another, and to varying degrees. Uses include construction, fuel, fencing, livestock and poultry enclosures, medicines, food supplements, veterinary medicine, and spiritual and ritual use. Just over one hundred plant taxa were identified as being used on a regular basis by people other than professional herbalists and traditional healers. It is therefore clear that wild plant resources contribute to the livelihood strategies of communities within the study sites. It is, however, significant that almost half of all the plant material used within the villages (being one-third of the taxa recorded) is specifically used for spiritual and ritual purposes. For example, many 'medicinal' plants (in the broadest sense) are used in ceremonies to protect individuals and families against sorcery, worn or carried as amulets in times of vulnerability, used to induce dreams as a means of direct communication with ancestors during sleep, used as purgatives to expel evil spirits, or simply grown in strategic places around the home to appease the ancestors and protect the home from evil forces (Cocks and Wiersum 2003).

Olea europaea *subsp.* Africana

Olea europaea subsp. *africana*, called *umnquma* in the study site and widely known in English as the Wild Olive, is a small-to-medium-sized evergreen tree reaching ±10 m, often with a gnarled, twisted trunk and a dense neatly rounded crown with glossy grey-green to dark-green leaves that are greyish below (fig. 1). The rough, grey bark sometimes peels off in strips. Sprays of tiny, lightly scented white to greenish flowers appear between October and February, and are followed (from March to July)

by small, spherical, thinly fleshed fruit that ripens to a rich purple-black. The fruit is a favored food for monkeys, baboons, mongooses, bush pigs, warthogs, and birds. Its leaves are eaten by both wild game and domestic livestock. This tree is an asset on farms and game farms, especially in very dry areas, because it is extremely hardy and is an excellent fodder tree. The wood is hard, heavy, and attractive, and so is used for furniture and carvings. The plant was previously known as *Olea africana* Mill., but is now regarded as a small-fruited subspecies (subsp. *africana* [Mill.] P.S. Green) of the commercial European Olive (*Olea europaea* L.).

Figure 1. The *umnquma* tree in its habitat (photo by Tony Dold).

The species occurs in a wide range of habitats, often along stream banks, and is common in most parts of South Africa. It also occurs northwards

as far as Ethiopia and as far eastwards as the island of Réunion (Pooley 1993). The leaves are used medicinally in South Africa to treat high blood pressure, enhance renal function, relieve colicky infants, and as an eye lotion (Van Wyk, Van Oudtshoorn, and Gericke 1997). Recent scientific experiments have revealed that chemicals extracted from *Olea africana* subsp. *europaea* could be used as an effective and cheap treatment in hypertension in the African population (Somova *et al*. 2003). The trees are common in the study area and there appear to be no community-wide prohibitions against harvesting of leaf and woody material for ritual use, fodder, medicine, or building materials. Wild olives are, however, rarely cut down, as it is considered taboo to kill the tree. Small leafy branches may be removed regularly and occasionally larger branches and stems are removed for construction, but, despite this abuse, the often scarred and stunted trees are remarkably hardy and long-lived.

One measure of the symbolic importance of the *umnquma* tree, and in line with the renaming of regional council districts throughout South Africa, the Butterworth Municipality has recently been renamed the *Umnquma* Municipality. Large trees are often incorporated into the village and homesteads where they provide shade and support structures. In one imaginative case, a tree serves as a mechanical workshop where motor vehicle engines are hoisted into the tree with block and tackle. In the study area, this species is also used as a veterinary medicine (Dold and Cocks 2001), and small forked branches are used as whisks in the preparation of herbal medicines by traditional healers (*amagqirha*). Occasionally small plants are planted in gardens for ornamental and shade purposes, but this is not common. The greatest threat to *umnquma* in the study sites is the clearing of land for commercial agricultural purposes, such as pineapple production and pasturelands. Although the clearing of natural vegetation is controlled by the State, permits are issued and vegetation is usually removed mechanically with large earth-moving machinery. In most cases, local communities have little or no say in how the landscape is transformed, but due to their poverty they may accept the value of agriculture and development in poor communities as outweighing the loss of the natural vegetation.

Ritual Sacrifices

It is well known that ritual sacrifices are performed by the *amaXhosa* people to solicit ancestral blessings (Wilson, Balkwill, and Witkowski 1952; Poland, Hammond-Tooke, and Voigt 2003) and to afford protection from malevolent forces such as sorcery (Dold and Cocks 1999). These sacrifices invariably involve the slaughter of a domestic animal, usually

an ox or a goat. The host family invites clansmen, family, neighbours and friends to attend and large quantities of food and traditional beer are prepared. Preparations for these costly rituals can take up to five days (Cocks *et al*. 2006).

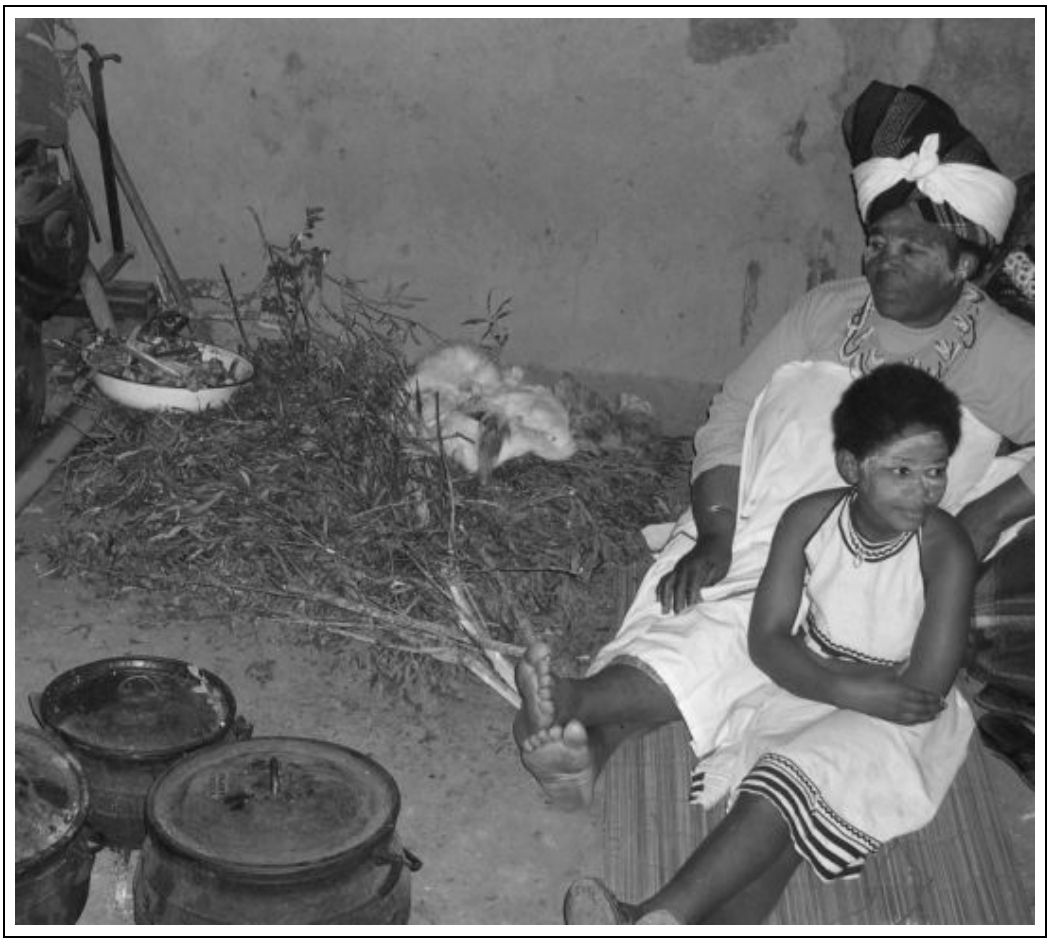

Figure 2. An *Imbeleko* ritual near Alice in the Eastern Cape in 2004. The ritual is to introduce the young girl to her ancestors, a goat is sacrificed, and some of its meat, covered by the skin, rests on the pile of *Olea* leaves and branches. On the left side of the pile of branches is a bowl with left-over bones that will be burnt with the branches on the final day of the ritual. The burning of the bones is a ritual within a ritual—family members gather in the cattle-byre at sunrise and burn the bones to ash (photo by Tony Dold).

In the study area there are several important and commonly performed rituals with sacrifices that involve *Olea*. *Ukubuyisa* and *Ukukhapha* require the sacrifice of an ox in the cattle byre (*isiXhosa—ubuhlanthi*; South African English—kraal) to appease the paternal ancestors (*izinyanya*) soon after the death of the family patriarch and are repeated on the first anniversary of his death. The *Imbeleko* ritual requires the sacrifice of a goat

(male or female), also in the kraal, to introduce a newborn member of the clan to the ancestors. Though it used to be carried out during the first few weeks of a child's life, these days it may be postponed for several years, as in the case of the little girl illustrated in Figure 2. *Intambo* is the solicitation of the ancestral spirits at the time of serious illness of a family member, during which a male goat is sacrificed in the kraal and the patient wears a protective necklace (*isiyaca*) made from the animal's tail hair. The customary initiation of Xhosa teenagers into manhood (*isiko lokwaluka*) by means of ritual seclusion and circumcision is concluded in a ceremony (*ukuceba*) in which each initiate has his head shaved in the kraal followed by the ritual sacrifice (*ukungcamisa*) of a goat, also in the kraal.

The women's equivalent to the *Ukubuyisa* ritual is called *Inkobe* and requires the sacrifice of a goat to appease the maternal ancestral spirits (*izinyanya*) soon after the death of the family matriarch and is repeated on the first anniversary of her death. The welcoming of a new bride to her husband's home and clan is called *ukutyiswa amasi.* A goat is sacrificed to introduce the new family member to the ancestral spirits. These rituals take place at the household's woodpile (*igoqo*) and are undertaken by clanswomen only (Cocks *et al.* 2006). Several other less commonly practiced ritual sacrifices are known in the study area.

Rituals are performed regularly in Ntloko and Woodlands. The greatest restriction to the frequency of these rituals is lack of money for the purchase of the sacrificial animal and other necessary provisions. The month with most ritual performances is December, since family and clan members are able to return home over the Christmas holiday and, most importantly, to contribute financially. Initiation ceremonies are always held in June and December, during holiday periods that enable family members to attend.

A ritual is typically a three-day event climaxing in the sacrifice presided over by the family patriarch. The sacrificial animal is chosen by the ancestors (*izinyanya*) and pointed out in a dream or by unusual behaviour of the animal itself. It is led into the kraal and prodded with a spear until it bellows, whereupon the gathering cheers in approval until the animal is finally stabbed in the heart and succumbs. The butchering of the carcass follows Xhosa protocol (*ukushwama*) with choice cuts from the right shoulder (*intsonyama*) being set aside for the immediate family. Sheep are not sacrificed as they do not bellow when killed, this being the required indication that the ancestral spirits have accepted the sacrifice (Cook 1931). Should the animal be rejected by the ancestral spirits, the sacrifice and the entire ritual is abandoned and a second attempt is scheduled after consultation with the ancestral spirits.

Use of Umnquma

On the day of a sacrificial ritual, young men and boys (not necessarily clansmen) go out, usually on foot, to collect *umnquma* branches for the sacrifice. There is no specific procedure or ceremony in the collection or placement of the material. The tree is common in the study area and access for the harvesting of material is unrestricted on communal land, municipal commonages, and roadsides. A vehicle may be hired to transport material to urban rituals. Approximately 19 kg (standard deviation: ± 5.2 kg) of *umnquma* branches are harvested per household. The branches are piled at the back of the kraal (or adjacent to the *igoqo* woodpile in the case of a ritual for a family matriarch) and are used as a plate or platter (*isithebe*) to hold the meat of the sacrificed animal while it is being butchered. This is both symbolic and utilitarian in that the meat is kept off the bare ground. All clans in the study area typically use *umnquma* for this purpose, but many have additional plant species that are also used for the same purpose. These deviations from the *umnquma* norm are clan specific and are identified through recurring dreams or with the assistance of a traditional healer. Examples of these include *Ptaeroxylon obliquum* (*umthathi*), which is more commonly used by the *amaXhosa*, and *Phoenix reclinata* (*isundu*) commonly used by the *amaMfengu*. The *umnquma* branches remain in the kraal until the third and last day of the ritual when they become the fuel to burn the bones and remains of the carcass of the sacrifice in a ritual called *ukutshisa amathambo*. The ash is finally swept into the ground of the kraal. According to our informants, *umnquma* is used because it symbolizes the ancestral spirits. Ranking exercises conducted across various social, ages, and gender groups in the study sites placed two plant species repeatedly and unequivocally as overall 'most important': *umnquma* and *umthathi* (*Ptaeroxylon obliquum*). The reason given was that these species are 'required for the performance of Xhosa rituals' (Dold and Cocks 2000b).

The coexistence of traditional Xhosa cultural practices and Christian belief systems has been well documented by anthropologists (Pauw 1975; Du Toit 1980). In our study area, although some aspects of Xhosa sacrifices have been modified to suit the more conservative churches, there appears to be no conflict between the Christian faith and Xhosa ancestral rituals. The majority of our informants belong to one of the region's many Christian denominations. They regularly attend church services and also host and attend Xhosa rituals. It is not unusual for a Christian minister to lead prayers before and after a sacrifice. Many Christians maintain relationships with their dead ancestors by performing and participating in Xhosa rituals, although the forms and meanings

of ritual behaviour vary considerably. Conservative Christian families may substitute a formal sit-down dinner for the sacrifice, thus conforming more closely to Christian or Western tradition (Pauw 1975).

The practice of ritual slaughter is likely to continue into the future as cultural activities often provide a reference point for confronting situations of uncertainty (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999; Niehaus 2001; Bond and Ciekawy 2001). This has been further strengthened by a growing national pride in African culture, fostered by the South African government's African Renaissance campaign and celebrity media coverage, which are doing much to promote traditional cultural practice. It has, for example, become fashionable for Xhosa celebrities to celebrate both a Christian wedding ceremony and a traditional African ceremony with symbolic exchanges such as the presentation of traditional reed mats and grass brooms to the bride. When in 2004 South Africa won its bid to host an international sporting event, the ensuing national celebration included a televised traditional ritual slaughter of a beast to thank the ancestors for facilitating the successful bid. A recent heated debate in the media between community leaders, animal rights activists, and health authorities in Grahamstown (Dold and Cocks 1999) revealed that animal sacrifice is on the increase in South Africa's urban suburbs. *Olea* is a key symbol in this process.

Table 1. Percentage frequency of ritual performance by different characteristics of household heads

Household heads	Peri-urban household percentages (n=316)		Urban household percentages (n=304)
Sex	Male	52% (n=106)	66% (n=109)
	Female	48% (n=97)	32% (n=53)
	Missing data		2% (n=3)
Occupation	Pensioner	51% (n=103)	19% (n=32)
	Professional	0% (n=0)	21% (n=34)
	Unemployed	29% (n=59)	9% (n=15)
	Low/med skilled	19% (n=39)	35% (n=60)
	Other	1% (n=2)	6% (n=8)
	Missing data	0% (n=0)	10% (n=16)
Education level	None	26% (n=54)	.5% (n=1)
	Primary	38% (n=75)	24% (n=40)
	Secondary	33% (n=66)	44% (n=71)
	Further	3%	24% (n=40)
	Missing data		7.5% (n=13)

In the rural study sites, 65% of households surveyed hosted rituals and made use of *umnquma*. The households who predominantly performed rituals were male-headed households (52%), pensioners (51%),

and had a primary level of education (38%). In the urban centres, 52% of the households surveyed conducted rituals and made use of *umnquma*. The households who predominantly performed rituals were male headed (66%), employed in low and semi-skilled employment (35%), and had secondary levels of educations (44%) (Tables 1 and 2).

Table 2. Percentage of head of households conducting rituals in rural households (n=316) and urban households (n=304). X2 results are shown (NS=Not significant, p>0.05; *=p<0.05; ***p<0.001).

Variables		Do not perform rituals	Perform rituals	X2	Significant
Head of rural household	Gender			.44	*
	Male	38	62		
	Female	34	66		
Head of urban household	Gender			.001	***
	Male	47	67		
	Female	53	33		
Head of rural household	Education			.90	NS
	None	27	26		
	Primary	34	36		
	Secondary	35	32		
	Further	2	3		
Head of urban household	Education			.50	NS
	None	0	0.6		
	Primary	22	25		
	Secondary	56	44		
	Further	21	25		
	Missing	0	4		
Head of rural household	Occupation			.14	NS
	Low/med skilled	20	16		
	Professional	3	3		
	Other	4	1		
	Pensioner	40	51		
	Unemployed	32	29		
Head of urban household	Occupation			.01	*
	Professional	23	21		
	Low/med skilled	44	36		
	Other	12	5		
	Pensioner	17	19		
	Unemployed	3	9		
	Missing	9	0		

In the rural communities of Woodlands and Ntloko, the gender of the household head has only a slight correlation with the frequency of ritual performance, whereas in the urban centres significantly more male-headed households engaged in rituals. However, other socio-economic factors, such as level of education and occupation of household head, had at most a very slight correlation with the frequency of ritual practice in either urban or rural areas. This pattern demonstrates a remarkable continuity of ethnobotanical values and ritual practice across rural and urban communities in this part of South Africa.

It is, however, important to note the diversity of culture that exists in the study area. One-third of the rural households and almost half of the urban households did not host rituals or make ceremonial use of the Wild Olive but continued to make use of traditional medicines (Cocks and Dold 2006) or purchase cultural artefacts, such as traditional brooms and mats for ceremonial functions (Cocks and Dold 2004). As noted by Bank (2002), many of these cultural practices and activities have been recorded as taking on a new form, with women sometimes taking charge of certain aspects of ritual and custom that were largely men's responsibility in the past. This is despite the onslaught of the apartheid regime and the ongoing impact of global economic processes in South Africa (Cocks 2006a, 2006b). The reason for this, as argued by Canclini (1995), is that people do not simply 'enter or leave modernity' but rather experience a dynamic process of trans-cultural exchange, where the modern fails to substitute for the traditional, resulting in constant rearticulations of tradition (Canclini 1995). Therefore, people deliberately choose elements from the cultural assemblage available to them and creatively assert freshly forged practices as authentic 'tradition' (Bhabha 1996).

Discussion and Conclusion

Despite the frequency of rituals involving the use of *umnquma* in the study area, there is little attention paid to it in the biological and social-scientific literature. In the past, most studies of the role of wild plant products in South Africa focused predominantly on understanding their importance for meeting basic household needs and obtaining additional income. Clearly the use of wild plant products is not restricted to such utilitarian purposes, but also provides an important means for communities to articulate, assert, and practice cultural values and to reaffirm social networks. Botanists therefore need to introduce the concept of *culture* into their analyses and not simply portray the significance of environmental resources in terms of economic values to users. Our data support recent observations that indicate that wild plants hold important

cultural significance for urban Africans (Dold and Cocks 2000a; Cocks and Møller 2002). Our study shows that the continued use of NTFPs and wild plants in these urban areas of South Africa is both cultural and utilitarian.

The important cultural values attributed to plant species, such as *Olea europaea* subsp. *africana* do not mean that their use is sustainable. For example, members of the Woodlands community indicated that many plant species are becoming increasingly difficult to find (Cocks and Wiersum 2003). Cultural value does not necessarily lead to harvesting restraint, and therefore cultural practices may be threatened by the destruction of the very species on which they depend. The cultural values attributed to many plant species could, however, be used as the foundation for policies to conserve biodiversity. Such policies have generally been applied in small homogenous communities in remote areas but have seldom been extended to more urban societies. In South Africa, apartheid resulted in the breakdown of traditional rural structures in the former homelands (Van Wyk, Van Oudtshoorn, and Gericke 1997), and many people now live in urban or peri-urban communities. Our study has shown that even in these communities, people not only use wild plant resources for utilitarian purposes, but also rely on them in the performance of their cultural practices. We recommend that programs for the conservation of bidiversity should pay attention to people and plants on the rural–urban interface, and to the complex connections between the urban areas and their rural hinterlands.

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