

**THE ETHNOTAXONOMIC PRINCIPLES OF USEFUL INDIGENOUS PLANTS OF  
THE MAMABOLO COMMUNITY IN THE LIMPOPO PROVINCE**

**By**

**Alice Shaena Mailula**

**SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE  
DEGREE OF MASTERS IN FOLKLORE IN THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL  
SCIENCES, UNIVERSITY OF LIMPOPO, SOVENGA, SOUTH AFRICA.**

**SUPERVISOR: RANKOANA S. A.**

**CO- SUPERVISOR: PROFESSOR KGATLA S. T.**

**SUBMITTED DATE: MARCH 2009**

## **DECLARATION**

I declare that the Ethnotaxonomic Principles of useful Indigenous Plants of the Mamabolo Community in the Limpopo Province (mini-dissertation) hereby submitted to the University of Limpopo, for the degree of Masters of Arts in Folklore Studies) has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other university; that it is my work in design and in execution, and that all material contained therein has been duly acknowledged.

---

12 April 2010

**A.S Mailula Mrs**

**Date**

## **ABSTRACT**

This study contains documentation and naming of indigenous plant species of the GaMamabolo area. Knowledge about their classification and their local natural resources has been acknowledged through this study. It is not only naming and classification but extending information about interaction of useful indigenous plants with human society. This is followed by a survey of 85 plant species found in the Mamabolo area. The immense cultural significance of the traditional knowledge system is portrayed in this study.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Acknowledgements are due to the following:

This dissertation is dedicated to my family, in particular, my loving husband, Sidney Lesetja Mailula, through the support he has shown from the beginning of this study. May the Almighty God shower him with never-ending blessings. Not forgetting my sweet children, Mpekana, Kanti and Daggi, for encouraging me to pursue my studies even though I was about to retire from the teaching fraternity. I thank also my friends and relatives who were also motivating me. Anna Segooa gave me support in offering me access to her internet.

Mr Molepo Ditšie, helped me with the knowledge of how indigenous plants are utilized and their significance in people's life. Mrs Lamola Sefofane as an herbalist has been open with her Indigenous Knowledge Systems. My husband's friends who reside in GaMamabolo, contributed with their information about some of GaMamabolo useful indigenous species taxonomy.

The following people have also contributed to this dissertation in showing me how to utilize a computer:

Mr Matlala Kgaudi Phillemon  
Namethe Roafa  
Lethabo  
Thendo  
Mokgadi

Sincere thanks are due to my supervisor, Ms AS Rankoana, for being always there whenever I needed help. She has personally played a definite role in stimulating my interest and perseverance through-out this study. I am also grateful to my co-supervisor, Prof. Kgatla, for his guidance.

Above all mentioned people; I thank the Almighty God for the completion of this study, by giving me healthy mind and body to pursue the course work, research proposal and the dissertation.

**ALICE SHAENA MAILULA**  
**APRIL 2010**

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<b>PAGES</b>
Declaration.....	i
Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgement .....	iii
..	
<b>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Statement of the problem.....	3
1.2 Definition of terms.....	5
1.2.1 Principles.....	5
1.2.2 Ethnobotany.....	5
1.2.3 Taxonomy .....	6
1.2.4 Ethnotaxonomy.....	6
1.2.5 Indigenous knowledge systems.....	6
1.2.6 Culture.....	7
1.2.7 Plants.....	7
1.3 Literature review/Survey .....	7
1.4 Motivation.....	9
1.5 Study aim and objectives.....	10
1.5.1 Study aim.....	10
1.5.2 Study objective.....	10
1.6 Methodology.....	10
1.6.1 Study design.....	10
1.6.2 Timeframe.....	11
1.6.3 Sample.....	11
1.6.3.1 Sampling procedure.....	12

1.6.3.2 Sample size.....	12
1.6.4 Data collection.....	12
1.6.4.1 Secondary data.....	12
1.6.4.2 Primary data.....	13
1.6.4.3 Data collection process.....	13
1.6.5 Data analysis.....	14
1.6.6 Research questions.....	14
1.6.7 Challenges.....	15
<b>CHAPTER 2: ETHNOGRAPHY.....</b>	<b>16</b>
2.1 Historical background.....	16
2.2 Location.....	16
2.3 Climate.....	17
2.4 Vegetation.....	17
2.5 Cultural background.....	18
2.6 Language.....	18
2.7 Religious, magic and traditional healing.....	18
2.8 The ethnobotany of GaMamabolo community.....	19
2.8.1 The medical ethnobotanical of GaMamabolo.....	23
2.8.2 Gathering of plant materials.....	26
2.8.3 Vegetable dishes.....	26
2.8.4 Collection of indigenous fruits.....	28

## **CHAPTER 3: GAMAMABOLO PRINCIPLES OF INDIGENOUS TAXONOMY OF THE LOCAL VEGETATION.....32**

3.1 Indigenous plants.....	32
3.1.1 <i>Mabjang</i> .....	32
3.1.2 <i>Mehlašana</i> .....	33
3.1.3 <i>Dikgophha</i> .....	33
3.1.4 <i>Mehlare</i> .....	34
3.2 Categories according to use.....	34
3.2.1 Taxonomy derived from taste.....	35
3.2.2 Habitat.....	35
3.2.3 Morphological taxonomy.....	35
3.2.4 Medicinal taxonomy.....	36
3.2.5 Functional taxonomy.....	36
3.2.6 Taxonomy derived from food.....	37
3.3 Other Generic Terms.....	37
3.3.1 <i>Dihlare</i> (Medicinal plants).....	37
3.3.2 <i>Dikgong</i> (Firewood).....	37
3.3.3 <i>Merogo</i> (Sidedishes).....	38
3.3.4 <i>Phulo</i> (Fodder).....	38

## **CHAPTER 4: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF INDIGENOUS PLANTS.....39**

4.1 Grass category.....	39
4.1.1 <i>Kgoloane</i> ( <i>Aristita</i> sp; red grass).....	39
4.1.2 <i>Lefielo</i> ( <i>Aristida congesta</i> ; broom grass).....	40

4.1.3 <i>Mabjang</i> ( <i>Eragrostis pall</i> ; broom love grass).....	40
4.1.4 <i>Mabjang</i> ( <i>Ishaemum afrum</i> ; turf grass).....	40
4.1.5 <i>Mabjang</i> ( <i>Stipagrostis ciliata</i> ; tall bush grass).....	41
4.1.6 <i>Mabjang</i> ( <i>Harpochloa falx</i> ; caterpillar grass).....	41
4.1.7 <i>Mabjang</i> ( <i>Cymopogon validus</i> ; giant turpentine grass).....	41
4.1.8 <i>Mabjang</i> ( <i>Hyperthelia dissolute</i> ; yellow thatching grass).....	42
.. 4.1.9 <i>Mabjang</i> ( <i>Hyparrhenia filipendula</i> ; fine thatching grass).....	42
4.1.10 <i>Motshikiri</i> ( <i>Aristida</i> ; barbicollis grass).....	42
4.1.11 <i>Mohlakahlaka</i> ( <i>Cynodon dactylon</i> ; scutch grass).....	43
4.1.12 <i>Lefielo</i> ( <i>Porobons pyramidalis</i> ; catstail grass).....	43
4.1.13 <i>Mohlahla</i> ( <i>Scirpus validus</i> ; common bulrush).....	43
4.1.14 <i>Lehlakanoka</i> ( <i>Phragmites grandiflora</i> ; common river reed) .....	44
<b>4.2 Indigenous creeper.....</b>	<b>44</b>
4.2.1 <i>Mompate</i> ( <i>Dicerocaryum eriocarpum</i> ; devil's-claw).....	44
4.2.2 <i>Mohlakahlaka</i> ( <i>Cynodon dactylon</i> ; creeping grass).....	44
4.2.3 <i>Phela</i> ( <i>Cf. hypoxis</i> ; yellow star).....	45
4.2.4 <i>Selešo</i> ( <i>Fadogia tertraquetra</i> ; unknown).....	45
4.2.5 <i>Theepe</i> ( <i>Amaranthus thubergii</i> ; pigweed).....	45
4.2.6 <i>Phelalegolana</i> ( <i>Dicoma gerraddii</i> ; koors-bossie).....	45
4.2.7 <i>Tshetlo</i> ( <i>Tribulus terrestris</i> ; devil's thorn).....	46
4.2.8 <i>Monyaku</i> ( <i>Cucumis africanus</i> ; wild cucumber.....	46

<b>4.3 Indigenous potherbs.....</b>	46
4.3.1 <i>Morotho</i> ( <i>Gynandropis</i> ; spider-wisp).....	46
4.3.2 <i>Monawa</i> (No botanical name; indigenous beans).....	47
4.3.3 <i>Mophotse</i> (No botanical name; pumpkin young leaves).....	47
4.3.4 <i>Mantlalekgeru</i> (No botanical name; unknown).....	47
4.3.5 <i>Letelele</i> ( <i>Amaranthus spinosus</i> ; thorny pigweed).....	48
<b>4.4 Indigenous shrubs.....</b>	
4.4.1 <i>Thithikwane</i> ( <i>Hypoxis villosa</i> ; bushman poison bulb).....	48
4.4.2 <i>Legaba</i> ( <i>Cf. hypoxis</i> ; African potato).....	48
4.4.3 <i>Tlokoane</i> (No botanical name; mushroom).....	49
4.4.4 <i>Sekanama</i> ( <i>Urginea sorgunea</i> ; unknown).....	49
4.4.5 <i>Fora</i> ( <i>Crotalaria capensis</i> ; cape-rattle-height).....	49
4.4.6 <i>Maime</i> ( <i>Cythula ucinulata</i> ; cape-rattle-height).....	49
4.4.7 <i>Mohlahlaila</i> ( <i>Gnaphalium helichrysum</i> ; white brittle bush).....	50
4.4.8 <i>Mohletlwa</i> ( <i>Grewia flara</i> ; brandy bush).....	50
4.4.9 <i>Moshunkoane</i> ( <i>Lippia javanica</i> ; fever tea).....	51
4.4.10 <i>Monamane</i> ( <i>Aquifoliac</i> ; African holly).....	51
4.4.11 <i>Mokhure</i> ( <i>Ricinus communis</i> ; castor oil plant).....	51
4.4.12 <i>Motholla</i> ( <i>Solanum panduriforme</i> ; flame acacia).....	51
<b>4.5 Indigenous trees.....</b>	52
4.5.1 <i>Dikgophha</i> (Aloe Category).....	52
4.5.1.1 <i>Sekgophha</i> ( <i>Agave Americana</i> ;sisal).....	52

4.5.1.2. <i>Sekgophana</i> (Aloe marlothii; bitter aloe).....	53
4.5.1.3 <i>Motlalamela</i> (No botanical name; euphorbia).....	53
4.5.1.4 <i>Motoro</i> ( <i>Oponita megacant</i> ; sweet prickly pear).....	53
<b>4.5.2 Indigenous trees bearing flowers and fruit.....</b>	<b>54</b>
4.5.2.1 <i>Mokumo</i> ( <i>Ficus burkei</i> ; common-wild fig).....	54
4.5.2.2 <i>Mothokolo</i> ( <i>Carissa bispinosa</i> ; num-num).....	55
4.5.2.3 <i>Mmilo</i> ( <i>Vangueria infausta</i> ; wild medlar).....	55
4.5.2.4 <i>Mokgalo</i> ( <i>Ziziphus mucronata</i> ; buffalo thorn jujuba).....	55
4.5.2.5 <i>Motšhidi</i> ( <i>Ximenia caffra</i> ; sour plum).....	56
4.5.2.6 <i>Mohlatswa</i> ( <i>Chrysophyllum</i> ; milk plum).....	57
4.5.2.7 <i>Mohlokohloko</i> ( <i>Clerodendrum verbenatae</i> ; white cats whiskers).....	57
<b>4.5.3 Indigenous trees for technological purpose.....</b>	<b>58</b>
4.5.3.1 <i>Mokgwete</i> (No botanical name; velvet bushwillow).....	58
4.5.3.2 <i>Monee</i> ( <i>Berchemia zeyheri</i> ; red ivorywood).....	58
4.5.3.3 <i>Mmupudu</i> ( <i>Mimosops zeyheri</i> ; moepel-red-milkwood).....	59
4.5.3.4 <i>Modumela</i> ( <i>Kirkia wilmsii</i> ; white kirkia).....	59
4.5.3.5 <i>Mogatakgomo</i> (No botanical name;African whitestinkwood).....	59
4.5.3.6 <i>Mokgoba</i> ( <i>Dombeya rotundifolia</i> ; wild pear dombeya).....	60
<b>4.5.4 Indigenous trees for firewood.....</b>	<b>60</b>
4.5.4.1 <i>Mohweleretshipi</i> ( <i>Combrutum imberbe</i> ; leadwood).....	60
4.5.4.2 <i>Mohwelere</i> (No botanical name; red bush willow).....	61

4.5.4.3 <i>Monamane</i> ( <i>Ilexmixis</i> ; kooboo-berry).....	61
4.5.4.4 <i>Mosehla</i> ( <i>Peltophrum africanum</i> ; African weeping-wattle).....	62
4.5.4.5 <i>Mooka</i> ( <i>Acacia karo</i> ; sweet thorn acacia).....	62
4.5.4.6 <i>Moshu</i> ( <i>Acacia tortoloides</i> ; came-thorn acacia).....	63
4.5.4.7 <i>Mokaka</i> ( <i>Acacia mellifera</i> ; black-thorn).....	64
4.5.4.8 <i>Mosehla</i> ( <i>Acacia permixta</i> ; slender thorn).....	64
4.5.4.9 <i>Mokgwaripa</i> ( <i>Acacia burkei</i> ; black monkey thorn).....	64
4.5.4.10 <i>Mophato</i> ( <i>Gymnosporia senegalensis</i> ; red spikethorn).....	65
4.5.4.11 <i>Morobadiepe</i> ( <i>Pappea capensis</i> ; jacket plum).....	65
<b>4.5.5 Indigenous trees for shades.....</b>	<b>65</b>
4.5.5.1 <i>Morula</i> ( <i>Sclerocarya birrea</i> ; marula).....	65
4.5.5.2 <i>Mosarampomo</i> ( <i>Melia azedarach</i> ; seringa).....	66
4.5.5.3 <i>Moshu</i> ( <i>Acacia tortoloides</i> ; umbrella thorn).....	66
4.5.5.4 <i>Mphoka</i> ( <i>Senecio barbetonicup</i> ; paperbarked thorn).....	67
4.5.5.5 <i>Mosehla</i> ( <i>Peltophrum Africanum</i> ; African wattle).....	67
4.5.5.6 <i>Mophala</i> (No botanical name; forest fever tree).....	68
4.5.5.7 <i>Mohlwehlwe</i> (No botanical name; mountain karee).....	68
<b>CHAPTER 5: INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE OF CATEGORIZATION OF USEFUL INDIGENOUS PLANTS.....</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>5.1 Plant taxonomy.....</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....</b>	<b>74</b>
<b>6.1 Concluding remarks.....</b>	<b>74</b>

<b>6.2 Recommendations.....</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>7. LIST OF REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>78</b>
<b>8. APPENDIX A.....</b>	<b>82</b>