



What is “Xhosa Forest”? Botanical and indigenous ways of classifying thicket vegetation

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Introduction

A landscape photograph of a savanna. The foreground is a dry, brownish field with sparse green grass. In the middle ground, there are several scattered trees of varying heights and densities. The background shows a range of low mountains under a clear blue sky with a few wispy clouds. A large, leafy tree branch is visible in the upper right corner, partially obscuring the sky.

Importance of “Xhosa Forest” has been highlighted in previous talk

People identify vegetation types in terms of botanical composition and structure but also in terms of their own values, uses, associations

Aims

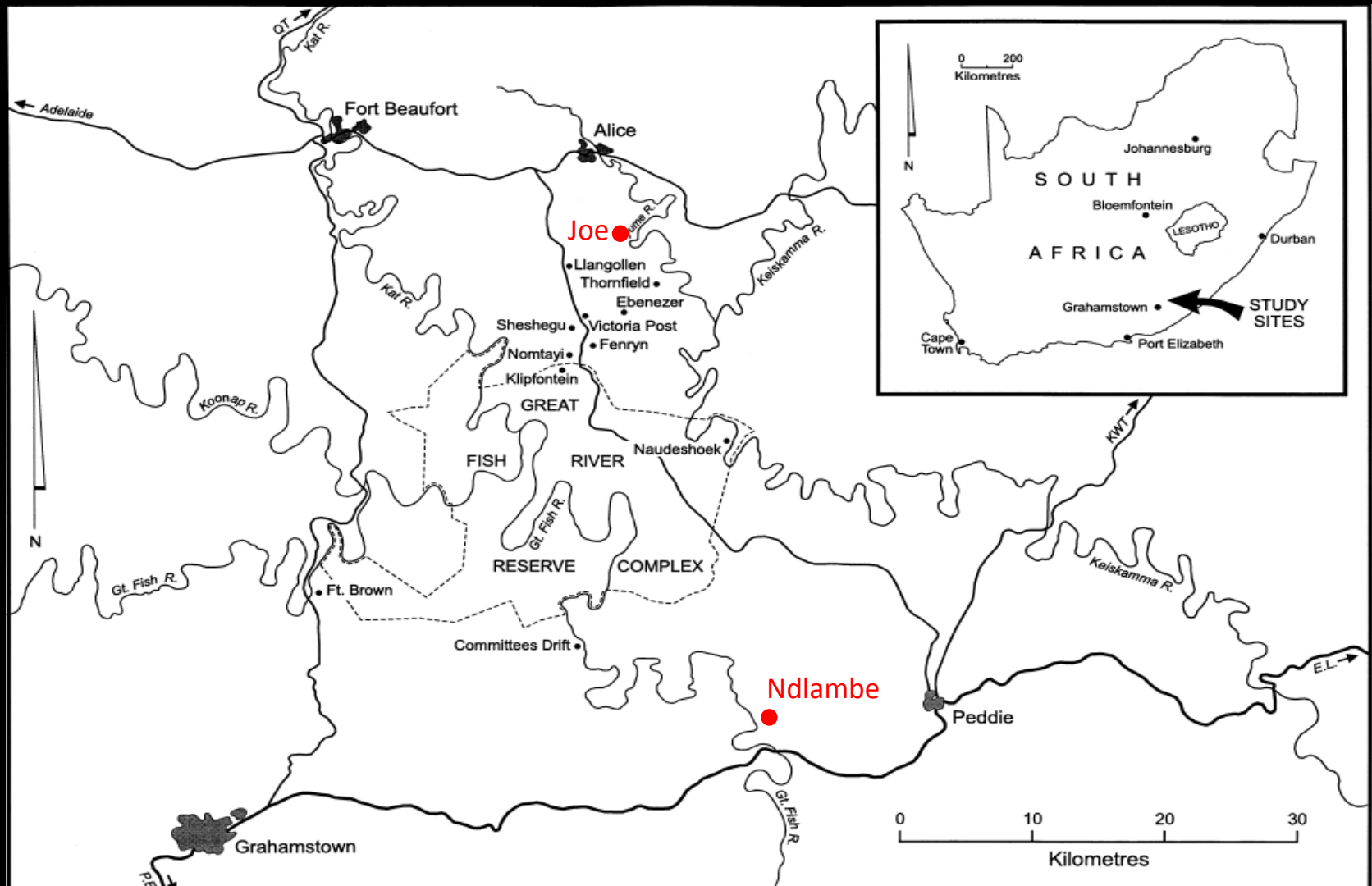


How do people characterise vegetation types?

To what extent does their classification correspond to botanical characteristics?

What botanical attributes make a patch of vegetation a “Xhosa Forest”?

Study Sites



(Cocks and Dold 2001)

Interviews

Small groups, in the field:
young men, older men,
young women, older women

Semi-structured interviews at 20 sites representing
different vegetation

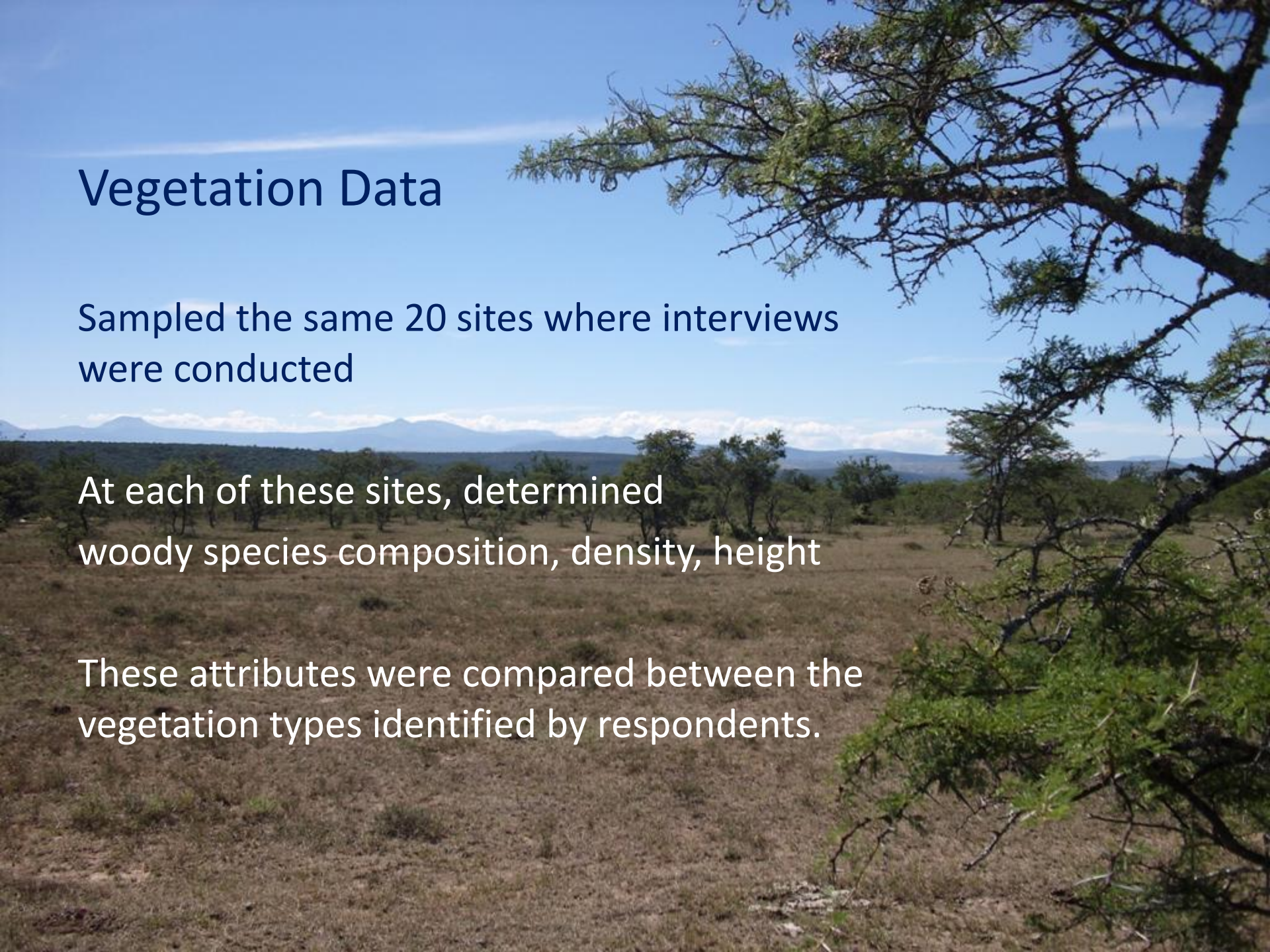
People named the vegetation types and described the
vegetation in terms of its key attributes, uses,
importance and the feelings they associated with it.

Vegetation Data

Sampled the same 20 sites where interviews were conducted

At each of these sites, determined woody species composition, density, height

These attributes were compared between the vegetation types identified by respondents.



Open, transformed
Well-utilised, safe, familiar
Mundane
No ancestral spirits



Dense, intact
Considered less safe
Beautiful, wild
Sacred, ancestors present, rituals



Ithafa



Igquba



Imbambe
JOE



Ihlathi



Ihlonthlo

Igquba



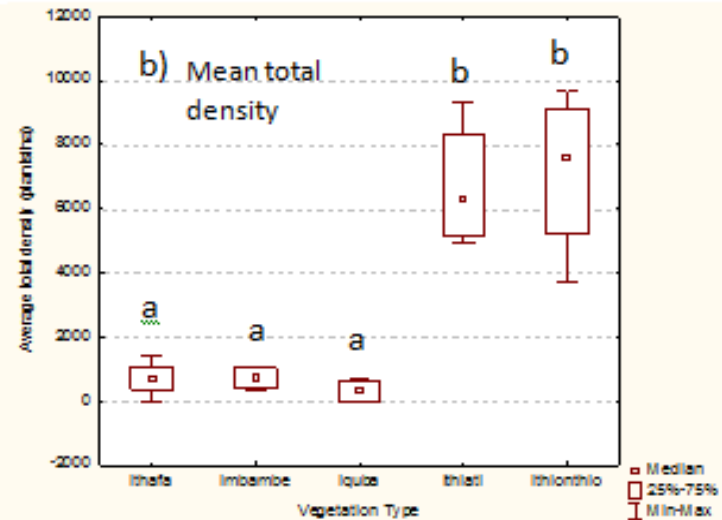
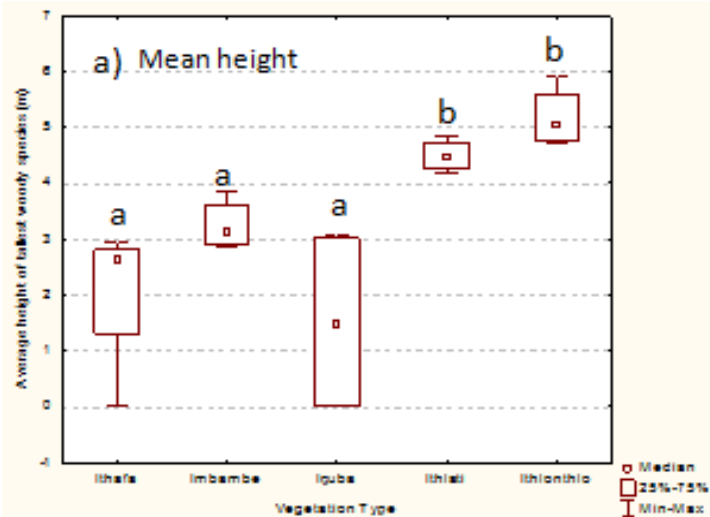
NDLAMBE
"Ihlathana"



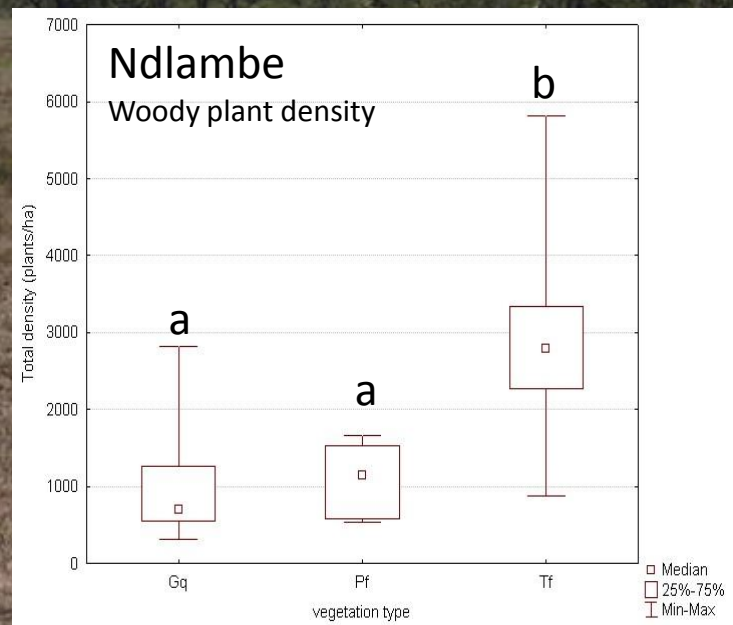
Ihlathi



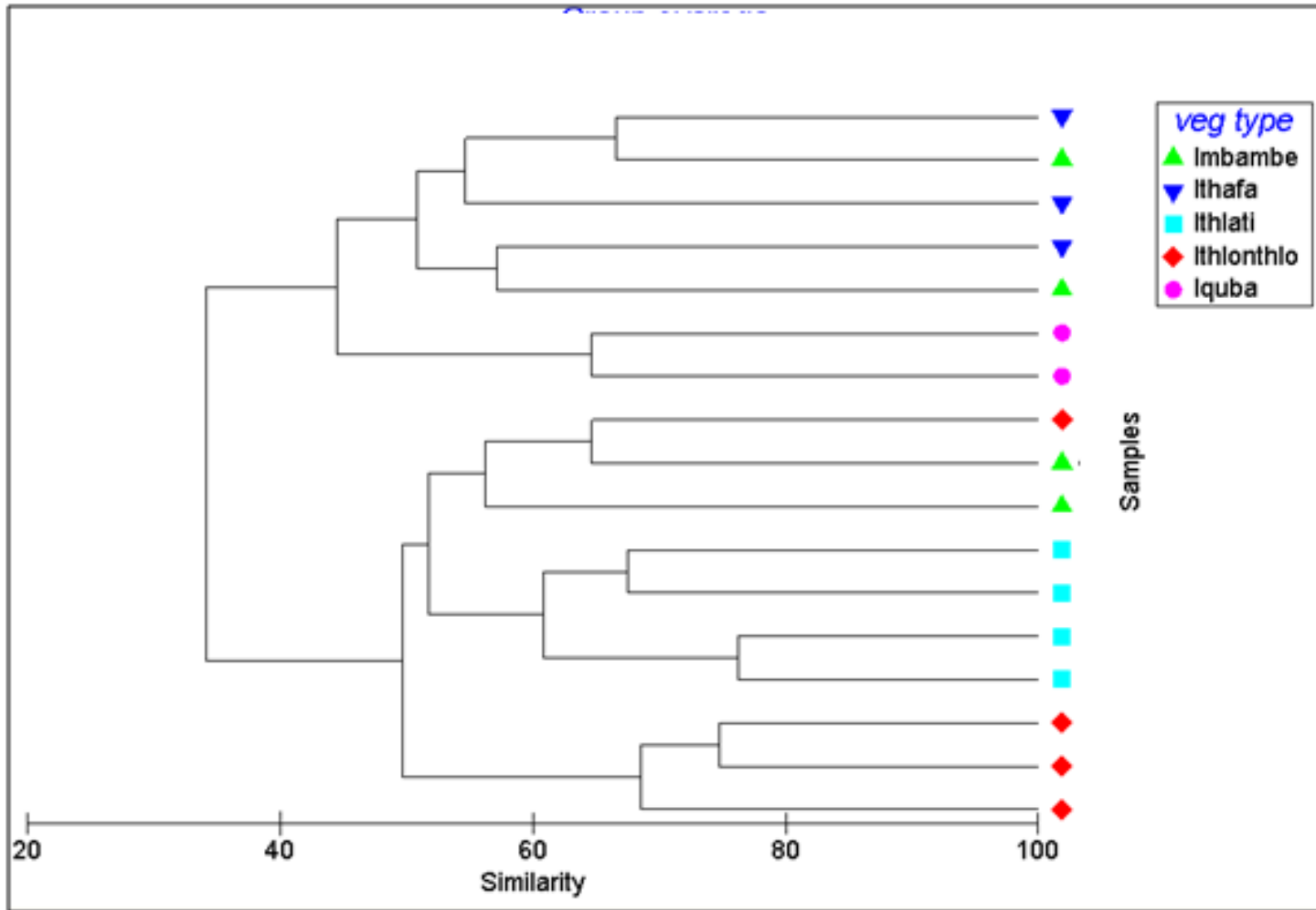
Vegetation height and density



Joe



Woody plant composition - Joe



Woody plant composition - Joe

Vegetation type	Characteristic species (average abundance)
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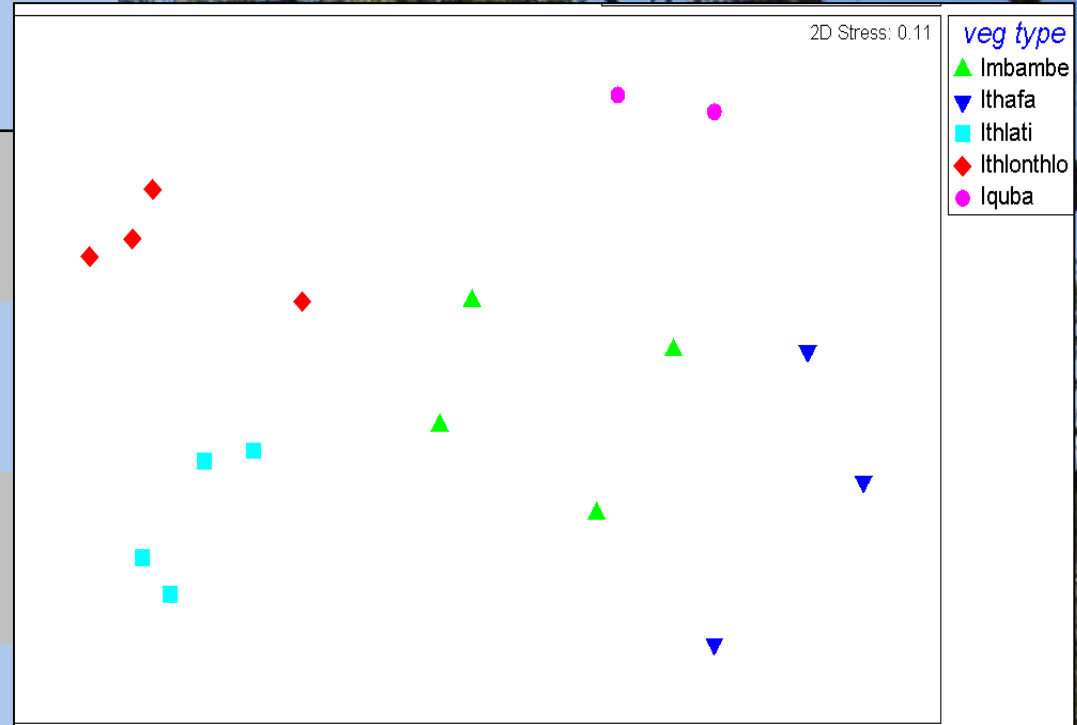
Ithafa	<i>Acacia karroo</i> (53%) <i>Opuntia sp.</i> (15%) <i>Opuntia ficus-indica</i> (9%)
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Iquba	<i>Acacia karroo</i> (27%) <i>Asparagus suaveolens</i> (17%) <i>Scutia myrtina</i> (10%)
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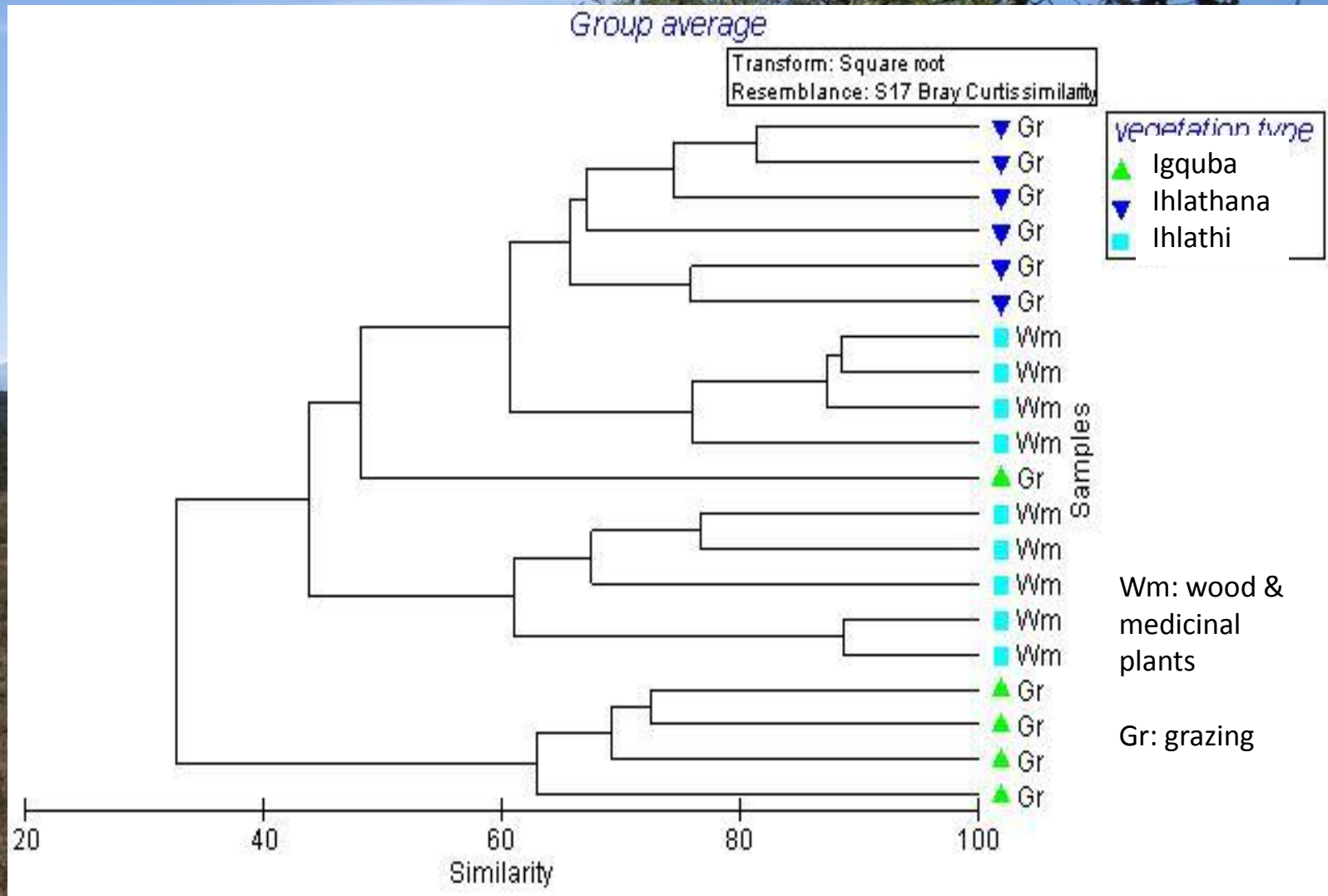
Imbambe	<i>Acacia karroo</i> (32%) <i>Asparagus suaveolens</i> (17%) <i>Scutia myrtina</i> (15%)
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Ihlathi	<i>Sideroxylon inerme</i> (24%) <i>Acacia karroo</i> (12%) <i>Asparagus suaveolens</i> (8%)
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Ihlonthlo	<i>Olea europaea subsp. africana</i> (15%) <i>Maytenus heterophylla</i> (14%) <i>Asparagus suaveolens</i> (11%)
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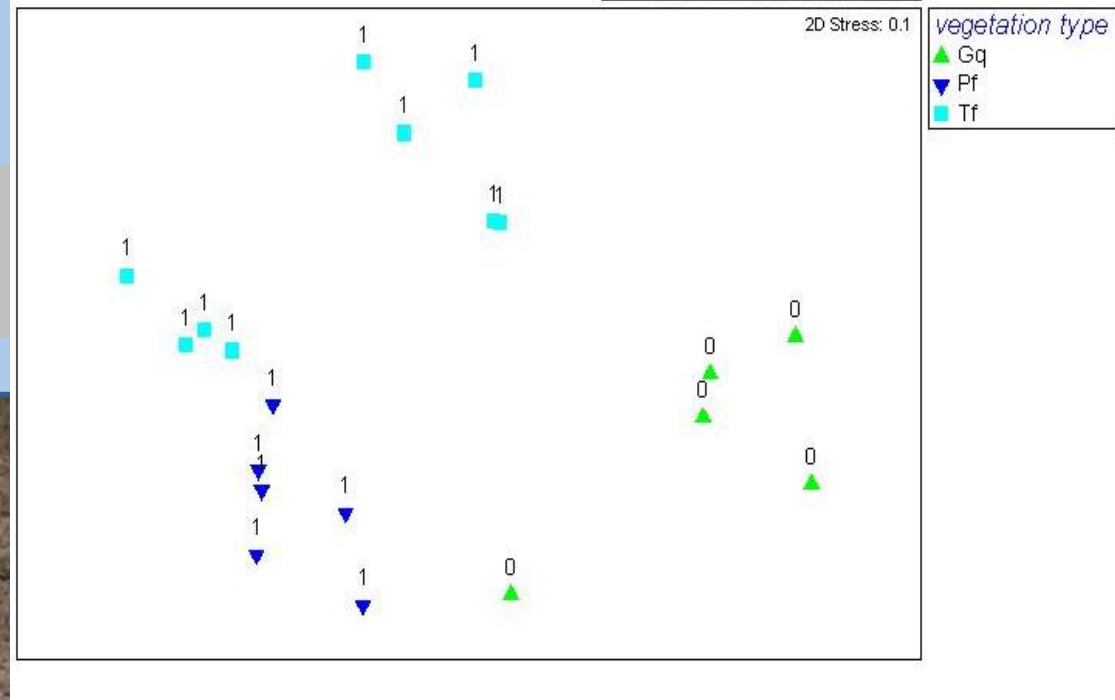


Woody plant composition - Ndlambe



Woody plant composition - Ndlambe

Vegetation type	Characteristic species (average abundance)
Igquba	<i>Ptaeroxylon obliquum</i> (37%) <i>Aloe ferox</i> (33%) <i>Lycium ferocissimum</i> (13%)
Ihlathana	<i>Ptaeroxylon obliquum</i> (41%) <i>Grewia robusta</i> (12%) <i>Jatropha capensis</i> (12%)
Ihlathi	<i>Euphorbia triangularis</i> (30%) <i>Ptaeroxylon obliquum</i> (27%) <i>Jatropha capensis</i> (14%)



Conclusions



Different vegetation types are associated with different locations, values, feelings and activities.

Supported by botanical data.

Can split these vegetation types into forest- and non-forest types

The forest types (Ihlathi, Ihlonthlo) are emphasised as particularly different and important in this data set:

- presence of characteristic species
- taller and denser than the non-forest vegetation types
- rated as most valuable and sacred by people

Questions?

