

**Characterization and biological activity of antifungal compounds
present in *Breonadia salicina* (Rubiaceae) leaves**

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DECLARATION

I **Salome Mamokone Mahlo**, hereby declare that this thesis submitted to the University of Pretoria for the degree of Doctor Philosophiae is the result of my own investigations in execution and has never been submitted at any other university or research institution. Any help I received is acknowledged in the thesis.

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Co-promoter



DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my daughter Dunisani Maashaba Mahlo and my parents Wilson and Maria Mahlo for their support throughout my studies.

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Psalm 23:4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.



LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Amph B	Amphotericin B
BEA	Benzene: ethanol: ammonia
CC	Column chromatography
CEF	Chloroform: ethyl acetate: formic acid
DCM	Dichloromethane
DEPT	Distortionless enhancement by polarization transfer
DPPH	2,2-diphenyl-1-picrylhydrazyl
EIMS	Electron impact mass spectrometry
EMW	Ethyl acetate: methanol: water
EtOAc	Ethyl acetate
INT	p-Iodonitrotetrazolium violet
IPUF	Indigenous Plant Use Forum
LC₅₀	Lethal Concentration for 50% of the cells
MeOH	Methanol
MIC	Minimum Inhibitory Concentration
MS	Mass spectrometer
MTT	(3-(4,5-dimethylthiazol)-2,5-diphenyl tetrazolium bromide
NMR	Nuclear magnetic resonance
R_f	Retention factor
SDA	Sabouraud Dextrose Agar
TLC	Thin Layer Chromatography

ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to investigate plant species to develop a product with the potential of protecting plants or plant products against plant fungal pathogens. Hexane, dichloromethane, acetone, and methanol leaf extracts of six plant species (*Bucida buceras*, *Breonadia salicina*, *Harpephyllum caffrum*, *Olinia ventosa*, *Vangueria infausta* and *Xylothea kraussiana*) were evaluated for antifungal activity against seven plant fungal pathogens (*Aspergillus niger*, *A. parasiticus*, *Colletotrichum gloeosporioides*, *Penicillium janthinellum*, *P. expansum*, *Trichoderma harzianum* and *Fusarium oxysporum*). These plant species were selected from more than 400 plant species evaluated in the Phytomedicine Programme that had good activity against two animal fungal pathogens. All the leaf extracts were active against at least one or more of the phytopathogenic fungi in a serial microdilution assay. Of the six plant species, *B. buceras* had the best antifungal activity against four of the fungi, with MIC values as low as 0.02 mg/ml and 0.08 mg/ml against *Penicillium expansum*, *P. janthinellum*, *Trichoderma harzianum* and *Fusarium oxysporum*.

The number of active compounds in the plant extracts was determined using bioautography with the above-mentioned plant pathogens. No active compounds were observed in some plant extracts against the fungal plant pathogens indicating possible synergism between metabolites responsible for the antifungal activity of the extract. *B. salicina* and *O. ventosa* were the most promising plant species, with at least three antifungal compounds.

The antioxidant activities of plant extracts were determined using the qualitative method by spraying TLC chromatograms developed in three eluent systems BEA, CEF and EMW with 1, 1-diphenyl -2 picrylhydrazyl (DPPH). The plant extracts of five of these species did not have a strong antioxidant activity. The methanol extract of *X. kraussiana* was the most active radical scavenger in the DPPH assay amongst the six medicinal plants screened.

Based on good activity against *Aspergillus niger* and *A. parasiticus*, leaf extracts of the six plant species were also tested for antifungal activity against *A. fumigatus*, a very important animal fungal pathogen. The acetone extracts of *B. buceras*, *B. salicina*, *V. infausta* and *X. kraussiana* had good antifungal activity against the animal pathogens, with MIC values ranging between 0.02 and 0.08 mg/ml. This indicates that crude extracts of these species may be more

valuable in combating *Aspergillus* infections in animals than in humans. Based on the results discussed above, *B. salicina* was selected for in-depth study.

Serial exhaustive extraction was used to extract plant material with solvents of increasing polarities namely, hexane, chloroform, acetone and MeOH. Amongst the four extractants, MeOH extracted the largest quantity of plant material 12.3% (61.5g), followed by acetone 5.6% (27.8 g), hexane 2.6% (12.8 g) and chloroform 2.1% (10.3 g). The chloroform fraction was selected for further work because it had the best antifungal activity against *A. niger*, *C. gloeosporioides*, *P. janthinellum* and *T. harzianum* and the bioautography assay showed the presence of several antifungal compounds in the chloroform fraction.

Column chromatography was used in a bio-assay guided fractionation and led to isolation of four compounds. The antimicrobial activity was determined against seven plant pathogenic fungi and three bacteria, including the Gram-positive *Staphylococcus aureus* (ATCC 29213) and the Gram-negative *Escherichia coli* (ATCC 25922) and *Pseudomonas aureus* (ATCC 27853). The isolated compounds had good antifungal activity against *A. parasiticus* with an MIC of 10 µg/ml, while in other cases it ranged from 20 to 250 µg/ml. Amongst the four compounds tested, only three had a clear band, indicating that the growth of the pathogenic fungi was inhibited in the bioautography assay.

Nuclear magnetic resonance spectroscopy (NMR) and mass spectroscopy (MS) were used for identification of isolated compounds. Only one compound was identified as the triterpenoid ursolic acid. Ursolic acid has been isolated from several plant species and has antifungal activity against *Candida albicans* (Shai et al. 2008). This is the first report on the isolation of antifungal compounds from leaves of *Breonadia salicina*. The other compounds isolated appeared to be mixtures of fatty acids based on mass spectroscopy and the structures were not elucidated.

The cytotoxicity of acetone extracts and the four isolated compounds were determined against Vero cells using a tetrazolium-based colorimetric (MTT) assay. The acetone extract was selected based on good *in vitro* antifungal activity and was used in an *in vivo* fruit experiment. The acetone extract was less toxic toward the Vero cells with an LC₅₀ of 82 µg/ml than

ursolic acid and compound 4 which had LC₅₀ values of 25 and 36 µg/ml respectively. Compounds 2 and 3 had low toxicity against the cells with LC₅₀ values greater than 200 µg/ml.

The potential use of the extract or isolated compound(s) against three plant fungal pathogens *Penicillium expansum* and *P. janthinellum* as well as *P. digitatum* (isolated from infected oranges) were tested after treating the oranges with the extract and ursolic acid. The model used gave good reproducible results. The concentration that inhibited growth correlated reasonably well with MIC values determined by serial microplate dilution. There were substantial differences in the susceptibility of the different isolates tested. The activity of ursolic acid was in the same order as that of the crude acetone leaf extract of *B. salicina*. The LC₅₀ of the extract varied from 1 to 1.8 mg/ml.

Penicillium digitatum was more resistant to amphotericin B in comparison to other *Penicillium* species. It has been reported that the fungus was resistant to the three fungicides: sodium *o*-phenylphenate (*o*-phenylphenol), imazalil, and thiabendazole used commercially in the fruit industry to reduce postharvest decay (Holmes and Eckert 1999).

The toxicity of the extract to Vero cells was in the order of 10 times lower than the LC₅₀ of the extracts to the fungal pathogens. Although much work still has to be done, there is good potential that a commercial product can be developed from an acetone leaf extract of *B. salicina* leaves, especially if the activity of this extract can be improved by removing inactive compounds.

The results confirm the traditional use of *B. salicina* and demonstrate the potential value of developing biopesticides from plants.

CONFERENCES AND WORKSHOP

2007

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION.....i
DEDICATION.....ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS..... iii
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....v
ABSTRACT.....vi
CONFERENCES AND WORKSHOPS ATTENDED.....ix



Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1.....	1
Medicinal Plants.....	1
1.1 Introduction.....	1
1.2 Literature review.....	2
1. 2.1 Importance of medicinal plants.....	2
1.2.2 The use of plants against microbial infections.....	3
1.2.3 Fungi as pathogens.....	3
1.2.3.1 Antifungal drugs.....	4
1.2.4 Resistance of fungi.....	4
1.2.5 Food production and effects of fungal pathogens.....	5
1.2.6 Plants as antifungals.....	6
1.2.6.1 Previous related antimicrobial work in the Phytomedicine laboratory.....	6
1.2.7 Selection of plants for study.....	7
1.2.7.1 Ethnobotanical information on six selected species.....	7
1.2.7.2 Phytochemical data available on selected species.....	9
1.2.8 Motivation.....	10
1.2.9 Aim.....	10
1.2.10 Objectives.....	11
CHAPTER 2.....	12
Extraction and phytochemical investigation of selected plant species.....	12
2.1 Introduction.....	12
2.2 Materials and methods.....	13
2.2.1 Plant selection.....	13
2.2.2 Plant collection.....	14
2.2.3 Plant storage.....	14
2.2.4 Extraction Procedure.....	15
2.2.4.1 Laboratory extraction method.....	15
2.2.5 Phytochemical analysis.....	15



2.2.6 Retention factor (R_f) values of compounds	16
2.3 Results and discussion.....	16
2.3.1 Extraction using different solvents.....	16
2.3.2 Phytochemical analysis of extracts	18
2.3.2.1 TLC analysis of plant extracts for preliminary screening	18
2.4 Conclusion.....	22
CHAPTER 3.....	23
Preliminary screening for antifungal activity of six selected plant species	23
3.1 Introduction	23
3.2 Materials and methods	25
3.2.1 Fungal strains	25
3.2.1.1 Quantification of fungal inoculum	25
3.2.2 Bioassays for antifungal activity	26
3.2.2.1 Dilution method.....	26
3.2.2.2 Bioautography	27
3.3 Results and discussion.....	27
3.3.1 Quantification of fungal inoculum	27
3.3.2 Microplate dilution assay	28
3.3.3 Bioautography assay	34
3.4 Conclusion.....	41
CHAPTER 4.....	42
Antioxidant activity.....	42
4.1 Introduction	42
4.2 Materials and methods	44
4.2.1 Extraction	44
4.2.2 Assay for free radical scavenging (DPPH).....	44
4.2.2.1 TLC fingerprint and antioxidant activity	44
4.3 Results and discussion.....	45



4.4 Conclusion.....	47
CHAPTER 5.....	48
Activity of crude leaf extracts of plant species against <i>Aspergillus fumigatus</i>	48
5.1 Introduction	48
5.2 Materials and methods	49
5.2.1 Fungal strain.....	49
5.2.2 Quantification of fungal inoculum	49
5.2.3 Bioassays for antifungal activity	49
5.3 Results and discussion.....	50
5.3.1 Dilution method.....	50
5.3.2 Bioautography assay	53
5.4 Conclusion.....	55
CHAPTER 6.....	56
Antifungal activity of <i>Breonadia salicina</i> leaf extracts	56
6.1 Introduction	56
6.2 Materials and methods	58
6.2.1 Exhaustive sequential extraction	58
6.2.2 Solvent-solvent fractionation	59
6.2.3 Microplate dilution assay	59
6.2.4 TLC fingerprinting	59
6.2.5 Bioautography assay	59
6.3 Results and discussion.....	60
6.3.1 Serial extraction with different solvents.....	60
6.3.2 TLC analysis	63
6.3.2.1 Separation of compounds in the serial extraction fractions	63
6.3.2.2 Separation of compounds in the solvent-solvent fractions.....	64
6.3.3 Bioautography assay	65



6.4 Conclusion.....	66
CHAPTER 7.....	68
Isolation of antifungal compounds from leaves of <i>Breonadia salicina</i>	68
7.1. Introduction	68
7.2. Materials and methods	69
7.2.1 Isolation of antifungal compound(s)	71
7.2. 1.1 Column chromatography.....	71
7.2.1.1a Compound 1 (column i)	71
7.2.1.1b Compound 2 (column ii)	71
7.2.1.1c Compound 3 (column iii)	72
7.2.1.1d Compound 4	72
7.3 Microplate dilution assay	72
7.4 Bioautography assay	72
7.5 Results and discussion.....	72
7.5.1 TLC analysis	75
7.6 Conclusion.....	77
CHAPTER 8.....	78
Structure elucidation of four isolated compounds.....	78
8.1 Introduction	78
8.2 Materials and methods	79
8.2.1 Structure elucidation	79
8.2.2.1 Nuclear Magnetic Resonance	79
8.2.2.2 Mass Spectroscopy	79
8.2.2.3 Electron impact mass spectrometry (EIMS)	79
8.3 Results and discussion.....	80
8.3.1 Structure elucidation	80
8.3.1.1 Compound 1	80
8.3.1.2 Compound 2, 3 and 4	82
8.4 Conclusion.....	82



CHAPTER 9.....	83
Antifungal and antibacterial activity and cytotoxicity of isolated compounds.....	83
9.1 Introduction.....	83
9.2 Materials and methods.....	84
9.2.1 TLC fingerprint.....	84
9.2.2 Bioassays for antifungal activity.....	84
9.2.2.1 Microdilution method.....	84
9.2.2.2 Bioautography assay.....	85
9.2.3 Antibacterial activity.....	85
9.2.4 Cytotoxicity assay.....	85
9.2.4.1 Tetrazolium-based colorimetric assay (MTT).....	85
9.3 Results and discussion.....	86
9.3.1 Biological activity of the isolated compounds.....	86
9.3.1.1 Bioautography assay.....	86
9.3.1.2 Microplate dilution assay.....	88
9.3.2 Cytotoxicity assay.....	89
9.3.2.1 Therapeutic index of the crude extract and isolated compounds.....	92
9.4 Conclusion.....	94
CHAPTER 10.....	96
In vivo experiment: Plant extracts active against <i>Penicillium</i> species.....	96
10.1 Introduction.....	96
10.2 Materials and methods.....	98
10.2.1 Microplate dilution assay.....	98
10.2.2 Isolate and culturing of fungi.....	98
10.2.3 Quantification of fungal inoculum.....	98
10.3. In vivo experiment.....	99
10.3.1 Fruit Decay test.....	99
10.4 Results and discussion.....	102



10.4.1 Microplate dilution assay	102
10.4.2 First experiment to evaluate the procedure	102
10.4.3 Determining the dose related effect of the treatments.....	104
10.4.4 Determining the effect of dose and time of exposure	106
10.4.5 Determining the LC ₅₀ of the crude extract	110
10.5 Therapeutic Index.....	114
10.5.1 Therapeutic index of the crude extract and isolated compounds	114
10.6 Conclusion.....	115
CHAPTER 11.....	117
Summary and conclusion	117
CHAPTER 12.....	122
References	122
Appendix	138

LIST OF FIGURES

- Figure 2-1** Percentage of material extracted from 4g of leaves of (1) *Bucida buceras*, (2) *Breonadia salicina*, (3) *Harpephyllum caffrum*, (4) *Olinia ventosa*, (5) *Vangueria infausta* and (6) *Xylothea kraussiana* with different extractants **17**
- Figure 2-2** Chromatograms developed with CEF (top)) and EMW (bottom) solvent systems, sprayed with vanillin-sulphuric acid. **19**
- Figure 3-1** Bioautograms of extracts of *Bucida buceras*, *Breonadia salicina*, *Harpephyllum caffrum* and *Olinia ventosa*. Chromatograms were developed in CEF and sprayed with *Penicillium janthinellum* (top), centre (*Aspergillus parasiticus*), bottom (*Trichoderma harzianum*). White areas indicate inhibition of fungal growth. **Lanes from left to right:** acetone (A), hexane (H), DCM (D) and methanol (M) **36**
- Figure 3-2** Bioautograms of extracts of *Bucida buceras*, *Breonadia salicina*, *Harpephyllum caffrum* and *Olinia ventosa*. Chromatograms were developed in EMW and sprayed with (*Aspergillus niger*) top, centre (*Colleototrichum gloeosporioides*) and bottom (*Penicillium janthinellum*). White areas indicate inhibition of fungal growth. **Lanes from left to right:** acetone (A), hexane (H), DCM (D) and methanol (M) **37**
- Figure 3-2 (continuation)** Bioautograms of extracts of *Bucida buceras*, *Breonadia salicina*, *Harpephyllum caffrum* and *Olinia ventosa*. Chromatograms were developed in EMW and sprayed with (*Aspergillus parasiticus*) top, centre (*Penicillium expansum*) and bottom (*Trichoderma harzianum*). White areas indicate inhibition of fungal growth. **Lanes from left to right:** acetone (A), hexane (H), DCM (D) and methanol (M). **38**
- Figure 4-1** TLC chromatograms of six plant species (left to right: *Bucida buceras*, *Breonadia salicina*, *Harpephyllum caffrum*, *Olinia ventosa*, *Vangueria infausta* and *Xylothea kraussiana*) extracted with acetone, hexane, DCM and MeOH (left **46**

to right), developed in BEA, CEF and EMW, and sprayed with DPPH solution.

Figure 5-1 Bioautograms of six plant species (left to right: *Bucida buceras*, *Breonadia salicina*, *Harpephyllum caffrum*, *Olinia ventosa*, *Vangueria infausta* and *Xylothea kraussiana*) extracted with acetone, hexane, DCM and MeOH (left to right), developed in BEA and CEF, and sprayed with *Aspergillus parasiticus*. Clear zones on the bioautograms indicate inhibition of fungal growth. **54**

Figure 6-1 A photograph of (a) small and large tree and (b) leaves of *Breonadia salicina* taken from Lowveld National Botanical Garden in Nelspruit. **57**

Figure 6-2 Map showing geographic distribution of *Breonadia salicina* (Palgrave 2002). The red shaded areas indicate the places where the plant species grows and the arrows show other places/countries where the plant species is found. **58**

Figure 6-3 Quantity of plant material sequentially extracted from 500 g of *B. salicina*, with different extractants. **Lanes from left to right:** hexane (H), chloroform (C), acetone (A), and methanol (M). **60**

Figure 6-3 Chromatograms separated in BEA (left), CEF (centre) and EMW (right) solvent systems, sprayed with vanillin-sulphuric acid. **Lanes from left to right:** (A) = Acetone, (H) = Hexane, (C) = Chloroform and (M) = Methanol. **64**

Figure 6-4 Chromatograms of *Breonadia salicina* fractions, developed in BEA (left), CEF (centre) and EMW (right), left to right: Aqueous (A), Butanol (B) and Chloroform (C) and sprayed with vanillin-sulphuric acid (0.1% in vanillin in sulphuric acid). **65**

Figure 6-5 Bioautograms of *Breonadia salicina* extracts, serially extracted with A= Acetone (A), Hexane (H), Chloroform (C) and Methanol (M), developed in BEA, and EMW, and sprayed with *A. parasiticus*. White areas indicate inhibition of fungal growth. **66**

- Figure 7-1** Schematic representation of bioassay-guided isolation of four antifungal compounds from the leaf extract of *B. salicina*. The isolation pathway include the following stages: (1) 500 g plant material was ground to fine powder, (2) Serial extraction was carried out using four extractants (Hexane, CHCl₃, Acetone and MeOH), (3) Bioautography assay was used to determine antifungal compounds, (4) Solvent-solvent fraction was carried out using chloroform fraction since antifungal compounds were present on bioautograms, (5) Isolation of antifungal compounds with column chromatography, (6) six fractions were collected in the first column (Ci); Hexane: EtOAC (3:2) fraction yielded 120 mg of compound (C1), Further column chromatography Cii, Ciii and Civ yielded compounds C2 (70 mg), C3 (20 mg) and C4 (14 mg) respectively. **70**
- Figure 7-2** Fractions of column i developed in Hexane: EtOAC (3:1) and visualized using vanillin-sulphuric acid. **73**
- Figure 7-3** Bioautograms of fractions showing activity of fractions developed in hexane: EtOAC (3:1) and sprayed with *F. oxysporum*. White areas indicate inhibition of fungal growth on bioautograms. **73**
- Figure 7-4** Bioautograms of fractions showing activity of fractions developed in hexane: EtOAC (3:1) and sprayed with *P. janthinellum*. White areas indicate inhibition of fungal growth on bioautograms. **74**
- Figure 7-5** Fractions of column ii developed in hexane: EtOAC (3:2) and visualized using vanillin-sulphuric acid. **74**
- Figure 7-6** Fractions of column iii developed in CHCl₃: EtOAC (1:2) and visualized using vanillin-sulphuric acid. **75**
- Figure 7-7** Fractions of column iv developed in CHCl₃: MeOH (90:5) and visualized using vanillin-sulphuric acid. **75**

Figure 7-8 Chromatograms of 100 µg of isolated compounds developed with BEA, CEF and EMW and sprayed with vanillin-sulphuric acid. Lanes from left to right: Cr= Crude extract, 1= Compound 1, 2= Compound 2, 3= Compound 3 and 4= Compound 4.	76
Figure 8-1 Structure of ursolic acid isolated from leaves of <i>Breonadia salicina</i>	82
Figure 9-1 Bioautograms of 100 µg of isolated compounds eluted with BEA, CEF and EMW and sprayed with <i>Trichoderma harzianum</i> , <i>Aspergillus parasiticus</i> (left), <i>Penicillium janthinellum</i> (centre) and <i>Fusarium oxysporum</i> (right). White areas indicate inhibition of fungal growth. Lanes from left to right: Cr = Crude extract, 1 = Compound 1, 2 = Compound 2, 3 = Compound 3 and 4 = Compound 4	87
Figure 9-2 Bioautograms of compound 1, 2, 3, 4 and crude extracts, chromatograms developed in BEA and EMW sprayed with <i>Escherichia coli</i> , <i>Pseudomonas aeruginosa</i> , and <i>Staphylococcus aureus</i> . White areas indicate inhibition of fungal growth. Lanes from left to right: Cr = crude extract, 1 = compound 1, 2 = compound 2, 3 = compound 3 and 4 = compound 4.	88
Figure 9-3 Cytotoxicity of berberine with LC ₅₀ = 13 µg/ml against Vero cells	90
Figure 9-4 Percentage (%) cell viability of berberine	90
Figure 9-5 Cytotoxicity of ursolic acid with LC ₅₀ = 25 µg/ml against Vero cells	90
Figure 9-6 Cytotoxicity of C2 with LC ₅₀ = 525 µg/ml against Vero cells	91
Figure 9-7 Cytotoxicity of C3 with LC ₅₀ = 1849µg/ml against Vero cells	91
Figure 9-8 Cytotoxicity of C4 LC ₅₀ = 35 µg/ml against Vero cells	91

Figure 9-9 Cytotoxicity of crude extract with $LC_{50} = 82 \mu\text{g/ml}$ against Vero cells **92**

Figure 10-1 Schematic representation of orange infection experiment using plant pathogen isolated from rotten orange and *P. expansum* and *P. janthinellum*. (2) Sterile loop was used to streak *P. digitatum* on agar plate and (3) incubate overnight. (4) Observation of fungal growth after 24 hrs. (5) The fungal culture was adjusted to approximately 1.0×10^6 cells/ml (6-8) Navel oranges were soaked for 5 minutes and then washed with soap and allowed to dry. (9) Each orange was divided into eight sections with two duplicates in each section to make sixteen treatments. The oranges were punctured and then the extracts were applied into the wound at different concentrations and allowed to dry for 20 minutes. Acetone and amphotericin B were used as negative and positive controls. The fungal culture was applied to the wound and (10) the oranges were placed in a container and incubated until the zone of growth was visible. **101**

Figure 10-2 Orange fruits were inoculated with about 10 000 cells of *P. expansum*, *P. digitatum* and *P. janthinellum* on each wound and subjected to different concentrations of the crude extract. Diameters of growth (mm) were measured after 4 (top) and 7 (bottom) days incubation time. Results are shown as the average diameter of the infected wounds. Error bars show standard deviation. **Lanes from left to right:** Acetone extracts at different concentrations (0.0, 1.25 and 10 mg/ml), Amphotericin B (0.16 mg/ml). **104**

Figure 10-3 Orange fruits were inoculated with about 10 000 cells of *P. digitatum* on each wound and subjected to 1 mg/ml concentration of ursolic acid. Diameters of growth (mm) were measured after 4 days incubation time. Results are shown as the average diameter of the infected wounds. Error bars shows standard deviation. **Lanes from left to right:** Acetone (0.0), ursolic acid (1 mg/ml) and Amphotericin B (0.16 mg/ml). **105**

Figure 10-4 Orange fruits were inoculated with about 10 000 cells of *P. expansum*, *P. digitatum* and *P. janthinellum* on each wound and subjected to **108**

different concentrations of the crude extract. Diameters of growth (mm) were measured after 4 (top) and 7 (bottom) days incubation time. Results are shown as the average diameter of the infected wounds. Error bars shows standard deviation.

Lanes from left to right: Acetone extracts at different concentrations (0.0), 1.25 and 10 mg/ml, Amphotericin B (0.16 mg/ml).

Figure 10-5 Orange fruits inoculated with 1.0×10^6 cells/ml of *P. digitatum*, *P. expansum* and *P. janthinellum*, subjected to different treatment (A) acetone, (L) lower concentration (H) higher concentration and (P) Amphotericin B and then incubated for 4 days. Zone of growth (mm) of infected wounds were observed on the skin of fruit. **109**

Figure 10-6 Oranges inoculated with 100 000 cells of *P. digitatum* and subjected to different treatments. **Left:** Oranges half infected with *Penicillium* after 8 days and **right:** oranges were covered with fungi after 10 days probably reflecting a change from a yeast to a mycelial growth form. **110**

Figure 10-7: Oranges inoculated with 100 000 cells of *P. expansum* (top) *P. digitatum* (middle) and *P. janthinellum* subjected to different concentrations of the crude acetone leaf extract of *Breonadia salicina*. The area of growth in mm^2 was calculated and results are shown as the average infected area after 4 days of incubation time. **112**

Figure 10-8: Oranges inoculated with 100 000 cells of *P. expansum* (top) *P. digitatum* (middle) and *P. janthinellum* (bottom) subjected to different concentrations of the crude acetone leaf extract of *Breonadia salicina*. Area of growth in mm^2 was calculated and results are shown as the average infected area of the after 7 days of incubation time. **113**

LIST OF TABLES

Table 2-1 Minimum inhibitory concentrations (MIC) of acetone extracts of six plant species against two animal fungal pathogens (Pauw and Eloff unpublished data)	14
Table 2-2 Quantity in mg extracted from 1 g of powdered leaf material of different species by acetone [A], hexane [H], dichloromethane [D] and methanol [M]	18
Table 2-3 R _f values of compounds separated in CEF and EMW, extracted by A (acetone), H (hexane), D (dichloromethane) and M (methanol). The compounds were visualized under visible light, UV light 254 or 365 and sprayed with vanillin-sulphuric acid.	20
Table 2-3 continued. R _f values of compounds separated in CEF and EMW, extracted by A (acetone), H (hexane), D (dichloromethane) and M (methanol). The compounds were visualized under visible light, UV light 254 or 365 and sprayed with vanillin-sulphuric acid.	21
Table 3-1 Minimum inhibitory concentration (MIC) of six plant species against plant pathogenic fungi (values duplicate SD = 0)	29
Table 3-2 Total activity in ml/g of six plant species extracted with acetone, hexane, dichloromethane and methanol tested against seven fungi	31
Table 3-3 Average MIC values (mg/ml) of extracts prepared with different extractants on all test organisms	32
Table 3-4 Average MIC values of acetone, hexane, dichloromethane and methanol extracts against seven plant pathogens	33
Table 3-5 The average MIC values (mg/ml) of plant extracts prepared using	34

different extractants against seven plant pathogens

Table 3-6 The inhibition of fungal growth by bioautography of different plant extracts separated by TLC (CEF solvent system). R_f values of active compounds are shown.	39
Table 3-7 The inhibition of fungal growth in the bioautography assay of different plant extracts separated by TLC (EMW solvent system). R_f values of active compounds are shown.	40
Table 5-1 Minimum inhibitory concentration (MIC) of six plant species against <i>Aspergillus fumigatus</i> using different extractants (A = acetone, H = hexane, D = dichloromethane, M = methanol). The results are the average of three replicates and the standard deviation was zero (0).	52
Table 6-1 Minimum inhibitory concentration (MIC) and total activity of four serial extracts against seven plant pathogenic fungi. The results show the average of three replicates and the standard deviation was 0 in all cases	61
Table 6-2 Total activity of the crude acetone extract of <i>B. salicina</i> leaves tested against seven plant pathogenic fungi	62
Table 6-3 Minimum inhibitory concentration (MIC) and total activity of solvent-solvent fractions against plant pathogenic fungi. The results show the average of three replicates with standard deviation 0 in all cases	63
Table 7-1 R_f values of compounds separated in BEA, CEF and EMW. The compounds were visualized using visible light, UV light at 254 or 365 nm, and sprayed with vanillin-sulphuric acid.	77
Table 8-1 ^{13}C NMR spectroscopic data for compound 1	81

Table 9-1 Minimum inhibitory concentration (MIC) of four isolated compounds against seven plant pathogenic fungi. Standard deviations were 0 in all cases.	89
Table 9-2 Cellular toxicity and minimum inhibitory concentration of crude extract and four isolated compounds against seven plant pathogenic fungi.	93
Table 9-3 The Therapeutic Index (TI) of four isolated compounds against seven plant pathogenic fungi.	94
Table 10-1 Minimum inhibitory concentration (MIC) after 48 h of crude extract, ursolic acid and amphotericin B against three <i>Penicillium</i> species. The results show the average of three replicates with a standard deviation of 0.	102
Table 10-2 Growth of different <i>Penicillium</i> isolates in mm treated with acetone (0), acetone extracts and amphotericin B after 7 days incubation	103
Table 10-3 Growth of different <i>Penicillium</i> species in mm treated with different concentrations of the crude extract and two concentrations of amphotericin B after 7 days incubation	107
Table 10-4 Growth of different <i>Penicillium</i> isolates in mm ² treated with two concentrations of amphotericin B after 7 days incubation	111
Table 10-5 LC ₅₀ and area of growth after 4 and 7 days incubation time against three <i>Penicillium</i> species.	114
Table 10-6 The Therapeutic Index (TI) of acetone extracts against three plant pathogenic fungi calculated by dividing LC ₅₀ with MIC using values after 4 days.	115