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"Different Histories of Buchu: Euro-American Appropriation of San and Khoekhoe Knowledge of Buchu Plants"

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Low, Christopher H. "Different Histories of Buchu: Euro-American Appropriation of San and Khoekhoe Knowledge of Buchu Plants." *Environment and History* 13, no. 3 (Aug, 2007): 333–61. doi:10.3197/096734007X228309 . Buchu (*Agathosma*) is a fragrant smelling South African fynbos shrub widely known and marketed as a traditional remedy of southern Africa's Khoisan herders and hunter-gatherers. It is also an important flavouring agent in commercial food manufacture. This article considers representation of buchu as a traditional remedy in relation to both extensive historical, botanical and commercial interest in the plants and recent and past Khoisan use. The Khoisan account is drawn from detailed ethnographic analysis and fieldwork carried out amongst Namibian Khoisan and northern Cape San. The paper tracks the arrival of buchu onto the European medical market and the subsequent misfit between European and American pharmaceutical representations of the 'true' buchu relative to Khoisan understandings of buchu. Low proposes that, like the Europeans, the Khoisan have engaged with buchu because of its distinctive odour and properties but, unlike Western appropriators of the plant, Khoisan relationships with buchu relate to smell as an agent of physical and mental transformation. The smell of buchu has been conceived by the Khoisan as a potent force with a role in healing, in perfume use and certain rituals. All rights reserved. © 2007 The White Horse Press

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