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Title: Fertility and fontanel : women's knowledge of medicinal plants for reproductive health and childcare in western Africa

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Curriculum Vitae

Alexandra Maria Towns was born on the 23 of May 1983 in Watertown, New York, USA. She graduated from Francis Scott Key High School in Union Bridge, Maryland in 2001. Selecting a university program of study was particularly hard for her, as Alexandra was equally drawn to the natural and social sciences. She started her undergraduate degree in Education in August 2001 at La Salle University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. In 2002, realizing that she needed to learn much more about the world before she could teach about it, Ms. Towns transferred to Towson University in Baltimore, Maryland to begin a B.A. program in International Studies. She wrote an honors thesis entitled *The Continued Presence of NGOs in the International System* and studied abroad in Germany (2002), Mexico (2003), and Chile (2004).



Graduating *magna cum laude* from Towson University in May 2005, Alexandra joined the United States Peace Corps as an agricultural volunteer. She spent two and a half years living in a rural village in Niger, West Africa, supporting a women's sesame seed cooperative and working on multiple small farming and gardening projects. It was also at this time that Alexandra became fascinated with local knowledge systems. She spent many mornings collecting wild plants with village youth and afternoons preparing traditional dishes with female elders.

In September 2008, Alexandra started a M.Sc. degree in International Agricultural Development at the University of California, Davis. She acquired funding to return to Niger in 2009 to identify wild plants and fish and investigate their role in the local Nigerien food system. She presented the results at the Society for Economic Botany Conference in Xalapa, Mexico in May 2010, compiled them into the MSc thesis entitled *Ethnoecology and food sovereignty among the Songhai people of Niger: species, knowledge, and implications for rural development*, and graduated in September 2010.

In December 2010, Alexandra joined Naturalis Biodiversity Center, Leiden University as a PhD researcher. In addition to fieldwork, she also co-organized the *Tropical Plant Families* course at Naturalis in 2012, and gave lectures on plant families Lamiaceae and Melastomataceae in both 2013 and 2014. Ms. Towns supervised five students during her time at Naturalis. She also served on the board of the Society for Economic Botany as a student representative (2013-2014) and presented her research findings at international conferences in Bénin (2011), England (2013), Maryland (2013), Macau (2014), and North Carolina (2014). In the Netherlands, she presented at the Institute for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Dynamics (2011), the Catharina Schrader Foundation (2012), and NWO Bessensap (2013). Alexandra received the Fulling Award for *Best Contributed Oral Paper* at the Society for Economic Botany conference in 2013. Ms. Towns plans to apply for post-doctoral funding to continue conducting ethnobotanical research in the USA. One day she still intends to teach.

List of Publications

van Anel, T.R., Croft, S., van Loon, E., Quiroz, D., **Towns, A.M.**, and Raes, N. Prioritizing West African medicinal plants for conservation and sustainable extraction based on species distribution models and market surveys (submitted).

Anel, T.R. van, van 't Klooster, C.I.E.A., Quiroz, D., **Towns, A.M.**, Ruysschaert, S. and M. van den Berg. Local plant names reveal that enslaved Africans recognized substantial parts of the New World flora (submitted).

Vossen, T.E., **Towns, A.M.**, Ruysschaert, S., Quiroz, D. and T.R. van Anel. Consequences of the trans-Atlantic slave trade on medicinal plant selection: Plant use for cultural bound syndromes affecting children in Suriname and Western Africa. *PLOS One* (in review).

Anel, T.R. van, de Boer, H., **Towns, A.M.** Gynecological, andrological and urological problems: an ethnopharmacological perspective. In: Heinrich, M. and Jaeger, A. (eds.), *Ethnopharmacology - a reader*. Wiley & Sons, Chichester. (accepted).

Towns, A.M., S.M. Eyi and T.R. van Anel. Traditional medicine and child care in Western Africa: mothers' knowledge, folk illnesses, and patterns of healthcare-seeking behavior. *PLoS ONE* 2014, 9(8): e105972.

Towns, A.M., Quiroz, D.K., Guinee, L., de Boer, H.J., and T.R. van Anel. Volume, value and floristic diversity of Gabon's medicinal plant markets. *Journal of Ethnopharmacology* 2014, 155: 1184-1193.

Towns, A.M., S. Ruysschaert, E. van Vliet and T. van Anel. Evidence in support of the role of disturbance vegetation for women's health and childcare in Western Africa. *Journal of Ethnobiology and Ethnomedicine* 2014, 10:42.

Towns, A.M. and T. van Anel. Comparing local perspectives on women's health with statistics on maternal mortality: an ethnobotanical study in Benin and Gabon. *BMC Complementary and Alternative Medicine* 2014, 14:113.

Quiroz, D., **Towns, A.M.**, Legba, S.I., Swier, J., Briere, S., Sosef, M.S.M. and T.R. van Anel. Quantifying the domestic market in herbal medicine in Benin, West Africa. *Journal of Ethnopharmacology* 2014, 151: 1100-1108.

Towns, A.M., D. Potter, and S. Idrissa. Cultivated, Caught, and Collected: Defining Culturally-Appropriate Foods in Tallé, Niger. *Development in Practice* 2013, 23:2.

Towns, A.M. Ethnobotany and Food Sovereignty among the Songhai People of Niger: Species, Local Knowledge, and Implications for Sustainable Rural Development. Diss. University of California, Davis, 2010. Dissertations & Theses: A&I, ProQuest.

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