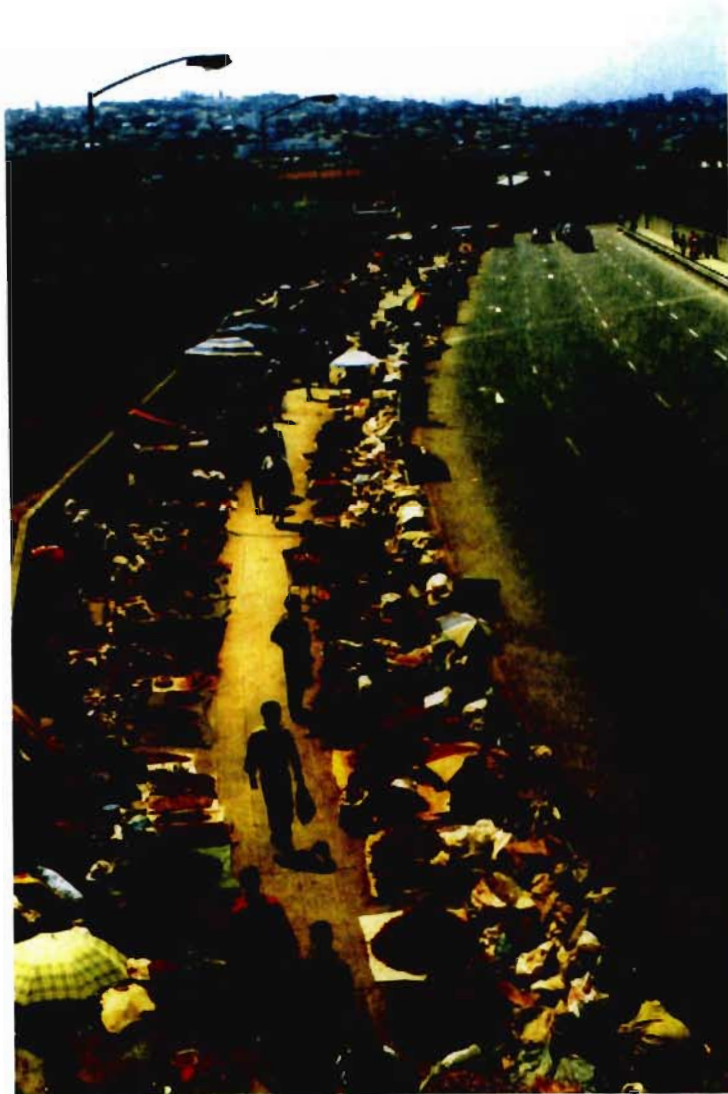


# D'Urbanised Tradition

The Restructuring and Development of the *Muthi*  
Trade in Durban.



The Russell Street *Muthi* Market in Durban (1996).

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## Abstract

This thesis is about the history of the *muthi* trade (the African traditional medicine trade) since it was introduced to Durban. “D’Urbanised Tradition” refers to the way the tradition surrounding *muthi* was *urbanised* in *Durban*, and how it has been viewed as a ‘*de*-urbanising’ element in the city. The thesis deals with the changes, over the past 100 years, to the tradition of *muthi* trading that were brought about both by actors ‘within’ the trade - what I refer to as ‘restructuring of tradition’ - and by interventions from ‘external’ forces (the state, the biomedical lobby and the conservationist lobby) - what I have termed ‘the development of tradition’. Whereas many studies present (Zulu) tradition as something static, this study of “D’Urbanised tradition” focuses on *change* and *process* – why and how these changes to tradition have occurred. It comprises an analysis of how the dialectic between change and continuity within the *muthi* trade has been negotiated by strategic actors throughout the twentieth century. Emphasis is on the economic and political potentials of tradition and traditional medicine, and focus will be on changes in the *muthi* trade in Durban, using the Russell Street *Muthi* Market in the 1990s as a case study. Although ‘restructuring’ and ‘development’ are kept separate in this thesis, they denote interrelated processes whereby active agents strategically use tradition to achieve their ends. It is argued that the traditions surrounding *muthi* have been manipulated both as economic as well as political tools by the various vested interests in the trade. The thesis deals with one of the largest and most important sectors of South Africa’s informal economy, and provides a historical analysis and case study of the strategies used by both traders and outside institutions involved in the trade. This is done by using the paradigm of ‘tradition’.

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**I state unambiguously that the whole thesis, unless specifically indicated to the contrary in the text, is my own work.**

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## **Abbreviations**

AIDS: Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome

ANC: African National Congress

CBD: Central Business District

CID: Criminal Investigation Department

CIPUR: Centre for Indigenous Plant Use Research (University of Natal, Durban)

CITES: Convention on Trade in Endangered Species

CNC: Chief Native Commissioner

FAO: Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations

HIV: Human Immunodeficiency Virus

IFP: Inkatha Freedom Party

INR: Institute of Natural Resources

LAPC: Land and Agriculture Policy Centre

MP: Member of Parliament

NAB: Native Advisory Board

NAD: Native Affairs Department

SABC: South African Broadcasting Corporation

SEWA: Self-Employed Women's Association (India)

SEWU: Self-Employed Women's Union

SNA: Secretary of Native Affairs

STD: Sexually Transmitted Disease

TMP: Traditional Medical Practitioner

TrDr: Traditional Doctor

WHO: World Health Organisation

## **Chapter 1: “D’Urbanised Tradition”. The Restructuring and Development of the *Muthi* Trade in Durban. An Introduction**

The Russell Street *muthi* market is placed at the interface between what can be termed two forms of modernity: urbanised (conventional) modernity and (D)urbanised tradition. It constitutes an intersection of different ideologies of health and economy, and therefore provides an interesting site for studying the changing relationships between these different forms of modernities. One of the greatest challenges has been to analyse some common and fundamental contradictions involved in viewing the *muthi* trade: is it ‘traditional’ or ‘modern’? If it is traditional, how can it also be new and modern? If it is modern, why is it so archaic and primitive? Many claim that the *muthi* trade has changed so much since it was first introduced into the Durban setting that there is not much ‘tradition’ left in it. Despite these changes however, the *muthi* trade has, throughout its history, remained ineluctably and inextricably bound up with the reference to tradition. This study of the “D’Urbanisation” of the *muthi* trade will show that the changes mentioned above are in fact the outcomes of a dialectic between the ‘restructuring’ of tradition from “within” and the ‘development’ of tradition from ‘above’.

The *muthi* trade, when viewed from dominant notions of (D)urban space, culture, health and economic activity, has always been seen as anomalous - and indeed, as threatening. This conflict has been cast as a clash between ‘tradition’ versus ‘modernity’; Africanism vs urbanism; primitiveness vs rationality; chaos vs order etc. This thesis attempts to go beyond the simplistic and conventional uses of ‘tradition’ and stresses the need to incorporate dialectic agency and process into the term.



Despite a history of oppression through segregation, apartheid and global systems of science, capital and ideology, *muthi* traders have successfully managed to carve out a viable economic niche, which has come to produce social multiplier effects extending into the realms of politics, religion, and selfhood. The thesis is essentially about the role of tradition in South African modernities. It will analyse the strategic uses of tradition by *bricoleurs*<sup>1</sup> within and outside of the *muthi* trade.

This introductory chapter, together with Chapter 2, will provide the reader with basic information about the *muthi* trade and outline my methodological and theoretical approach to studying it. The focus of this thesis is on *muthi* as a commodity inscribed with certain powers due to its reference to tradition. I have not focused on *muthi* as medicine per se – i.e. whether or not *muthi* has actual healing properties. I have rather worked from the observable premise that since people regard *muthi* as an essential commodity, it can be assumed that it ‘works’.

## LITERATURE ON MUTHI TRADING

The *muthi* trade is a largely under-researched sector of South Africa’s so-called informal economy. What little literature there is on the subject has mainly focused on issues relating to the social and cultural uses of *muthi* in South Africa (i.e. Sundkler 1948; Lugg 1975; Berglund 1976; Ngubane 1977; Hammond-Tooke 1993; Dauskardt 1994). The existing research on *muthi* trading per se has been confined to studies analysing *muthi* as a natural resource (Cunningham 1992; INR 1988, 1996, 1998; FAO 1998). These studies have been

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<sup>1</sup> *Bricolage* is an analogy employed by Levi-Strauss in his discussion of mythic thought and its relationship to scientific thought (The Savage Mind, 1966 [1969]). The *bricoleur* is a kind of handyman or “Jack of all trades”, who uses whatever tools and materials are at hand to construct his projects. Levi-Strauss contrasts this innovative, associational and playful mode of thought operation with modern scientific thought. I use the term to denote the ways in which tradition is used by strategic actors (mainly with regard to ‘restructuring’ but also ‘development’).

conducted by people concerned about the resource mismanagement by *muthi* traders and gatherers. This has resulted in studies which have tended to be essentially quantitative and biased, with a tendency to over-dramatise the problems (for policy reasons), and in some cases, portraying an unsympathetic image of the people involved in the trade. There is no doubt that the trade does have serious resource management problems. However, it is unfair to focus entirely on poor people's accumulation strategies as most of these studies tend to. What is needed, is a broader vision that contextualises the problem with wider issues of economic power, capitalism and global ecology (more in Chapter 5). Despite these studies, the *muthi* trade still remains an under-researched 'hidden economy'. This thesis will attempt to address this void by providing a qualitative analysis of the economic history of *muthi* trading in Durban.

Almost all the "facts and figures" present in the thesis are based on studies done by the Institute of Natural Resources (INR). Although I am somewhat sceptical to the feasibility and validity of such quantitative studies, I make use of them where necessary to fill in the gaps in my knowledge of the wider quantitative context. The INR's study in Russell Street (1996) was based on questionnaires and interviews conducted over a short period of time. In Chapter 4, I will show how traders used this survey as part of a strategic marginalisation discourse, and in Chapter 5, I will illustrate how the same study served INR's uses and aims. I saw no reason to challenge these findings since they serve their function and are useful in providing an overview of the extent and dynamic of the trade. I instead chose to direct my research efforts towards complementing this essentially quantitative and static material with more qualitative and dynamic data.

There is, in addition to the above, a more substantial body of literature dealing with Zulu medicine and Zulu culture in general, but these studies too have tended to be static - and also reifying - in their representations (Callaway 1870; Sundkler 1948; Bryant 1966; Lugg 1974; Berglund 1976; Ngubane 1977, 1992; Hammond-Tooke 1993; Hutchings 1996). 'The Zulu tradition' is presented in a positivistic way as something fixed, unchanged and unanimously shared and agreed upon. Where there is brief mention of change, it is simply attributed to urbanisation (Du Toit 1971; Berglund 1976; Ngubane 1977).

Vilakazi's *Zulu Transformations* (1965) was the first major study to deal with what I term the "D'Urbanisation of tradition". His fascinating account differs from other studies in that it deals with the dynamics of 'culture contact' and 'culture change' (which was fashionable at the time). His book is especially interesting in this regard since it is based on research in Durban and in the Nyaswa Reserve in the Valley of a Thousand Hills just outside Durban. However, he has fallen into the same trap as other contemporaries of referring to 'a cultural baseline' (i.e. *the* 'tradition') from which all changes took place, and proposing that the introduction of these changes disturbed a 'Yin-state of cultural equilibrium and ushered in the Yang-state of change' (Vilakazi 1965, 136). His main argument is that although there were multiple factors operating to bring about 'culture change', Christianity and education, which always went together, were 'beyond doubt the most conspicuous factors of change' (1965, 136). Throughout his book, Vilakazi makes the point that Christianity, westernisation and urbanisation are synonymous. These forces of change transposed differently, and therefore he speaks of a 'traditionalist' class (*amagxagxa*), who are mostly (or merely) products of 'secular change' (influenced by 'secular agents' such as the white government, industry and migrant labour), and 'Christians' (*amakholwa*), who have been influenced by both secular and profane forces.

A later study which deals with the position of *muthi* in urban areas is Du Toit's *The Isangoma: An Adaptive Agent Among Urban Zulu* (1971). This article is also very typical of its time, and reflects the academic view of urbanisation and tradition that was then prevalent. Du Toit conducted his study in KwaMashu just outside Durban (which he terms 'an African city') where he set out to investigate why the *sangoma* (a traditional healer, defined more closely below) had retained so much of his/her status and why he/she still formed a functional part of the Zulu community in the city. He found that the main reason was that 'the *isangoma* is answering very pertinent questions for his patients in a way they can understand' (Du Toit 1971, 61). The *sangomas* function as a psychological buffer for the African in his experience of urban anxieties. 'At the same time in some cases the modern medical doctor and psychiatrist are replacing the traditional healer' (1971, 51). Du Toit then attempts to explain this trend by reminding the reader that

no person is able to break completely with his past or dissociate himself from his cultural values, world view, and cosmology *simply* because he has changed place of residence. The man in the city is still a Zulu, in spite of a square house and paved streets where he lives or the permanent job and football which occupies his time. The need, of course, is for education, both in a religious sense and in an academic sense, in order that the basic premises which are seen as underlying the world and its existence may be reinterpreted. But this education must be sympathetic and substitutive rather than coming in to sweep away completely the old values and accepted beliefs. (Du Toit 1971, 62)

In support of his argument for this 'need', Du Toit uses his friend M. V. Gumede (a medical doctor who also has written a book on traditional medicine) who says:

Africans today, in all walks of life, urban and rural, erudite and illiterate, are everywhere swimming in a whirlpool of black and white magical conceptions, a characteristic of a people in search of the truth. They will spend thousands of rand annually on the herbalist and the diviner and will pay vast sums for the *intelezi* which will fortify their homes against wizards and witches. They will buy armlets to ward off sickness and pain, charms to keep away lightning, charms to bring them good luck and good

fortune, or carry out sacrificial rites to appease the ancestral spirits to look kindly upon them and bless their homes. Thus it will continue until the African eventually realizes the true aetiology of sickness and suffering, that is until the spirit and man-made theories are replaced by scientifically valid arguments. (Gumede 1968 in Du Toit 1971, 62)

The studies referred to above were often cast in the now unfashionable structural-functional mode, or bore marks of the attitudes of their time. Their strength, however, lies in their descriptive detail, and treated with sufficient caution, they provide some worthwhile insights into the past, albeit in the sense of 'a more or less hypothetical baseline, a reconstruction of traditional society which is contingent on our relative ignorance of pre-colonial conditions' (Murray 1980, 139 in Spiegel and Boonzaier 1988, 46).

## METHODOLOGY

The research for this thesis had its inception in May 1995 when I walked through the Warwick Avenue market area, which I had singled out as a possible interest-spot for research. At first I did not even know what the *muthi* traders were selling, and tried to ask some women sellers (who could not speak English). Only when I came to the middle of the Russell Street Bridge did I find an answer, when I was greeted by a friendly woman who was willing to tell me what was on sale. She invited me to sit down, and introduced me to the ins and outs of *muthi* trading. She was later to become a close friend, "surrogate mother", and main informant.

In general, we know that the way in which one approaches a field of study to a large extent influences the end results of accumulated data-collection and analysis. Since a major part of my academic background is in the discipline of social anthropology, my fieldwork, which lasted over thirty months, has been essentially qualitative rather than quantitative. The

methods of participant observation, informal interviews and 'action research' seemed to me to be the only valid way to conduct this research. I spent many months simply being in Russell Street, chatting to traders, trying to introduce myself and my intentions, and getting to know people and gain their confidence. Indeed, most of my trips down to Russell Street were social trips, in the course of which I would sit and converse about everything from the weather, soccer, Norway and travelling, to violence, politics and the economy. On Friday and Saturday afternoons, I would often be served ice cold Black Labels as traders rounded off their week. One can learn a lot simply from being physically present in Russell Street and observing the trade: experiencing the roar and fumes from the heavy traffic passing by, the dust, the dirt, the smells of people and various medicines (*muthi*), and enduring the discomfort of sitting for long periods in the hot sun, or occasional shower of rain.

Many hours were also spent in the Pietermaritzburg Archives Repository tracing documents relating to the *muthi* trade. I have used archival data, limited and biased as it is, to give an impression of the official attitude towards the trade. Most of the oral data from Russell Street was collected through informal interviews, most often without the use of a tape-recorder, as I wanted to be as inconspicuous as possible. This was done to facilitate a more natural and relaxed interview situation, and to allow the informants time and ease to answer at their liberty. I learnt that people tended to become more tense and formal when they realised that what they said was being written down or recorded. I therefore tried to avoid recording material in public, which meant that in many cases I had to transcribe interviews from memory.<sup>2</sup> In Chapters 4 and 5, I have used newspaper quotes of statements made by both traders and other actors involved in the trade, even though I myself might have had similar conversations in the course of my informal interviews. This has been done because the press

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<sup>2</sup> I used my tape-recorder in interviews with traders with whom I had a fairly close relationship, and who did not mind me using it. The following quotes from traders have been taken from such tapes.

quote both reflect my own unrecorded conversations and reveal how these issues (*muthi* trading and restructuring and development of tradition) have been dealt with through the media.<sup>3</sup>

I also found it necessary to spend some time maturing into this new setting before I could properly research the “nitty gritty” of *muthi* trading. The *muthi* trade is, needless to say, extremely complex, and I felt that I first needed to get to know some of the people involved in the trade, and some of its basic elements, before I could proceed with my investigations. I therefore started off with learning about traditional healing and the cosmology surrounding it, and then proceeded to study the trade and the traders.

Being a young, white, foreign male had both advantages and disadvantages - something I learned to control and to some degree, take advantage of through strategic role-playing. It was important for me not to be seen as intrusive, and I wanted the traders in Russell Street to be relaxed and confident about my presence. In many ways, I think I was seen as quite difficult to classify both according to age and gender (skinny young man with long hair) and even race, as most of the few white people who entered the market were either city officials (male) or the occasional journalist (or Pat Horn the secretary of the Self-Employed Women's Union). I think and hope that my presence was not seen as a threat, although, inevitably in that environment, I was “a matter out of place”. At times I felt tiny, helpless and stripped bare of all my normally active and effective social resources. The language barrier was the most frustrating aspect of working in Russell Street. All my interviews and conversations were conducted in English, or in very few cases through the help of other traders who could

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<sup>3</sup> I have discussed the issues dealt with in Chapter 5 (the restructuring of tradition and breaches of tradition) with both Mr Mhlongo and Mr Jamile in person and over the telephone. I have chosen to use newspaper quotes because they summarise their views in a concise way, and because they are directed towards public opinion.

interpret. In September 1996, I decided to engage in what has been termed 'action research'. The traders in Russell Street were threatened by City Police plans to 'clean up the area'. This crisis gave me an opportunity to get actively involved on the side of the traders (see Chapter 4). This intervention gave me extremely valuable and exclusive insights. If ever I was close to being one with my field, it was during the tense hours before and during the night of the police raid. This intervention also enabled me to give something back to the traders. During my first months, I was often asked what I was going to do for them, what good my research would do for them. There were also times when my intervention and involvement caused antagonism and frustration amongst certain individuals in and outside Russell Street, since it was seen to threaten certain interests. These problems (and in some cases misunderstandings) were dealt with as they occurred, and I hope and believe that the air was cleared by the time I left the field.

Interviews with official actors involved in the trade were more structured, using pre-faxed questions and a tape recorder. I did not prioritise any quantitative surveys of any kind.

To sum up, then, my approach has been to try to dissolve the divisions between synchrony and diachrony, ethnography and historiography, parochialism and globalism; and avoid separating culture from political economy, micro from macro and process from structure. Throughout the thesis, emphasis will be on both structural impositions ('development'), and agency from 'below' ('restructuring').



## AN INTRODUCTION TO *MUTHI* TRADING

Despite the widely held assumption that the use of so-called traditional medicine would decline with increasing modernisation and urbanisation, the *muthi* trade has experienced a steady growth throughout the twentieth century. Both as a business and belief, the *muthi* trade is a significant aspect of South Africa's socio-economy, and one of the most important sectors of South Africa's informal economy. Studies have shown that Durban is the most important centre for the *muthi* trade in the Southern African region, with an unprecedented scale, sophistication and intensity (see Cunningham 1992, 34).

It is believed that 80-85% of the African population use *muthi*, most often in conjunction with biomedicine (Green 1984; Cunningham 1992; Dauskardt 1994; INR 1988, 1996, 1998; FAO 1998), which means that there are some 27 million *muthi* consumers in South Africa today (INR 1998). A recent report from the Institute of Natural Resources (INR) in Pietermaritzburg estimates that the annual trade volume of medicinal plants alone in South African could be as much as 19 500 tons a year, with a trade value of R270 million. The raw materials traded and the value added through the dispensing of medicine could be worth R2 billion a year (INR 1998). If one adds the healing services provided by the 300 000 traditional healers, this figure would be substantially higher. This means that the *muthi* trade is an important income source for thousands of people. The report from the INR estimates that the *muthi* trade generates between 20 000 to 30 000 jobs in KwaZulu-Natal, and some 14 000 jobs in Durban alone (INR 1998).

This is in large part due to the fact that *muthi* is not only believed to have the power to heal bodily illnesses/diseases, but that its powers transcend the realms of psychology, social

relations, religion, economy and politics. While biomedicine is based on a scientific, technical and analytical approach, the cosmology surrounding *muthi* takes a holistic approach, according to which disease or misfortune results from an imbalance between the individual and his/her social environment. In the opinion of Bryant, 'the secret of many Kaffir cures, and may it be added, of many Kaffir ailments, is not in the action of matter on matter, or drug on flesh, but in those occult regions where mind works on mind, and mind on flesh' (Bryant 1966, 16).

### ***The Goods and Services Involved in the Trade: Muthi and Traditional Healing***

First of all it is necessary to elaborate on the Zulu term *muthi* (*umuthi*) which means medicine<sup>4</sup>. Whereas in English the word 'medicine' refers to 'a substance ... used in curing illness' (Oxford Dictionary 1995), *umuthi*, which is often used as a synonym for 'medicine', has wider connotation. *Umuthi* literally means 'tree' or 'shrub'. When used for medicine it applies to noxious as well as curative substances; there is medicine for healing (*umuthi wokwelapha*) and for killing (*umuthi wokubulala*), and sometimes for both purposes (Ngubane 1977). There is a complex classification system of herbal and animal medicines according to their traits, properties, gathering method, uses, preparation, and administration (see Pujol 1988; Hutchings 1996; Ngubane 1977). Some *muthi* is believed to be potent in itself (mostly from plants), while other types require symbolic transformations through special rites (mostly from animals).

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<sup>4</sup> I have chosen to Anglicise the Zulu term *umuthi* (plural: *imithi*) to *muthi*.

People use *muthi* as it is believed that many material substances contain specific powers (*amandla*). These powers, which are embedded in the species itself,<sup>5</sup> can be used for all kinds of healing, for success in risky undertakings (e.g. examinations, operations), for the favourable outcome of court cases, for protecting homes, fields, property, businesses as well as protection against the dangers of travel, police raids, dangerous jobs and ill-tempered employers. *Muthi* also makes warriors braver, and lovers more attractive and committed. In other words, the powers of *muthi* can be used in all spheres of life.

Herbal medicines (*amakhambi*) consist of green leaves, bark, roots, stems, bulbs, fruits, flowers, and seeds. Some are used in their live, fresh form, while others are dried and preserved, crushed and boiled, or ground into powder (Ngubane 1997, 106; Pujol 1988).

Cunningham estimates that over 400 indigenous and 20 exotic species are commercially sold in South Africa, representing 109 different families and all plant life forms (1992, 37). One of the most important categories of herbal medicines is *intelezi*. This group of medicines is used for its psychoactive properties, whether preventive or counteractive. These special *intelezi* mixtures possess the unique quality of rendering the evil effects of sorcery ineffective, and are sprinkled ritualistically over the body or over a physical spot that is believed to be spelled (see Chapter 5).

The animals traded in the *muthi* market range from wild game, birds and marine organisms to reptiles, and even insects. These species are used ritualistically or medically, as *muthi* in the form of fat, pieces of skin and feathers, cerebral matter, and as powdered bones. Cunningham has registered thirty seven species of marine animals, forty seven species of animals, eighteen

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<sup>5</sup> According to Berglund, those who have been to school say that God has put the power into medicine (1976, 257).

reptile species, sixteen bird species, and seven categories of 'mythical beasts'<sup>6</sup> (1992, 43). The most popular animals are rock python, crocodile, hippo, mamba, elephant, baboon, monkey, and lion. In general, animals are used for magical purposes and sorcery, and are selected for their symbolic strengths rather than purely curative properties. In general, the curative value of *muthi* plants, and particularly animals, is based on a similar notion to 'the *Doctrine of Signatures*' propounded by Paracelus (1493-1541) which revolutionised European medicine. This doctrine teaches 'the idea of similars'; that plant shapes and animal features resembling human organs or body structures should be regarded as healing agents for those body parts (Pujol 1988; Cunningham 1992). Many *inyangas* and *sangomas* think similarly to Paracelus, who said 'all is poison, nothing is poison' - as they believe that it is the dosage and preparation that is important. I was shocked to learn that mercury (*isigidi*) was sold in Russell Street as medication to induce childbirth for pregnant women. A small drop of mercury is added to a mix of herbs which is boiled and then drunk.

Animals attain their symbolic value through their behaviour patterns, their physical bodies, their sensitive faculties, their natural resistance to injuries and poison, their strength, their agility and their cunning (Krige 1936; Douglas 1966, 1996; Berglund 1976; Pujol 1988; Cunningham 1992; Hammond-Tooke 1993). Examples of powerful animals are those which are seen as physical anomalies. Mary Douglas has claimed that animals whose physical appearance does not fit in with the standard classification system of the culture encountering them, often become powerful symbolic assets (Douglas 1966, 1996). In Durban, exotic marine animals provide the same anomalies, such as the circular sea bat (*Haliutaea fitzsimonsi* or *umakhukhumesana*) which looks like a cross between a porcupine and a fish. Vultures are valuable *muthi* because of their excellent sight and ability to track down death. This is generally interpreted into the medicine's ability to "foresee" future events

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<sup>6</sup> For example, water spirits, ghosts, resurrected corpses and witches (see Cunningham 1992, appendix 1, 137).

(Cunningham 1992). Abnormal physical appearances can also account for animals' value: the Natal Tonguefish (*Paraplagusia billineata* or *ingulamlomo*) for example, is used in the treatment (or prevention) of strokes because of the similarity between the skewed mouth of the sole, and that of a stroke victim who is paralysed down one side (Cunningham 1992, 58). Eel skin on soccer players and in taxis make them slippery and able to evade opposition soccer players and speed-traps (Cunningham 1992, 58). Similarly, the strong grip of baboons are good for stick-fighters and goal keepers, chameleons are good for camouflage, fat from owls keeps lazy people awake, and lion parts give boldness or treats nervousness (Krige 1936; Berglund 1976; Pujol 1988).

The preparation and application of some *muthi* is common knowledge, and can be administered without consulting specialists. There are strict customary purity rules governing the method of collection, storage, preparation and application of *muthi*. The *muthi* can lose its power or even work against you if these rules are not adhered to (see Chapter 5).

Cunningham has shown that the most popular herbal *muthis* today were also popular in the past (1992, 3).

### ***The Cosmology Surrounding Muthi***

Zulu notions of health and disease/illness are complex. Ideally, an introduction to *muthi* trading should involve a more detailed presentation of the cosmologies and worldviews of the consumers and producers of *muthi*. For it is precisely because of this intricate and pervasive 'traditional' cosmology that *muthi* assumes its commercial value. For reasons of space constraints, I will attempt to summarise some of the most relevant ideas and practices that are presented in the literature, along with findings from my own research (Callaway 1884; Krige

1936; Sundkler 1948; Bryant 1970; Du Toit 1971; Lugg 1975; Berglund 1976; Ngubane 1977). Generally speaking, traditional cosmology does not distinguish between or compartmentalise physical treatment as contrasted with psychiatric treatment: 'the treatment of body and mind go hand in hand' (Du Toit 1971, 52).

Good health for a Zulu, Ngubane claims, consists not only of a healthy body, but 'a healthy situation of everything that concerns him' ... 'the harmonious working and co-ordination of his universe' (1977, 27-28). When regarding nature as a factor in the causation of illness, Ngubane claims the Zulu sees natural forces operating on two levels (1977, 22-23). The first premise views the body as a biological entity that presents somatic symptoms to indicate illness (referred to as *umkhuhlane*). These are illnesses which 'just happen' (common colds, flu etc.), they do not result from any personal malice or fault of a patient. The medicines to cure these diseases are believed to be active and potent in themselves (mostly herbal medicines). The understanding of this type of natural illness is common to people even from outside Africa, which means that people do not have any problems using biomedical cures and medicines (Ngubane 1977, 23). On the other hand, there are a wide range of diseases and ideas of causation that are based on Zulu cosmology (*ukufa kwabantu* or 'disease of our people/our nation') and which can only be understood and dealt with within these parameters. This is the second level of natural explanation of illness, which is based on the special, often symbolic, relationship of a person to his/her environment. To cut short Ngubane's detailed account, this environment is perceived to be riddled with dangers, so in order to survive, people need to be strengthened to maintain resistance, or in other words, to establish and maintain a form of equilibrium with their natural environment (to restore order). But this environment also has a social aspect to it, and sorcery (*ubuthakathi*) is the direct result of malign social relations within a person's environment or surroundings. People are easily

susceptible to sorcery, as it is believed that humans in motion absorb certain elements of their environment, some of which are harmful, deliberately placed there by a sorcerer (*abathakathi*).

The role of ancestors (*amadlozi*) also deserves a brief mention. Ancestors are believed to be concerned with the welfare of their descendants. When life is good, people say 'the ancestors are with us' (*abaphansi banathi*), and when misfortune occurs, they say 'the ancestors are facing away from us' (*abaphansi basifulathele*). Ancestors can withdraw their protection and gifts of good fortune if descendants fail to meet their obligations, and this can lead to all sorts of misfortune and disease. Timely and correct sacrifices, certain life-cycle rituals, and regular usages of *muthi* are necessary to keep the ancestors pleased. Without ancestral protection, a person is vulnerable to sorcery and other environmental dangers, as well as being more prone to accidents. Berglund uses the term 'shade' instead of ancestor, as he claims it captures the close and intimate relationship and association within the lineage between the departed ('the living dead') and their survivors (Berglund 1976).

### *Actors Involved in the Trade*

There is considerable confusion in the literature regarding the taxonomy of actors involved in the *muthi* trade. Before I introduce the main cast of actors, it is important to clarify my choice of using the Anglicised version of the Zulu terms for the two main traditional medical practitioners (TMPs), namely the *inyanga* (doctor, medical healer) and the *sangoma* (diviner, spiritual healer)<sup>7</sup>. I have chosen to Anglicise these terms, as I found that people I interviewed used them in this same way in their English. Historically, these specialists were labelled

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<sup>7</sup> The plural form in Zulu is *izinyanga* and *izangoma*. I have chosen to use an Anglicised version: *inyangas* and *sangomas*.

'medicine men' or 'herbalists' and 'witchdoctors' respectively by colonialists, government officials and laymen, and these Anglicised versions are the closest I can get to the emic versions. In my Zulu dictionary, *inyanga* (*nyanga*), refers to a 'Native doctor; renowned doctor; herbalist; diviner', but also an 'expert, one skilled in a particular profession' (Doke et al 1990, 620). The *sangoma* (*angoma/ isangoma*) is translated as 'diviner, witch-doctor, necromancer' (1990, 11). An alternative Zulu term is *isanusi*, which refers more commonly to female diviners (1990, 12). In development circles (WHO) the term 'traditional healer' is preferred, and is defined as:

Someone who is recognised by the community in which he lives as competent to provide health care by using vegetable, animal and mineral substances and certain other methods based on the social, cultural and religious background as well as the prevailing knowledge, attitudes and beliefs regarding physical mental and social well being and the causation of disease and disability in the community. (Oyebola 1986, in Louw and Pretorius 1995, 42)

Traditional healers are divided into various fields of specialisation. Historically, sources say, traditional medical practitioners (TMPs) were organised according to a certain sexual division. Ngubane claims in her book that women are usually *sangomas* (diviners), while men are *inyangas* (doctors) (1977, 100-103). This is, she says, because paternal ancestors only return through daughters. If a man is possessed he becomes a transvestite, as he is playing the role of a daughter rather than a son (1977, 57 and 142). Sundkler also refers to the *sangoma* as *she*, stating that 'most diviners are women' (1948, 22). Bryant (1966) puts the percentage of women healers as high as 95% (footnote 11 p. 302 in Sundkler 1948). Lugg says the *sangoma* may be male or female, but uses mostly the '*he*' form. But the *inyangas* are always men (medicine *men*) (Lugg 1974). Women, he says, 'may act as *sangomas* or herbalists, and as midwives, but not in the realms of magic except in its minor forms' (Lugg 1975, 21-22). The oldest study I came across refers to the diviner in the male form (Callaway



1871), but then it also uses the Zulu term *inyanga* to denote a diviner. Berglund says that 'in theory, anybody can become a diviner, but in practice the overwhelming majority are women' (1976, 136). His informants gave no definite reasons for this. But according to Berglund, 'the most common word for a diviner is *inyanga*', which he says denotes a specialist of some kind (Berglund 1976, 185). Du Toit claims that when an *inyanga* goes beyond merely treating with herbs, he may be called a *sangoma* (he also uses the *he* form) (Du Toit 1971).

In Durban today, according to my findings, there are no such strict sexual divisions when it comes to these specialist occupations. Also, the two categories are becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish, as I have heard many conflicting definitions. However, generally, one can say that a person can *learn* to become an *inyanga* (it takes from five weeks to twelve years), while a person is *chosen* or *called* to be a *sangoma* by her/his ancestors through dreams. Furthermore, a *sangoma* can also be an *inyanga*, but not the other way around.

Bryant writes that the *sangoma*'s office is to 'indicate', while the *inyanga* 'administers' (Bryant 1966, 13). Berglund says that the diviners 'expose' *ubuthakathi* (witchcraft) while the herbalists 'defend' people and society from its evil powers (Berglund 1976). The *sangoma*'s ability to intervene into people's illnesses and misfortunes resides in their close communication with ancestral spirits. It is the latter who operate through the *sangoma*, revealing cures or explaining events (they also fix the price for the consultation). Most *sangomas* communicate with their ancestors by 'throwing the bones' (*amathambo*), and then reading off what the ancestors say about the particular problem or quest. Others use ecstatic chanting or clap hands to fall into a trance-like mode which enables dialogue. *Sangomas* are often not given a history of the illness or symptoms, as they are expected with their second sight to see beyond what ordinary people perceive and so to be able to know who is ill, what

the nature of the ailment is, what has caused it, and how it should be treated (Ngubane 1992, 368). But apart from these clairvoyant powers, *sangomas* often have a comprehensive knowledge of *muthi* comparable with that of the *inyanga*. According to Ngubane (1992), female *sangomas* are superior to the male *inyangas* because they have this knowledge as well as having clairvoyant powers. This shows that there is considerable overlapping as diviners can gain knowledge of cures from the ancestors.

The *inyanga* candidate learns the trade through an apprenticeship, for which she/he pays compensation through livestock or/and money (during this apprenticeship, there is much sacrifice of cows, goats, and fowls, which have to be paid for by the candidate).<sup>8</sup> Some learn the trade through their parents or family, while others learn from established *inyangas* and organisations which offer courses. In Durban today, there is an organisation called *Umgogdlawesiswe College*, that has started a five week evening course for *inyanga* candidates, who receive an *inyanga* certificate upon completion of the course. But most people still believe that to become a proper *inyanga* means up to twelve years of intensive study. Berglund notes that anybody can become a herbalist, but that in practice, this knowledge is most often passed from father to son (1976, 347). Historically, the institutions of the *inyanga* and *sangoma* were important aspects of tribal life, and they were seen as holding power almost equal to that of the chief (Bryant 1966).

As will be shown later (see Chapters 3, 4 and 5), the *muthi* trade has changed from being primarily a specialist activity (up until the early 1900s), to a bustling commercial trade involving new entrepreneurs. The main actors involved in the trade today are the *inyangas*

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<sup>8</sup> One sangoma estimated the cost of her training to be over R5 000 (one big cow costs R2 500). Another sangoma said it had cost him a lot of money to become what he is today. He had sacrificed many fowls, goats, sheep, and in his 14 years of practice, he had sacrificed nine cows to assume his powerful position (Interview Henry Mlangeni, 19 March 1996).

and *sangomas*; herbalists, who are experts on herbs but are not doctors per se (i.e. Indian shop owners.); *muthi* traders (and their assistants), who are solely traders, with little or no specialist knowledge of *muthi*; and finally, *muthi* gatherers, who supply the markets. The first two categories are the two specialist occupations that historically have dominated the trade. The remaining categories are more recent introductions, which found a niche when the *muthi* trade started to become more professionalised and commercialised (or “D’Urbanised”). As will be seen, these categories are often combined by people involved in the trade.

*Inyangas* and *sangomas* have been practising from small stalls and offices (practices) in Durban’s Central Business District (CBD) and in the peri-urban areas since the beginning of the 1900s. They have always depended on *muthi* supplies from traders and gatherers. Most of them hold small stocks of basic medicines, and then refer their patients to *muthi* shops, street stalls or even post-order businesses for other *muthi* products. While the specialists more or less managed to survive in harsh legislative environments because of their seclusion from policed public spheres, the suppliers (mostly women) suffered from constant police harassment. Between the 1940s and late 1980s, the main urban supply function was performed by the Indian *muthi* shops, which operated in the Indian trading area in the north-western parts of the CBD (around the Victoria Market). With the emergence of mass street trading in the late 1980s, a gradual supply shift occurred from ‘formal’ Indian shops, to the booming informal market in Russell Street (see Chapters 3 and 4).

These developments not only marked a change in the professional and racial composition of the supply function, but also altered the gender ratio, as most of the *muthi* traders on the streets today are women. While these professional categories were more separate some years back, today many people combine these specialist duties and act as both doctors and diviners

(and even traders). According to practising *sangomas* and *inyangas* in Durban, men comprise only a small majority of Durban's specialised traditional medical practitioners. There are no fixed rates in the market for healing services, and TMPs charge differential rates based on what the ancestors decide, or charge according to the wealth of the patient or client (Ngubane claims that there are, however, fixed rates in the *muthi* trade: Ngubane 1977, 104). Many have pointed to the cheaper cost of consulting traditional healers as an important reason for their popularity. However, a study done in survey of a township near Bloemfontein, has shown that the consultation fee of *sangomas* was twice as high as that of both black and white biomedical practitioners (Pretorius 1990 in Louw & Pretorius 1995). A recent study done for the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) confirms this<sup>9</sup> (FAO 1998).

As mentioned above, people do not consult TMPs for what in western terms would be viewed as health-related reasons only. *Sangomas* are consulted for a wide range of services, ranging from protecting houses<sup>10</sup> (from lightning, crime, sorcery etc.), taxis and buses (against crime, violence and accidents); recovering lost property; detecting *umthakathi* and providing good luck and fortune in love, games and business. Some *sangomas* specialise in certain niches in the market, and manage to build up a good reputation in their field. The same applies to *inyangas*, who specialise in skills concerning the preparation of a certain type of medicine, or healing techniques (i.e. snake bite antidotes, dental medicines, cures for sexually transmitted diseases, treatment of fractures, complex midwifery, and treatment of livestock).

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<sup>9</sup> The FAO report clearly shows that access to clinics and the cost of biomedical treatments were not important considerations in determining whether to use *muthi* or not (see figure 4.17 page 34 in FAO 1998).

<sup>10</sup> In Durban *inyangas* and *sangomas* charge up to R3 000 to protect a house (according to one *sangoma* it takes approximately one hour to do the job).

### *The Demand for Traditional Medicine and Healing Services*

Why do people consult traditional medicine? Why is it still an important aspect of day-to-day life? There are many explanations for the persistence of the demand for traditional medicine and healing (see Green 1984; Feierman & Janzen 1992; Kirkland et al 1992; Sindiga et al 1995). A plausible politico-economic explanation emphasises the historical apartheid of health care facilities and the concomitant inaccessibility of the latter for large numbers of black South Africans, which left many people with no other option than to do as generations had done before them; i.e. consult the local *inyanga* or *sangoma*. The sporadic and poor health care provision, coupled with the lack of access to educational opportunities, is seen by some as having forced many Africans to be self-reliant in meeting their needs, and to rely on their own knowledge and skills in treating disease (Sindiga et al 1995). Others have argued that the reason for traditional medicine's popularity lies in its cost-saving benefits for consumers. This premise, however, has also been invalidated by studies such as those mentioned above (Louw and Pretorius 1995; FAO 1998).

The continued demand for traditional medicine, should not be viewed merely as the result of exclusion and poverty. Commenting on the persistence of traditional medical beliefs and practices in the world today, David Hufford suggests that these represent 'a universal set of efforts to cope with illness in ways that go beyond - but do not necessarily conflict with - what modern medicine has to offer' (Hufford 1992, 15). Indeed, both traders and customers in Russell Street have indicated that 'modern medicine' is not simply an alternative to 'our nation's medicine': people have a need to consult traditional medicine in particular because there is a wide range of ailments and problems which can only be cured or solved by an *inyanga* or *sangoma* or through the use of *muthi*. Some also claim that people have

abandoned biomedicine due to its shortcomings in curing AIDS, cancer and other diseases and illnesses (Green 1984; INR 1996).

Furthermore, the often frustrating difficulty involved in interpreting symptoms and determining the cause of a given episode of illness (whether naturalistic, supernatural, or socially-induced) makes people oscillate between 'traditional' and 'modern' medicine in order to maximise the chances of recovery (Sindiga 1995). From a practical point of view, consumers therefore find that traditional cures are useful, since they do what they are expected to do. They are still a socially approved way of dealing with disruptive and anomalous events that need resolving. Even so, many patients and consumers of *muthi* deem it necessary to consult an *inyanga* or *sangoma* at night-time, in order to avoid the social stigma which they consider to be incompatible with their roles in everyday life.

As seen from the above, the *muthi* trade attends to a wide range of physical and psychological disorders, social problems, and practical day-to-day challenges. It provides people with a rationale for seemingly inexplicable phenomena (offering explanation for *why*, not necessarily how a particular person fell ill etc.). Furthermore, as will shortly be shown, traditional medicine - like all 'traditions' and cultural artefacts - has a fundamental flexibility that enables it to constantly meet new needs and challenges (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1992; Gyekye 1997). It is for these reasons that *muthi* remains an essential consumer commodity for many households in Durban.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Households spend between 4-8% of their annual incomes on traditional healing services and medicines (FAO 1998, 35).

## WHY THE CONCEIT OF “D’URBANISATION”?

The neology of the “D’Urbanisation of tradition” is the mere result of a playful experiment of merging two words with similar pronunciation – ‘Durban’ and ‘urban’- which, coalesced, have been ascribed a certain connotation. The term stems from *D’Urban*, which was the name that was given to the early township that was established in Port Natal in 1835.<sup>12</sup> The term plays with the general and wider concept of ‘urbanisation’, which adds both analytical content to the term in addition to giving it a processual or diachronic dynamic. Thus, the intellectual leap from initially working with the theme of ‘the urbanisation of tradition’ and transforming it into the “*D’Urbanisation of tradition*” with specific reference to Durban, is not sensational.

The conceit is an attempt to focus on the perceived virtues of approaching a particular practice in its particular context (i.e. Durban and Russell Street as opposed to a more general or wider universe). It fits in with my intentions to limit my focus to Durban. This, I feel, is in accordance with a general - some would call it a post-modern - trend to move away from “grand narratives” of huge universes (positivism) to more intensive case-studies on smaller universes. My specific focus is on the Russell Street *muthi* market and the trade in Durban, which is an acknowledgement of the complexity, distinctiveness and idiosyncrasy of the case of Durban as a particular city in a particular region in a particular country and continent etc.

After further testing the validity and applicability of the term, I also found it to denote another important theme that I wished to pursue, namely the ideological notion of ‘islands of traditionalism’ or ‘pockets of informality’ within the dominant discourses (both local and

global) of urbanism and modernism. The French *D'* prefix can thus be Anglicised to, or interpreted as *De-* which implies a *negation of* - or *removal of* - something. Extrapolating these ideas, “D’Urbanisation” can therefore also refer to *de-urbanisation* processes or *de-urbanising* elements - something which is believed to *negate* or work against urbanisation or modernisation (see Chapter 2). As will be shown, *muthi* traders have, since their establishment in Durban, been treated as *de-urbanising* elements.

### A PRESENTATION OF THE THESIS

After this general introduction to the thesis and the *muthi* trade, Chapter 2 will proceed with a presentation and analysis of the conceptual framework used in the thesis. Here, I will focus on the term ‘tradition’ and its relation to ‘modernity’ and ‘development’. It will be shown that, even if it often appears to be static and conservative, ‘tradition’ is in fact a fundamentally flexible and innovative social construct, which is constantly restructured and developed by strategic actors. In Chapter 3, I will present a history of the *muthi* trade in Durban from the pre-colonial or “pre-D’Urbanised” *muthi* trade up until the present. The chapter will also provide a historical context to the theoretical (Chapters 2 and 5) and empirical sections (Chapter 4) of the thesis. From this history, it is evident that the *muthi* trade has gone through various changes, due to both processes of ‘restructuring’ and ‘development’. In Chapter 4, I present some of my findings from my 30 month fieldwork research into the life and work of traders in Russell Street. I will describe the supply and demand characteristics of the market, as well as the power and gender relations between the traders. Finally, Chapter 5 will sum up how the tradition of *muthi* trading has been restructured and developed by presenting recent

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<sup>12</sup> Captain Gardiner convened a meeting of colonialists in 1835 which named the township at Port Natal D’Urban, after Sir Benjamin D’Urban, then Governor of the Cape. The French apostrophe was discarded by common consent to Anglicise the name when Durban was declared a Borough in 1854.



cases of the ways in which traders and outsiders have changed tradition to suit their own needs and agendas. I have chosen to concentrate on the two most important outside actors who have influenced the trade in Russell Street – namely, the biomedical sector (City Health Department) and nature conservation bodies (Institute of Natural Resources).

## Chapter 2: The “D’Urbanisation” of Tradition. A Conceptual

### Analysis

To read about African life today is almost to be transported back a hundred years, when the newly established colonial powers ‘revealed’ to the world how backward Africa was, how much it needed to be civilised. Today, like yesterday, our perception is that Africans continue to be singularly superstitious: the occult is alive, witchcraft is thriving ... Not only does it appear that African societies are failing to become more secular, as they are widely expected to do, but there is a sense in which they are ‘re-traditionalizing’ – in that the realm of the ‘irrational’ is seemingly gaining importance. (Chabal & Daloz 1999, 63)

As mentioned in the introduction, the “D’Urbanisation” of tradition – the restructuring and development of the *muthi* trade – is a process that challenges the conventional ways we speak of ‘tradition’ and its relationship to ‘modernity’. An analysis of the archaeology of these terms is important, because all restructurings and developments have been done with particular references to ideas of both tradition and modernity (see Chapter 5).

This chapter, which analyses different notions and definitions of ‘tradition’, will argue that the continued relevance of tradition within South African modernities must be seen both as an indication of shortcomings in theoretical conceptualising, and as a manifestation of real-life social adaptations to ‘modernity’. Tradition, it is claimed, has certain creative but also limiting features. Tradition is an important resource for making sense of, and surviving - both economically and politically – in modernity. I will emphasise the plurality and heterogeneity of tradition and show how this is instrumentalised into political and economic strategies by various actors. All traditions, not only the D’Urbanised tradition of *muthi* trading, are products of changes brought about both by actors ‘within’ the tradition – i.e. those who identify themselves with the tradition and who ‘own’ it (what I call ‘restructuring’) - and

‘external’ agents, who believe they have a stake in it (what I refer to as ‘development’). Towards the end of the chapter, I will define more closely my use of ‘development’ as denoting the restructuring of tradition by ‘external’ agents for strategic ends. I will also briefly show how the notion of ‘informality’ (informal sector, informal trading, informal markets) is closely linked with ‘tradition’, and how *muthi* trading is seen as a “*de*-urbanising” tradition.

Neologisms (such as “D’Urbanisation”) can often offer valuable critiques of orthodox terminology and enable new insights into conceptually and theoretically complex phenomena. Dichotomies flourish in academic and popular discourses, as they have proven useful for preliminary classification. The problem is that they now appear to have fossilised into a scientific knowledge, which is characterised by fixed and distinctive categories. This poses particular difficulty when analysing certain forms of economic activity, knowledge and social practices which do not fit into established categories: practices which are in essence neither traditional nor modern, neither informal nor formal but *both and all at the same time*. To address these problems, paradigms of ‘syncretism’ and ‘creolisation’ have recently appeared in anthropology and sociology.<sup>13</sup> But these terms have also proved inadequate. Syncretism, for its part, ‘takes as its starting point the clash or interplay between two or more distinct forms of religious symbolisms without explaining the dynamics of the interaction, thus excluding the importance of human agency in the creation of religious knowledge’ (Akinnaso 1995, 234). Although ‘creolisation’ does include active human agents, it suggests a historic ‘one-off blending of forms that were previously finite and separate’ (Akinnaso 1995, 234), and is thus unable to explain established hybridities such as *muthi* trading. Both models therefore fail to account for the innovative potential of specialists and other custodians of

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<sup>13</sup> ‘Syncretism’ is a term usually applied in the study of certain religious phenomenon or movements, while ‘creolisation’ is a linguistic term used to explain mixed languages.

specialised 'traditional' knowledge in strategically controlling and restructuring this knowledge, and they also hinder the study of the creative processes by which these boundaries are adjusted or dissolved. This may well be due to the reification of the ritual and cosmological domains by anthropologists, who have long presented ethnographies of 'the traditional' in a static way (see Chapter 1). Why is it so difficult, even at a theoretical level, to navigate in this liminal landscape of 'neither - nor', and 'betwixt and between'? There is a need to find a new model to analyse incremental changes within 'bastard' forms such as the *muthi* trade, one which focuses on both restructuring and development. The neological conceit of "D'Urbanisation of tradition" is an attempt to address this need. In order to understand the framework of the thesis, it is important to clarify what tradition is.

### WHAT IS TRADITION?

What constitutes a tradition? What is tradition's relationship to modernity? How do people perceive tradition? How have academics defined tradition? Are traditions 'authentic'? Does tradition have an inherent authority? What is the difference between tradition and culture? How does an idea or a particular cultural practice or value become or ossify into a tradition? How can tradition be an important tool for political and economic entrepreneurs? How do ideas and values, previously considered alien by a people, find their way into the texture of their culture and thus become part of their tradition?

A commonsense definition of tradition can be found in the Oxford Dictionary, where tradition is defined as 'the passing of beliefs and customs from the one generation to the next' or 'a belief or custom passed on in this way; any established method, practice, etc.' (Oxford Dictionary 1995, 1267). In Latin etymology, *traditum* refers to that which is handed down

from the past. This past is not a recent past and denotes anything that has endured through generations. The British philosopher H.B. Acton defines tradition as 'a belief or practice transmitted from one generation to another and accepted as authoritative, or deferred to, without argument' (Acton 1952-3, 2 in Gyekye 1997). The American sociologist Edward Shils characterises it as 'anything handed down from the past to the present' (Shils 1981, 12). According to Shils, whatever is handed down must last over at least three generations to be called a tradition (Shils 1981, 15). In a similar definition, Samuel Fleischacker explains tradition as 'a set of customs passed down over the generations; and a set of beliefs and values endorsing those customs' (Fleischacker 1994, 45). Spiegel and Boonzaier say that 'in a limited sense, "tradition" refers to the transmission of culture - the repeated handing down of ideas, conventions and practices which humans need in social interaction' (Spiegel & Boonzaier 1988, 40). Seymour-Smith defines tradition as '...patterns of beliefs, customs, values, behaviour and knowledge or expertise which are passed on from generation to generation by the socialisation process within a given population' (Seymour-Smith 1986, 279-80). In general, anything which is old and appears unchanged since its inception will pass for a tradition. Tradition therefore has an inherently static and conservative aspect to it.

It is important to note that popular understanding and use of 'tradition' goes beyond this neutral and definitional sense. In our everyday use, the term is seldom used without subjective and value-ridden implications. 'Traditional' can denote both authority and legitimacy, or suggest backwardness and primitiveness. "'Tradition" can therefore have contradictory or ambivalent connotations, implying either duty and respect or dismissive disdain' (Spiegel & Boonzaier 1988, 40). Both connotations provide a powerful resource for people intent on gaining, maintaining or challenging existing power and privilege, whether economic, political or social. A good example is the widespread belief that the persistence of

traditional medicine in South Africa today can be attributed to these notions of unchanging lifestyles and inherent irrational conservatism. Traditions are often assumed to be *caused* by 'traditionalists', or 'conservative thinking', and is often associated with particular populations ('peoples', 'groups' or 'societies'). This is especially the case with the dominant political discourse in South Africa (Spiegel and Boonzaier 1988, 41). In South Africa, this kind of argument was actively used during apartheid, which perceived Africans as *still* being 'traditional' through the persistence of traditional custom (traditional medicine, *lobola*, initiation rituals, the authority of chiefs, belief in ancestors etc.). As will be shown later, the apartheid state encouraged 'tradition' as part of their rule through 'decentralized despotism' (Mamdani 1996).

Until recently, similar notions have also dominated anthropological and other representations of 'the other'. In short, traditional (African) culture has been conveyed as unchanging, homogenous and communal, as opposed to a modern (white) culture which is dynamic, diverse, and individualistic. These are not mere descriptive labels, but form powerful discourses which are used to account for global discrepancies of wealth resulting from the supposed obstacles presented by these traditional elements to 'development' and 'modernity'. The argument that Africans are 'backward' and 'impoverished' because they still are traditional provides its own (albeit circular) substantiation in that there is ample evidence of Africans who *are* still poor and still traditional. The *muthi* trade and other traditional practices in that sense help to maintain and reproduce these ideas in South Africa. These images and notions form powerful discourses which manage to obscure and mystify the crucial political and economic realities that led to the inequalities. Indeed, this process is not limited to South Africa.

But these conventional views of tradition are also held amongst those who are believed to be 'traditional', i.e. those who live 'traditional' lives. In Russell Street, both traders and customers talk about tradition as something very real and concrete and based on 'our nation's' culture before the white man came. When I asked them to describe what this 'original' tradition was, and its relation to the present, I heard very different stories, but the common answer was to describe the rural practice in the old days, and then attribute changes seen today to simply being the result of new needs and demands of urbanisation and 'new times'. I have tried to capture this representation of a 'vernacular' tradition in Chapter 3, in the section dealing with the pre-"D'Urbanised" *muthi* trade. What characterises these popular descriptions, is the idea of a static and pure tradition, which only started to change after the interference of Europeans. Some respondents saw these changes as 'untraditional' and essentially negative and problematic (as will be shown in Chapter 5), while others could not understand why I made such an issue out of them as change was an inherent quality of their idea of tradition. Why is it so problematic to see these forms of traditionalism as a contemporary social phenomenon without invoking at the same time this kind of negative 'traditional mentality'? What alternative interpretations are valid?

The very fact that the term 'tradition' is used and interpreted in such different ways both within academia and in popular discourse permits the term to be 'manipulated' or strategically used to promote or justify various social, political or economic agendas. The notion of 'tradition' is therefore a tool that can be used both from 'above' (what I refer to as 'development') and from 'below' ('restructuring') (see also Hobsbawm and Ranger 1992; Mamdani 1996).

Before the recent renewed interest in tradition which resulted in new definitions, anthropologists and other social scientists tended not to place so much emphasis on the centrality of the concept since it did not allow for the essentially dynamic and adaptive nature of social and cultural systems. These critical voices pointed out that the uncritical use of the concept of tradition would prevent us from examining the key issues of the relationship between cultural persistence or continuity and cultural change. This, critics claimed, was a problem which was to be approached not only in terms of cultural elements in themselves, but also with reference to the historical process of social reproduction and social change in the population concerned.

### *Towards a New Definition of Tradition*

Barfield's definition of tradition is very relevant to this study:

Connoting an inherited body of traits and ideas, 'tradition' is a category that individuals and societies ascribe to practices, expressions, beliefs, and behaviours in the present to add value for the future ... Societies designate aspects of their culture as traditions to infuse them with meaning and historicity ... By placing its subject in history and by referring to a collective cultural continuity, such a designation adds a burden of significance. It offers a rationale for uniqueness, which calls for preservation and special attention and treatment ... Something is termed a tradition to encourage it to continue, to give it momentum, and to reproduce certain values or beliefs. (Barfield 1997, 470-471)

It has been stated that traditions often have political undertones as people may wish to perpetuate or influence power relations through the strategic invention of tradition. Tradition has been widely used as a powerful tool both for controlling colonial territories, building nation-states, and for rallying support for political parties (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1992; Eriksen 1993; Mamdani 1997; Hamilton 1998). In the same way, tradition has also constituted an important building block for organising and voicing opposition, although this



has been less extensively analysed (Lan 1985; Scott 1985, 1990; Mamdani 1996). What has not been much elaborated in academic writings, are the economic uses of tradition.

I will try to address this void by using the case of *muthi* trading in Durban to show how tradition is used as an economic strategy for accumulation. As stated in Chapter 1, *muthi* is considered a basic commodity precisely because of this symbolic and strategic ascription. The commercialisation of *muthi* has proven to be a viable enterprise because of the unique character of traditionally sanctioned goods and services. *Muthi*, which is situated somewhere between the religious and cultural realms of consciousness, takes on special characteristics when commercialised, which are beneficial for both suppliers and consumers. The former profits directly from the transaction through financial compensation, while the latter achieves good health, general well-being, and a sense of identity and community from consuming *muthi*.

The 'economics of tradition' is essentially non-rational, unstructured and open-ended in comparison with capitalism's rational, structured and closed features. Although economies of tradition may be capitalised to a certain extent, as in the case of *muthi* trading today, they remain unique in the sense that they are based on a dynamic which is more flexible than modern economies. The 'traditional' economies and capitalist economies are similar in the sense that there is competition over rules and resources, and that some actors are more powerful than others. Modern capitalism also has eclectic and manipulative sectors and features similar to that of tradition, which enable entrepreneurship and accumulation (e.g. the commercialisation of art, which is supposedly a non-rational activity). The difference lies in the extent of what can be called the 'ground of manoeuvrability': traditional economies often operate in the so-called informal sector, which is governed by a different set of rules and

according to an alternative ideology. In this economic sphere, formal rigid controls in the form of written laws, regulations (but also unwritten conventions and rules) are replaced by informal mechanisms which tend to be more diverse and open. This does not mean that tradition or the informal economy has no authority or boundary protecting elements (as will be seen in later chapters). The point is that whatever form the referencing to and legitimation by 'tradition' takes, it refers to a phenomenon that is shared in the consciousness of people. Tradition is not a fixed entity, but a fundamentally flexible artefact, which changes with the will of its bearers (or collective creators). Therefore, many of the changes to tradition that the *muthi* traders brought about, even in the face of massive opposition from powerful traditional custodians (chiefs and famous healers), were later institutionalised because of the will of the masses. The "D'Urbanisation" of tradition - the restructuring of tradition to allow for street trading - is accepted because consumers wanted it, needed it and used it.

According to Barfield,

tradition is a territory of the imagination, but its presence has very significant consequences in social life. To say that something is traditional is to use a powerful social strategy to claim that it is valuable, that it speaks eloquently about 'us', and that we should attend to it. (Barfield 1997, 471)

As will be shown, this labelling recognises the continuity of what can be seen as 'old' practices as well as adding the weight of the past to slightly new forms and practices that have less 'authentic' continuity than the designation implies. Barfield writes that

To call something tradition is to institutionalise it by setting it off from less authentic and mundane practices, to reduce it to a pared-down essence, to encourage its social performance, and to imply the need for stewardship into the future. (Barfield 1997, 471)

There are few so-called traditional institutions which persist without undergoing significant changes in form or function or both. This raises serious questions about the applicability of the term 'traditional' in reference to these processes:

Although tradition continues to imply a depth of time as well as continuity, today scholars are coming to see it not as an innate quality, imbued by continuity and stasis, but rather as an imperative in social life, a way in which the present interprets and characterises the past with an eye to the future. (Barfield 1997, 470)

I believe that one can still use the term tradition, but that it needs nuance and debate, and perhaps even to be given new meaning or content. Such redefinitions must see tradition as an adaptable resource for coping with contemporary situations. This thesis will show how tradition is constantly restructured and developed to meet contemporary needs. These social adjustments should be considered as normal and spontaneous processes in our uses of tradition. I choose the terms 'restructuring' and 'development' to describe these processes in order to avoid the more loaded 'manipulation' and 'invention', which to me have negative connotations. 'Restructuring' implies that changes have to be based on the 'original' structure, and to a certain extent can only be made within the more or less clear parameters of 'tradition'. In the end, all changes to tradition need at least some legitimate and popularly accepted reference to 'tradition'. Thus 'restructuring' and 'development' connotes the scope of both innovativeness and entrepreneurship, as well as the limits of individual shrewdness. These notions of tradition direct us away from simply seeing tradition in an objective, passive and neutral sense as culture in transmission. By using the case of *muthi* trading, I wish to focus on those situations where the process of transmission is actively pursued – i.e. situations where it is in the interests of the individuals or groups transmitting and receiving the ideas embodied in a particular tradition, to restructure certain elements of it. As Spiegel and Boonzaier have noted, 'the fact that some traditions are discarded, and others made anew,

reveals the active agency of those perpetuating tradition' (Spiegel & Boonzaier 1988, 56).

The following section will present some of the scholarly debates around tradition which have influenced me in this project.

### *The Strategic Uses of Tradition*

The Comaroffs have written widely on the role of tradition in the everyday lives of modern Africans (Comaroff J. 1985; Comaroff J. & J. 1993; Comaroff J. 1997). In their book *Modernity and Its Malcontents*, the Comaroffs prefer using the term 'ritual' rather than 'tradition', as they wish to stress the *action, behaviour* and *process* of tradition (Comaroff J. & J. 1993). Ritual, in a strictly definitional sense, is nothing more than 'actions done at a fixed time and in the same way' (Oxford Dictionary 1995, 1015). In this sense, *muthi* trading and the ways in which people access *muthi* are rituals governed by tradition. Although I will keep to the use of the term tradition, it makes equal sense to speak of 'rituals' instead of tradition. If tradition is ideology, then ritual is practice guided by that ideology. Ritual is thus the social manifestation of tradition in everyday life.

Ritual, the Comaroffs claim, used to denote cultures of tradition; the inverse of practical reason. They prefer to 'try to make the concept embrace more mundane meaningful practice, practice often meant to *transform, not reproduce*, the environment in which it occurs' (Comaroff J. & J. 1993, xvi). They therefore see tradition, in the form of ritual, as 'intentional historical practice': 'A vital element in the process that make and remake social facts and collective identities' (Comaroff J. & J. 1993, xvi). Despite the conventional insistence on viewing tradition as conservative and conservationist, as cultural continuity and political authority, the Comaroffs claim that it more often constitutes

a site and a means of *experimental practice*, of *transformative action*; that under its authorship and its authority, individual and collective aspirations weave a thread of imaginative possibilities from which may emerge, wittingly or not, new signs and new meanings, conventions and intentions. (Comaroff J. & J. 1993, xxix. My emphasis)

The tendency to resort to tradition, they claim,

is an especially likely response to contradictions created and (literally) engendered by processes of social, material, and cultural transformation, processes re-presented, rationalized, and authorized in the name of modernity and its various alibis (“civilization”, “social progress”, “economic development”, “conversion”, and the like). (Comaroff J. & J. 1993, xxx)

As mentioned above, the literature on the strategic uses of tradition, have focused mainly on its *political* uses. In their book *The Invention of Tradition*, Hobsbawm and Ranger (1992) analyse the political uses (or inventions) of tradition:

“Invented tradition” is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past. (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1992, 1)

This continuity with a past, especially with regard to invented traditions, is most often factitious. ‘Tradition’, as Hobsbawm and Ranger use it, must be distinguished clearly from ‘custom’ which dominates so-called ‘traditional’ societies:

The object and characteristic of “traditions”, including invented ones, is invariance. The past, real or invented, to which they refer imposes fixed (normally formalized) practices, such as repetition.

“Custom” in traditional societies has the double function of motor and fly-wheel. *It does not preclude innovation and change up to a point, though evidently the requirement that it must appear compatible or even identical with precedent imposes substantial limitations on it.* What it does is to give any

desired change (or resistance to innovation) the sanction of precedent, social continuity and natural laws as expressed in history. (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1992, 2. My emphasis)

We should expect the invention of tradition to occur more frequently

when a rapid transformation of society weakens or destroys the social patterns for which 'old' traditions had been designed, producing new ones to which they were not applicable, or when such old traditions and their institutional carriers and promulgators no longer prove sufficiently adaptable and flexible, or are otherwise eliminated: in short, when there are sufficiently large and rapid changes on the demand or supply side. (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1992, 4-5)

How does this analysis of the *muthi* trade as a D'Urbanised tradition fit in with Hobsbawm and Ranger's notion of 'invented tradition'? I see no reason to distinguish 'tradition' from 'custom', but in Hobsbawm and Ranger's terms, I am dealing with the restructuring of custom. One could say that according to Hobsbawm and Ranger's definition, the cosmology of 'traditional healing' is the 'custom', while the changes in the manner in which it is done is the result of constant new inventions of tradition, or what I call 'restructuring of tradition'. Most of their work is focused around imposed or imported 'invented traditions', mostly used for governing purposes in a colonial or post-colonial context. Their importance for my study is that they demonstrate how both sides of the conflict refer to tradition for strategic capital, so that tradition becomes a political tool of both domination and resistance.

In his book *Tradition and Modernity. Philosophical Reflections on the African Experience* (1997), Kwame Gyekye defines tradition as

any cultural product that was created or pursued by past generations and that having been accepted and preserved, in whole or in part, by successive generations, has been maintained to the present. (Gyekye 1997, 221)

According to Gyekye's definition, Hobsbawm and Ranger's 'invented traditions' are not traditions, because they have not spanned or been inherited by several generations:

Traditions, if they are traditions, cannot be invented, for they are not arbitrarily created, referring as they do to practices actually lived, or ideas and beliefs known to have been actually held. (Gyekye 1997, 232)

Gyekye claims that although each generation of people creates cultural values, whether or not any of those values will evolve into a tradition is a function of *time* – they have to endure for at least three generations. So what then is the difference between culture and tradition? In general, Gyekye explains, one can say that both are socially constructed and inherited, but

As long as we do not know whether a cultural product will evolve into a tradition, culture may be said to be distinguishable from tradition ... culture constitutes the content of tradition. Tradition consists of - or is the bearer of - those cultural products that have persisted over generations of people. (Gyekye 1997, 221)

Traditions, according to Gyekye, are not simply passed down from one generation to the next as a *fait accompli*:

They are placed at the disposal of the new generation in the expectation that that generation would preserve it [sic]. This depends on their attitude, and is not automatic. It depends on normative considerations that will be brought to bear on it [sic] by a subsequent generation. (Gyekye 1997, 220-221)

Who then, are the makers of a tradition? According to Gyekye's definition, they are both the creators of those cultural products, and those who later accept them. There is therefore constant refinement, abandonment, or revitalisation (i.e. restructuring) of tradition – this being the consequence of internal criticism and the adoption of appropriate non-indigenous ideas, values, and practices. Later generations may not always understand the perspectives,

conceptions or circumstances in which traditions originally were grounded and might see them as irrational, false, inconsistent, morally unacceptable etc. This leads Gyekye to assert, somewhat oddly, that much of African tradition is 'inadequate' and 'imperfect'.

Gyekye claims that because of cultural contact, borrowing and exchange, the tradition of any people inevitably consists of certain elements appropriated from other cultures or traditions. If these elements are adopted, developed, maintained, modified or refined, and cherished by the recipients (the borrowers), then they must be said to have become part of *their* tradition. The point he wishes to make is that not all elements of a tradition have to be originated by a people, or be unique to them, for it to become *their* tradition. This point is relevant when studying the *muthi* trade, as will be seen in the following chapters. Gyekye's analysis of tradition in Africa is important and relevant for this study. However, his shortcoming is that he fails to acknowledge the impact of outside actors on the formation and evolution of tradition (what I term 'development'). I intend to show that traditions evolve as a result of a dialectic between agency from 'within' *and* 'above', between 'restructuring' *and* 'development'.

Acton (1952/3) and Fleischacker (1994) both argue for the incontrovertible authority of tradition. Their assumptions were derived from the reverence shown to tradition by its adherents. According to Gyekye's definition however, new traditions are always reviewed and considered (i.e. challenged), and only endure if they survive a normative review.

Therefore, he says, tradition has no automatic authority. Tradition is always re-evaluated from time to time, as humans seek to improve their conditions or situations (morally, socially, politically, intellectually and also economically). 'The desire to improve their conditions will



often involve having to take a critical look at what has been inherited from the past' (1997, 227).

Timothy Luke argues along similar lines when he states that 'traditions are no more than traces of practices, signs of belief, and images of continuity revealed in human thought and action, which are continuously sent and chaotically received throughout all the generations' (1996, 8). Traditions, he claims, are not received as pre-given verities, but are always open to human agency. The 'inviolates' of traditions are always subject to some degree of questioning or revision (1996, 8).

What then is tradition? How should we understand its traits? To briefly sum up the above presentation of theory on tradition, one can distinguish between four aspects of tradition (based on Thompson 1996, 91-93):

- 1) Hermeneutic aspect: Tradition as an '*interpretative scheme*', a framework for making sense of the world. According to this, tradition can be viewed as a set of background assumptions or cultural baggage that is taken for granted by individuals in the conduct of their daily lives and transmitted by them from one generation to the next. 'All understanding is based on presuppositions, on some set of assumptions which we take for granted and which form part of a tradition to which we belong' (Thompson 1996, 91). The cosmology of *muthi* and traditional healing must be seen as providing an important means of interpreting and making sense of the complexities of life.
  
- 2) Normative aspect: Tradition (in the form of sets of assumptions, forms of belief and patterns of action handed down from the past) can serve as a normative guide for actions and beliefs in the present (Thompson 1996). This may occur in two ways: tradition can be

seen as a normative guide in that certain practices become *routinised* (involving little reflection), or in the sense that practices can be *traditionally grounded*, that is, grounded or justified by reference to 'tradition' (i.e. 'this is what we have always done/believed').

Much of the continued existence and importance of *muthi* trading lies in this normative function of tradition.

- 3) Legitimation aspect: Tradition may also become ideological and thus serve as a support for the exercise of power and authority, both politically and economically. This is evident in nationalisms and ethnicities around the world (Eriksen 1993; Mamdani 1996; Hamilton 1997). One example is Weber's (1978) notion of 'traditional authority', which is one of three principle ways in which the legitimacy of a system of domination can be established through the belief in the sanctity of traditions relating to a person's traditionally defined authority. I will show that tradition may, in addition to this overtly political character, also have important economic uses. I will also show that the legitimation aspect is crucial for the marketing of *muthi*: without the sanction of tradition, the goods and services involved would have no commercial value.
  
- 4) The identity aspect: Traditions provide some of the symbolic materials for the formation of both self-identity and collective identity. 'Self-identity refers to the sense of oneself as an individual endowed with certain characteristics and potentialities, as an individual situated on a certain life-trajectory' (Thompson 1996, 93). Collective identity refers to the sense of oneself as a member of a social group or collectivity; it is a sense of belonging or being part of a social group or a 'culture' which has a history of its own and a collective fate. By consuming *muthi*, customers also consume the identity aspects of tradition embedded in the *muthi*.

## RESTRUCTURING AND DEVELOPING TRADITION

From the above conceptual analysis of tradition, and by using the case of *muthi* trading in Durban, I argue that tradition has certain strategic uses, which means that it is constantly in flux as a result of internal restructurings and external interventions. Chapters 3 and 5 will show how actors within the trade as well as outside agents (the apartheid state, biomedicine and conservationists) have used tradition strategically to meet their ends. As seen above, in many scholarly studies of the active uses of tradition, attention has largely been focused either on what I have termed 'restructuring' from within (Scott 1985, 1990; Latouche 1992; Gyekye 1997) or on external interventions and strategic use of tradition (what I term 'development') (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1992; Hamilton 1998). This study has been influenced by writers who have, in different ways, incorporated *both* these two levels or processes (Comaroff 1985, 1993; Lan 1985; Mamdani 1996; Chabal & Daloz 1999). While 'restructuring' as a term denoting the internal changes to tradition (for strategic ends) is relatively obvious, my usage of 'development' to denote external interventions may seem more problematic. The following section will explain in more detail my choice of the term 'development'.

### *Development: External Restructuring*

Chabal and Daloz (1999) show how the perceived 'disorder' and 'irrationality' in Africa is co-opted and instrumentalised by individuals, groups and communities into political and economic strategies. They talk about the 'informalization' and 're-traditionalization' of contemporary Africa, and argue that 'the dynamics of African modernization are compatible with what we in the West tend to regard as 'traditional' characteristics' (Chabal & Daloz 1999, xxi). They say that the ways in which Africans define themselves and how they behave fail to conform to what social scientists expect of societies which are modernising. Africans

in their everyday life 'operate on several registers – from the most visibly modern to the most ostensibly traditional' (Chabal & Daloz 1999, 46). This fact, they argue, challenges the conventional paradigmatic dichotomy between the realms of the modern and the traditional, and makes our understandings of 'Westernisation' very problematic.

The relationship between modernity and tradition and the concepts of 'development' and 'westernisation' are highly complex and contentious issues which have been much debated (see Latouche 1992; Sachs 1992; Cowen & Shenton 1996; Gardner 1996; Rahnema & Bawtree 1997; Chabal & Daloz 1999). In everyday use, 'development' is often used synonymously with 'evolution', 'growth', 'maturing', 'expansion', 'spread', 'progress', 'headway' etc. (Oxford Thesaurus 1994). Development doctrine, in its classical sense (as expressed by the Saint Simonians), had as its primary goal to restore '*order*' to the chaos brought about by the undesirable effects – unemployment, impoverishment – of the development of capitalism; in other words, the 'immanent' process of development (Cowen & Shenton 1996). Therefore, according to Cowen and Shenton (1996), the *intention* to develop (i.e. the doctrine of development) must be distinguished from the *immanent* process of development.

According to post-Second World War development ideology – or modernisation theory – which continues to dominate development practice today, modernisation is a process of economic, social and cultural development that is expected to lead to a level of organisation and production (along with the concomitant belief systems) similar to those already achieved by industrial societies (Myrdal 1958; Rostow 1960; Sachs 1992; Long & Long 1992). Thus, central to modernisation theory, is the evolutionary assumption of the 'under-developed' as somehow lagging behind, in need of 'development' to replace the 'traditional', in order to

ultimately achieve a 'modern' and superior form of life. 'Development', for modernisation theorists, was seen as inevitable and global, it being assumed that modernising social forces and material forms would gradually erode local cultural differences. With the ideas of 'modernisation' and 'development' came the institutionalisation of binary distinctions in popular and scientific discourse between 'traditional' and 'modern', 'rural' and 'urban', 'informal' and 'formal'. 'Development' was seen as the mediating force which was to fill the gaps (theoretical and 'real') between these binary pairs. Both 'development' and 'the gaps' manifested themselves in very real and concrete ways.

In general, one may say that classical and later development doctrines have been essentially paternalistic ideologies (closely linked with theories of 'trusteeship')<sup>14</sup> based on the idealistic (some would say naive) view of helping and improving, and thereby creating 'order' (Sachs 1992, Cowen & Shenton 1996). In popular use, 'development' is a positive word used for the institutionalised transfer of aid packages, education programmes and money from the rich world to poor regions of the 'Third World'. For an increasing body of critical academics (often referred to as the 'post-development' school), 'development' refers to a powerful Occidental discourse of modernity with an effective executing body which failed its task and has become obsolete (see Sachs 1992; Latouche 1993; Rahnema & Bawtree 1997).

The term 'development' thus has many different connotations and uses. As mentioned earlier, in this thesis, 'development' is put forward as one of two main generators of change in the history of *muthi* trading (restructuring being the other). 'Development', in this thesis, thus refers to the role of the apartheid state, biomedicine and conservationists in bringing about changes to the tradition of *muthi* trading (see Chapters 3 and 5). While 'restructuring' denotes

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<sup>14</sup> 'Trusteeship is the intent which is expressed, by one source of agency, to develop the capacities of another. It is what binds the [immanent] process of development to the intent of development' (Cowen & Shenton 1996, x).

the active restructuring of tradition (for strategic ends) by agents *within* the *muthi* trade, 'development' is meant to describe the restructuring of tradition by *external* actors. As will be seen in the subsequent chapters, these interventions had two main (and interrelated) goals or effects: a) to 'develop' the 'traditional' according to modernisation theory and b) to strategically use tradition to enable effective governance over subjects. It is important to note that these development initiatives – i.e. changes to tradition from above – did not *necessarily* conflict with the interests of those within the trade (both traders and consumers), although, in some cases, the latter may have given this impression (see Chapter 5). As will be shown, the development interventions targeting the *muthi* trade were not limited to merely imposing changes viewed as 'helping and improving' the 'ignorant Native'. They also involved destructive and oppressive measures based on pure racism, professional rivalry and scientific arrogance and were instituted partly to enable effective governance. This makes it necessary to distinguish between these various forms of intervention. I will therefore show how various institutions, with different agendas and with different outcomes, have developed tradition. To conclude this chapter, I will briefly deal with two concepts which emanate from the above discussion of development, namely 'informality' and the notion of tradition as a '*de-urbanising*' element.

## **TRADITION AND THE INFORMAL**

The notions surrounding the term 'informal' are closely linked to the notions of tradition and development. In the conventional sense, street trading usually falls in the category of informal economic activity, which includes:

the production and exchange of legal goods and services that involves the lack of appropriate business permits, violation of zoning codes, failure to report tax liability, non-compliance with labour regulations

governing contracts and work conditions, and/or the lack of legal guarantees in relations with suppliers and clients. (Cross 1998, 580)

If 'development' is the operationalisation of modernity's idea of progress, then 'restructuring' can be seen as a 'vernacular' version of progress. Serge Latouche (1993) puts forward the following assertions:

(1) that development is a specifically Western cultural concern; (2) that it has transplanted badly in the societies now known as the Third World; (3) that underdevelopment stems from the collision of very different cultural universes with the expansionary West; and (4) that, within these imperfectly Westernised societies, the informal can be understood as the budding, under highly ambiguous circumstances, of qualitatively new social forms which are not alternative paths of development but *alternatives to development* being invented by social groups confronted with the impasses of both modernity and underdevelopment. (translators' introduction in Latouche 1993, 6. My emphasis)

Frequently, traditional customs and social structures have been interpreted as holding back the development process. Salient to this discussion is Latouche's argument for an alternative vision of the role that such manifestations have to play:

The vestiges of the past are, in the first place, a brake on and resistance to the real deculturation process taking place. But more than that, tradition along with the crazy cults and improvisations which from the developmentalist point of view may seem irrational, introverted and irksome, are also *the latent bases for invention* by the peoples involved of novel and radical ways out of the mess of underdevelopment. (translators' introduction in Latouche 1993, 13. My emphasis)

Latouche refers to the 'synthesis' that 'the castaways of development' must attempt, between their twin heritages of modernity denied and lost tradition. How might Third World social groups, he asks, search out solutions to their predicaments? For clues, he looks to the hybrid creations that manifest in the informal in many African countries. The informal, he says, is not a sector, it 'is above all *a form of social life, an authentic culture of poverty*' (Latouche 1993, 127. My emphasis). 'It is a society which is *delicately placed in relation to modernity*'

(Latouche 1993, 130. My emphasis). This last point is also stressed by Keith Hart, who argues for the need for 'dualistic analysis' of the relationship between the formal and informal economy in order to show how they are inextricably linked (Hart 1985). This thesis also emphasises this point by arguing that it is in the dialectic between the modern and the traditional, formalisation and informalisation, 'development' and 'restructuring', that the informal strategies find their expression and assume their values. The 'informal' in Latouche's sense, and what I term 'restructuring', thus denote very similar processes.

Chabal and Daloz (1999) agree with Latouche when they claim that the current trends of 'informalization' and 're-traditionalization' are not indications of an African failure to develop, but rather of their different routes of modernisation: 'Is not modernisation in effect determined by the complex ways in which social and cultural traditions evolve and are transformed, in Africa as elsewhere?' (Chabal & Daloz 1999, 46).

### **THE MUTHI TRADE: A DE-URBANISING TRADITION?**

An important aspect of modernity is the notion of ordered, rational, practical and functional urbanity. The manufacturing of modern metropolises is central to the virtues of modernity (Watson & Gibson 1995). One of the most important representatives of modernist architecture and urban planning was Le Corbusier, with his emphasis on grand scale and planning. Le Corbusier expressed the modern focus on the re-creation of society through a planned structure that would assign each individual to his or her place in life, regulating and caring for each need and demand:



Without plan there can be neither grandeur of aim and expression, nor rhythm, nor mass, nor coherence. Without plan, we have the sensation, so insupportable to man, of shapelessness, poverty, of disorder, of wilfulness. (Le Corbusier 1923 in Cahoone 1996, 207)

In a similar frame of mind, Durban planners set out to organise urban space according to the needs of modernity, industrialisation, globalisation and capitalism. But Durban planners added local flavour to modernist urban planning, in the form of segregation and later, apartheid. In doing so, they developed what has been termed 'the apartheid city', with a functional layout generated from a racist ideology by apartheid politicians, and according to the needs of a powerful (although not always homogenous) capitalist lobby (see Smith 1992; Mabin 1995).

As mentioned previously, "D'Urbanisation" was also intended to imply something about the ideologies that deemed *muthi* trading to be anomalous to what Durban is and should be. Therefore, I have asserted that "D'Urbanisation" could also refer to the perceived 'de-urbanising' effect *muthi* trading had on Durban. The rationale behind these perceptions is that *muthi* trading is *traditional*, not modern; it is based on *magic* and *religion*, not science and rationality; and lastly, that it is *informal* in its presence and organisation, not formal. Thus, notions of the *muthi* trade as a de-urbanising element are a product of classic modernist discourse and ideology. As will be shown in subsequent chapters, these objections were formulated in practical terms along the lines of *muthi* being 'harmful to ignorant Natives'; simply 'never meant to be in Durban' (according to 'tradition'); and constituting 'a threat to the pharmaceutical profession' (see Chapter 3). Mamdani uses the term of 'de-urbanisation' in a different context, one which is also relevant to this thesis, when he talks about apartheid's 'attempt artificially to deurbanize a growing urban African population' (Mamdani 1996, 29) (see more on this subject in Chapters 3 and 5).

## SUMMARY

This chapter has attempted to provide the reader with the theoretical framework underlying the theme of “D’Urbanisation” of tradition. Tradition, it is claimed, is the product of both *restructurings* from within the tradition concerned and *development* from outside (or above). It is a fundamentally flexible social artefact which is constantly challenged and protected by strategic actors for political and/or economic ends. I have argued that it is through the appreciation of the dialectic between tradition and modernity and between restructuring and development that the *bricolage* behind syncretisms and hybridities such as the *muthi* trade can be fully understood.

### Chapter 3: A Periodisation of the *Muthi* Trade in Durban

The Inherent belief in witchcraft, common to all Natives, is one of the last things which even Christianity and civilisation will eradicate. (Chief Native Commissioner Natal letter to the Chief Magistrate, Transkeian Territories, 22 April 1913 in CNC 120 1913/604)

This history of *muthi* trading in Durban will provide a background to the analysis of the various forms of restructuring and development provided in the following chapters. For practical and analytical reasons, I have generalised this history into three main periods: *The pre-“D’Urbanised” Tradition: The ‘Traditional’ Muthi Trade; Colonisation and Early Urbanisation (1820-1900)*; and finally, *The “D’Urbanisation” of the Muthi Trade (1900-1998)*. I have used quotes (from archival documents and newspapers) throughout this chapter in order to give an impression of the changing rhetoric and discourses of the actors involved in this history. Towards the end of the chapter, I have included two sections dealing with the two most important outside actors who have influenced the recent history of *muthi* trading, namely biomedicine and conservationists. Here, I have tried very briefly to sum up the changes in attitude towards the *muthi* trade. In Chapter 5, I will analyse in more detail how these two ‘external’ bodies have changed (or ‘developed’) the tradition of *muthi* trading.

Edwards and Maylam (1996) suggest that Africans in nineteenth-century Durban experienced minimal intrusion into their daily lives by the local state, and that it was only with the introduction of the *Durban system* and the establishment of the Native Affairs Department (1916), that the opportunities for organisation and occupation of urban space became restricted (Edwards and Maylam 1996). They maintain that ‘the low level of industrialisation and the undeveloped local state structure, left open various forms of space in Durban in the first two or three decades of the twentieth century’ (Edwards and Maylam 1996, 3). This

availability of residential and other space should in theory have allowed the informal sector to operate with very few restrictions. However, as this chapter on the history of the *muthi* trade will show, in practice, this was not necessarily always the case; or that there is a need for a slight modification. The *muthi* trade, together with beer brewing, has, since the early 1900s, been one of the most important informal economic activities for the African population in South Africa (especially in Natal and Zululand). Thousands practised it, and many more spent their money on it. This chapter will describe the changing legal and regulatory environments and the political and economic context in which the *muthi* trade developed. It will show that there were indeed restrictions on African economic activity and attacks on African social, economic and ritual spaces during the early decades of the twentieth century. I will further argue that although the *muthi* trade, as with other informal sector activities, has been restricted by law throughout history, there has always been massive defiance of this restriction. The chapter aims to document the changes in the *muthi* trade over the last 150 years.

### **THE PRE-“D’URBANISED” TRADITION: THE ‘TRADITIONAL’ MUTHI TRADE**

The history of *muthi* trading goes back hundreds of years. The presentation of the pre-colonial period of *muthi* trading will of necessity be sketchy because of lack of information, relying largely on present day oral accounts. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the main reason for including a section that deals with the trade before it established itself in Durban, is that this period functions as a popular reference to – and legitimation of – ‘the original tradition’. When investigating the “D’Urbanisation” of *muthi* trading, one has to understand and acknowledge the peculiar historical links between the pre-colonial/capitalist era and later colonial and capitalist periods. These links provide the *muthi* trade with ‘traditional’ and

'cultural' capital which gives *muthi* its value both socially (as an important aspect of daily living) and economically (as a commodity). This again is closely linked with the relationship between the 'rural' and the 'urban', and the notions of 'tradition' and 'culture'. Rural areas, especially during these early years but also in the present, symbolised *the tradition* and *the culture* of the *muthi* trade. Equally important, rural areas provided (and still provide) the material basis for the trade, with regard to the plants and animals used.

This period has, since *muthi* was introduced into Durban, been used as an intrinsic, fundamental and often static cultural reference point in successive definitions and notions of tradition. It is described by people today in a static way as being *original* and *stable*, the *origo* or ultimate reference point of 'our culture', or 'our customs'. This reality has since been referred to as the 'traditional way'. Very little is 'known' about how the trade developed and changed during this period before *umlungu*, the white man came. Indeed, it is commonly believed that it did not change during these years. The following section will briefly sum up some of the main features that appear in the anecdotal accounts given to me by informants of this period of 'tradition untouched'.

'Before', as many phrased it, *muthi* was the only medicine, and the *inyanga* or *sangoma* was the only medical practitioner. Everyone knew where to find the best local *inyanga* and *sangoma*, and they knew what their specialities were. Traders and customers I interviewed described the *inyangas* and *sangomas* in their traditional setting as being anti-social people who would not walk on the paths, but next to them; who wore strange costumes, and often lived a solitary existence etc. They were feared and respected, as they had great powers. They would be based in their village and patients would consult them at their homes. People did not pay them with money like they do today, but would bring gifts such as a fowl, a goat,

or some food. It was their God-given duty to heal and help, it was not a job. The healers were not greedy and selfish, but worked for the advantage of their communities. *Muthi* did not have a price, as access to *muthi* was not much of a problem. Most species could be found in the close vicinity, but there were a variety of principles, taboos, religious controls, seasonal and social restrictions that guided the gathering of *muthi* (see Chapter 5), and these were strictly followed. This meant that not just anyone could harvest *muthi*: it had to be done by a specialist who knew the herbs and how to administer the *muthi* without it losing its powers. The *sangoma* helped you with your problem, and referred you to the *inyanga*, who would then give you the right *muthi*. If necessary, the *inyanga* would go out into the bush with the patient and collect the *muthi* directly from nature. The traditional *muthi* trade was therefore a specialist activity practised by only a small sector of the communities, who were in harmony with nature, ancestors and culture. This is the period of ‘correct traditional practices’, of pure and highly respected forms.

I will not comment much on these descriptions, but it is interesting to note first of all that there seems to be a qualitatively big difference between the morality of pre-capitalist transactions and those involving money. The introduction of money, some informants claimed, disturbed the traditional obligations and the social networks that governed transactions, and made people more greedy. Also, it was noted that *muthi* was free and available. But regional topographical differences must have necessitated some form of trade in certain plant and animal species. There are reports of pre-colonial markets where *muthi* was traded. At iMona, north of Nongoma in northern Zululand, there is a market for *muthi*, livestock and foodstuffs, which, according to traders I spoke to, has been run by the Zulu royal kraal for over 200 years.

As will be seen in Chapter 5, this period is referred to in an idealised way by traders, practitioners, consumers, and modern institutions such as biomedicine and conservationists in their bids to change certain aspects of the present trade's traditions.

### **COLONISATION AND EARLY URBANISATION (1820-1900)**

It has been noted that the *muthi* trade was one of the earliest spheres of African transaction to be penetrated by the cash economy (Preston-Whyte & Beall 1985, 5-6). Up until the turn of the century, the *muthi* trade was predominantly a rural-based activity. Early colonisation did not seem to have much impact on the trade. Although attempts were made to control and limit the practice towards the end of the century, legislation did not have the desired effect. Towards the end of this period, the trade started to establish itself in urban areas in response to increasing African urbanisation. In Johannesburg, the presence of a substantial number of African mine workers created an early demand for traditional health services (Dauskardt 1991). In Durban, *muthi* traders started selling around the many 'eating houses' and beer halls that emerged. This second period was marked by the introduction of legislation pertaining to the *muthi* trade by the Natal government in the 1890s, and the emergence of *muthi* trading in Durban.

Missionaries were the first outsiders who came into contact with the trade, and therefore also the first to attempt to change it (to 'develop' it). The first missionaries and settlers started to operate in the region in the late 1830s, and their advance was slow but steady (Sundkler 1948). In essence, all Native customs and cultural institutions were perceived as hindering the Native's ascension from barbaric primitivity to civilisation and Christianity. At first, Zululand was closed to the missions, but in 1850 the Norwegian missionary Schreuder

succeeded in overcoming King Mpande's resistance by curing him of one of his ailments. The King was so impressed by Schreuder's medical cure that he gave the Norwegian Missionary Society land at Empangeni and permission to build a mission station (Sundkler 1948). Zululand was thus opened up to the Gospel - through the medicine bottle - and the struggle over health and belief began. This struggle resulted in the emergence of hybrid forms of religious ideas and organisations such as the Independent Zulu Churches, which Sundkler (1948) saw as a revolt against the white man's missionary crusade.

Norman Etherington (1987) describes the relationship between missionary doctors and African healers in mid-Victorian South Africa as being 'characterised by a good deal of mutual understanding', and suggests that 'the stereotype of professional arrogance was forged at the end of the nineteenth century' (Etherington 1987, 77). His principal example is the work of Henry Callaway, the famous doctor of medicine, priest of the Church of England, and historian of Zulu religion and mythology. He also mentions David Livingstone and J.W. Colenso as people who stood apart from most other missionaries of their era because of their enthusiasm for confronting and recognising African beliefs on their own terms (Etherington 1987).

The early legislative and policy environment pertaining to the *muthi* trade constituted a contradictory mix of both restriction and paternalism, which was typical of official Native policy rhetoric of the time (Dauskardt 1994). Natal was the only colonial authority that recognised 'Native medicine men and herbalists' (*inyangas*) through the issuing of licenses and by allowing them to practice in Zululand. Early archival data gives the impression that the *muthi* trade was seen as a major problem, as it was false and exploitative. Thus legislation had to be passed in order to protect the ignorant Native from being exploited by unscrupulous *muthi* traders. However, officials saw it necessary to concede to Africans their right to use



African health care systems. It was noted by the Chief Native Commissioner (CNC) in Natal that 'there is nothing like a sufficient number of European doctors to take the place [of herbalists] ... If Native doctors are prohibited from practising, it will mean that the majority of Natives will have to travel hundreds of miles to consult a European practitioner' (12 July 1911 in CNC 19 CNC 885/1911). The fact that this was seen as a concession also suggests that local pressure from African people, together with the considerable number of herbalists in the territory, motivated the decision (Dauskardt 1994, 49). By allowing for the licensing of *inyangas* and herbalists, authorities hoped to control and restrict the number of licenses granted. The licensing system was instituted to ensure that only suitable and qualified people practised as *inyangas*, and as a means of increasing state revenue through license fees.<sup>15</sup>

The first official legislation pertaining to the *muthi* trade came about in the 1890s with the Code of Native Law (see Chapter 14 in Law 19 of 1891, Natal) and the Zululand Proclamation (No. VII of 1895). The Zululand Proclamation laid down the conditions under which *inyangas* and herbalists were allowed to practice for gain; the procedure to obtain a license, the maximum fees they were allowed to charge, the securing of patient rights, which treatments and medicines were prohibited, etc. Unlicensed practice, together with the trade in 'love philtres, charms, divining and witchcraft' (i.e. practice as a *sangoma*) was prohibited and punishable by fines and imprisonment. The local chief was given the authority to grant or withhold permission for a license, which was to be issued by the local magistrate.

At first the license fee was £1, but this fee was increased to £3 in 1912 in an attempt to further restrict and limit the *muthi* trade.

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<sup>15</sup> In 1921 the inyanga licensing added as much as £4 667 to the Provincial coffers (NTS 1/376 Vol. 9301 in Dauskardt 1994, 49).

The effect of these laws on the development of the Durban *muthi* trade has to be seen in conjunction with other local and colonial laws, i.e. the early influx control and segregation measures in Durban. In general, the number of licenses granted was not representative of the extent to which *inyangas* practised. It was noted by one magistrate in 1909 that ‘the detection of this offence is almost impossible owing to the unpopularity of the work to the Native Police’ (Bulwer Correspondence 4/17 1073/1909 in Preston-Whyte & Beall 1985, 26). People feared *inyangas* and *sangomas*, and they were reluctant to report unlicensed practitioners for fear of their magical powers, but it also seems that people preferred consulting unlicensed practitioners to the officially licensed ones. Chief Nyoniyeswe in the Krantzkop Magistrate Division was quoted in official documents as saying that:

The people complained very much saying that the doctors that did not take out licenses were the ones that helped them, and only charged them 10/-, while the licensed doctors trouble them by requiring a goat killed, charged £1 and claimed a beast as payment and would then depart leaving their patients to die. (Krantzkop Correspondence 5/1/8 1908 in Preston-Whyte & Beall 1985, 26)

This sentiment resulted from the fact that many of the licensed *inyangas* saw the possibilities of accumulating wealth and reputation from travelling around as itinerant doctors, or establishing a practice in the urban areas, instead of limiting their practice to their chiefdom (Preston-Whyte & Beall 1985). Chiefs also reflected this sentiment and preferred the ways of the old days (see later CNC hearing 1915). Dependence on the recommendation from the chief also gave rise to a patron - client relationship between the chiefs and the *inyangas* (and *sangomas*). One of the major changes in the *muthi* trade resulting from this legislation was that *sangomas* started to combine divining and practising medicine in order to get a licence. This trend was most probably a direct result of legislation that banned divination (Berglund 1976, 190).

### ***Durban During the 'Formative Years'. Early African Urbanisation and Proletarianisation***

The development of the Durban *muthi* trade is closely linked with the emergence of African consumerism due to increasing urbanisation and the development of various urban economic niches for Africans. During the earliest years, dating back to Durban's settlement in 1824, there was not much of a market in Durban for the *muthi* trade to supply, as there was only a minuscule and temporarily based African (largely male) population living in the city. The period spanning from 1860 to 1910 can be termed 'the formative years', during which Durban developed from a small trading entrepot to a commercial colonial town. Durban's economic setting in this early period was dominated by smaller commercial capital in the form of shop-keepers, traders, individually-owned commercial firms, and various stevedoring and shipping companies. Early industries were mainly concerned with supplying the needs of a predominantly agrarian colony (la Hausse 1997).

It is important to note that, according to most historical accounts, the African urban population during this period was comprised almost entirely of young men. But there are reports of females entering the town as prostitutes (Hemson 1997) and beer sellers (la Hausse 1985). Women and children (i.e. families) were perceived by the local authorities to symbolise the increasingly intolerable presence of Africans in the town. The early administration of Africans in Durban was left to the town abattoir committee, who depended on Native trade and labour. Local native policy throughout this period was mostly ineffective, as it was contradictory and full of loopholes, partly because of the deep divisions of interest between the various actors in white politics and capital in Durban (Maylam 1982; la Hausse 1996). The purpose of influx control measures was to limit the African presence in Durban according to labour needs and to satisfy police and ratepayers' demands for

segregation. The dilemma was to negotiate a workable influx control system which could be acceptable for all sectors of white society.

At the turn of the century, Durban's economy was still centred on the harbour. Its industrial base was minimal, and the Borough depended heavily on the through trade to the booming Rand economy. One feature of Durban's economic growth in the first half of the twentieth century was its tendency to accelerate during war-time (Maylam 1997, 2-3). Durban's commerce and emerging industry expanded during the South African War (1899-1902) and the First World War, opening up new employment opportunities for African migrants. In 1904, approximately 28% of the town's total population was classified as 'African', of whom 95% were men (Maylam 1985). But African urbanisation was not entirely the result of the gradual utilisation and proletarianisation of the African labour force by white capital. 'African colonisation' of urban centres for their own economic purposes was also an important aspect of the process.

### *Formal and Informal Opportunities*

Before I describe the main income opportunities for Africans in Durban, it is important to briefly explain why I use the 'formal' – 'informal' division for this early period (or indeed any period). Eleanor Preston-Whyte and Jo Beall (1985) set out to investigate the applicability of the informal sector concept by looking at informal economic activity in Natal in the first decades of the twentieth century. They refer to Portes, who:

concludes that not only were such activities (direct subsistence production, non-contractual wage employment, and independent business ventures) common and intensively practised, but that the distinction between formal and informal pursuits did not exist. This was not because activities which

today are labelled informal did not exist then, but rather because there was a lack of a suitable point of contrast. (Preston-Whyte and Beall 1985, 1)

The authors conclude that the informal sector is not a novel development associated with the anomalies of a modern capitalist economy, but rather a process with its roots in the adaptation to the introduction of a money economy and capitalist relations (Preston-Whyte and Beall 1985, 10).

By insisting on using the formal - informal division, I wish to describe the historical notions of different kinds of economic activity and value systems. The 'formal' sector then, as it does today, denoted the 'acceptable', the 'structured', the 'organised' etc., as opposed to the unacceptable, the unstructured and the disorganised 'informal'. (Hart 1985; Latouche 1993). Various African employment opportunities were 'acceptable', despite segregation, because of a perceived or real need or demand for African labour, while other more informal activities were condemned, as they did not fulfil these criteria. This 'formal' – 'informal' division was backed up by a rigid legislative system of influx control measures and segregation policies. But the division also had wider implications for the social and political economy of Durban. As mentioned earlier, African urbanisation was predominantly an androcentric process. From the view of both rural and traditional culture, and from the modern colonialist administration, urban African life was regarded as part of male life. Women were to stay in the rural areas because of their domestic duties, and because they were not wanted or needed in urban areas. The formal – informal division was therefore also a male/female and legal/illegal division, and these distinctions gradually became more significant and real.

In response to Durban capital's particular needs for labour, and despite influx control and segregation, the African population engaged in various types of formal and informal labour.

In the formal white capitalist sector, the most important employment sectors for Africans during this period was as *togt* labourers, mainly comprising dock workers (Hemson 1997), washermen, domestic servants,<sup>16</sup> rickshaw pullers<sup>17</sup> (Posel 1997), Native policemen, and as assistants in shops and offices. Around these employment opportunities serving white capital's needs grew a thriving informal economic sector of *muti* trading, beer-brewing, prostitution, *dagga* dealing, etc. (see la Hausse 1997), the niches of which were to service the increasing numbers of Africans residing in - or travelling to and from - the Borough.

In general, initial segregation policies were more directed towards Indians than Africans, as Durban Municipal policy was more anxious to *control* the African workforce than to segregate it (Guest & Sellers 1994, 16). Therefore, towards the turn of the century, '...the large increase in the number of trading licenses held by Asiatics and the threatened invasion of the colony by still greater numbers of Indians' resulted in Government passing Act No. 18 of 1897, '*to amend the law relating to licenses to Wholesale and Retail Dealers*' (Henderson 1904, 139 & 177). Under this Act, the Town Council was granted discretionary power, through its Licensing Officer, to refuse licenses to all applicants whose premises were in an unhygienic condition or who were unable to comply with the conditions of the Insolvency Law as regards the keeping of proper accounts (Henderson 1904). There were also outcries with regard to Indians and sanitation, and the need for separation, but effective legislation proved hard to pass (Henderson 1904, 307). This legislation made it almost impossible for Africans and Indians to start formal businesses in Durban. But it was women in particular who were excluded from formal employment and who had to seek out alternative

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<sup>16</sup> La Hausse (1984) estimates the African servant population between 1902-1909 at approximately 2 000 (in Friedman 1987, 163).

<sup>17</sup> In 1899, some 11 445 men were registered as pullers, and about 740 rickshas were in daily use. By 1902, which appears to have been a boom year, an astonishing 2 170 rickshas thronged the streets and in all, 24 020 men were registered as pullers (Posel 1997, 202). These pullers were freelance operators with a relative degree of independence and pulling was generally regarded as an arduous but remunerative occupation.

channels for accumulation in the informal sector. Prostitution and beer brewing were the two most important economic undertakings for African women. These two niches had specific gendered, cultural and economic aspects intricately linked to them: they were both important to men, and they could both be seen as extensions of women's domestic duties. Prostitution and beer brewing was relatively remunerative, required skills that were (more or less) already acquired, and could be combined with other domestic duties such as child care, cooking etc. (Friedman 1987). Other activities open to women were based on these same criteria, such as trading in second-hand clothing, home-sewn clothes, processed foods etc.

Around the turn of the century, there were relatively few African women residing in Durban,<sup>18</sup> as most women entered Durban on five-day passes to visit and bring beer for brothers, fathers and boyfriends (La Hausse 1984). Beer brewing and selling was an important social and economic institution for early African Durbanites. Paul la Hausse has vividly described the importance of alcohol and beer brewing in popular culture, and its influence on the overall social history of African life in Durban (La Hausse 1984, 1996). The introduction of the notorious 'Durban System' had the effect of a multi-pronged attack on the women and increased state control over the men (Friedman 1984). Women suffered a double blow in that the spatial congruence of prostitution and beer was separated with the establishment of municipally controlled beerhalls (Friedman 1984, Bradford 1984). The combined result of the development of both formal and informal economic sectors was the emergence of an urban African population with cash to spend - an African consumer market - poor as it was.

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<sup>18</sup> Approximately 5% of the total enumerated population.

## THE “D’URBANISATION” OF *MUTHI* TRADING

A case has been brought to the notice of this department in which a native medicine man from beyond the borders of the Colony was found practising his calling under the cover of an inward pass, but without having provided himself with the license required by the Code of Native Law. As the presence of such natives in this colony is undesirable, I am to request you to instruct the Officers appointed for the issue of inward passes under Law 48, 1884, in your Division, that they are not to grant a pass to any native who may seek to enter the Colony for the purpose of practising as a medicine man or herbalist.

(Secretary of Native Affairs to Magistrate Durban, 30 November 1903 in IRD 22 IRD 1067/1903)

The next period under discussion, which starts around 1900, marks the beginning of the “D’Urbanisation” processes of the *muthi* trade in Durban. By establishing itself in Durban, the *muthi* trade went through profound changes as it gradually became more commercialised and professionalised. Before I start this section, it is important to note that archival material and other available data on these first years of urban *muthi* trading is at best sketchy and scattered. Most *muthi* traders operated on the fringes of the law, either operating with a general dealer’s license or a hawker license, or completely illegally, thereby making their activities difficult to record. This scarcity of data could also be a reflection of the attitudes of government officials of the time – i.e. their disinterest in the matter, which was conceived as being outside of ‘normal’ urban management – and their reluctance to recognise the presence of *muthi* traders in the town.<sup>19</sup>

In general, one can say that the *muthi* trade, together with beer brewing, provided an essential link to the rural traditional culture for the new African Durbanites. Not only did these newly urbanised traditional institutions serve as buffers in daily culture clashes resulting from the exposition of new urban challenges, they also provided an important income opportunity for hundreds of entrepreneurs. The emergence of urban *muthi* trading, together with the *utshwala*

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<sup>19</sup> As will be seen, this is still very much the case today.



business, has been explained by the fact that these rural based systems were the only support networks available in the towns (Dauskardt 1994). More importantly however, starting up businesses in the *muthi* trade 'was one of the few routes to economic success which were available to those who did not have or want access to the advantages accompanied by the patronage of the missionaries.' (Preston-Whyte & Beall 1985, 30)

As mentioned above, The African traditional medicine trade which established itself in Durban around the turn of the century, expanded with the increasing urban demand for *muthi*. This was due to increased African urbanisation and proletarianisation, and provides early evidence of an emerging African mass consumer market. *Muthi* traders, *inyangas* and *sangomas* started to sell their *muthi* and healing services from the various social and economic junctions that emerged in the early 1900s. Compared to the *utshwala* business, which was a female based enterprise, the early urban *muthi* trade was run by relatively few and wealthy *young African men*. One of the reasons for this lay in the licensing procedures, which generally favoured men. There was a reluctance on the part of chiefs to recommend female applicants for licenses, due to what they perceived to be the growing freedom of women and lack of respect for authority (Preston-Whyte & Beall 1985, 30). Another reason for the bias, was the fear that women would start dual practices due to their 'traditional' role as *sangomas*, which was coined 'witchcraft' and forbidden outright. There were also cases reported of male *inyangas* engaging lawyers to petition against female *inyangas* being granted licenses (see Preston-Whyte & Beall 1985, 31).

Dauskardt (1994) attributes the emergence of urban *muthi* trading to the fact that the uneven racial distribution of all urban services (including health) created a context where the traditional medical system was the only available and accessible health service in the city

(Dauskardt 1994, 133). I have already argued in Chapter 1 that the emergence, and the later revival, of the urban *muthi* trade has less to do with lack of availability or accessibility to biomedicine than with a general preference for *muthi*.

Along with the general proletarianisation process, came rising levels of education and literacy which was reflected in the development of an African commercial press - a development which had profound effects on the *muthi* trade (Dauskardt 1994). From the 1930s, these African newspapers played a major role in shaping urban African social, economic and political life, and they provided an important arena for debate and political awareness, as well as serving as significant vehicles for the advertising campaigns of the burgeoning pharmaceutical and *muthi* businesses (Dauskardt 1994). Pamphlets were also distributed on a large scale promoting various cures and medicines.

Natal's licensing of 'Native witchdoctors' caused a series of policy dilemmas and contradictions as well as outcries from opponents both within Natal and in the other provinces. Government departments and other lobbyists started challenging existing Natal policy, and argued for tougher legislation. One major concern was that the *muthi* trade was no longer being confined to 'Native areas' (Zululand) but was spreading to the Colony - especially into the towns (Pietermaritzburg and Durban) - and that Natal legislation was inspiring herbalists in other colonies to operate illegally. The *muthi* trade was spreading not only geographically, but even racially, as white people also started to sell *muthi*. In 1911, the Secretary for the Interior, observed that 'in some cases in Natal white people of the poorer classes are being treated by these Native doctors' (NTS, 1/376 Vol. 9301. 01/07/1911 in Dauskardt 1994, 52). In 1911 and 1912, Natal authorities discussed how to deal with the growing numbers of *inyangas* and herbalists in the province, and conducted a hearing on the

need to repeal existing legislation (CNC 50A/43/25/1911). As mentioned above, the main rationale for the licenses was to ensure that only suitable persons should be allowed to practice, and to act as a means of adding to the revenue. The license fee as declared in the Zululand Proclamation, was £1, and it was proposed that this should be increased to £3 in an attempt to diminish the numbers of applicants. There was debate over whether this would be a constructive move, as some of the submissions expressed fear that an increase in the license fee would only be used as an excuse to extort more money from patients. The District Native Commissioner of Zululand noted that an increase might not help to control the numbers of traders, since the herbalists would pay willingly, 'as their calling is very lucrative' (CNC letter 24 January 1912 in CNC 56 158/1912).

The Zululand Proclamation of 1895 made it necessary for those applying for an *inyanga* license to first obtain approval from the chief of the tribe, and then seek a final endorsement from the local magistrate. This was the only quality stamp the authorities could attain, but it was open for abuse, and it was believed that amendment was needed. The magistrate of Melmoth said in his submission:

It is known by all native experts that all Chiefs belong to their tribes, and not the tribes to the Chief who holds sway over them. Chiefs are childlike in nature and as superstitious as the rest of them... consequently they dare not openly recommend refusals of renewal licenses. (19 January 1912 in CNC 56 CNC 158/1912)

The CNC pointed out to the magistrates that it was discretionary for them to refuse a license even if it was recommended by the local chief. The CNC argued in his letter to the Secretary of Native Affairs (SNA) that

Native doctors should not be prohibited from practising amongst their own nationality because, (a) many of them are indeed skilled in the art of healing, (b) that there is nothing like a sufficient number of

European doctors to take their place and, (c) whether they are allowed to practice or not, they are sure to do so. (CNC letter to SNA, 12 July 1911 in CNC 19 CNC 885/1911)

This debate continued on a national scale in the 1910s and '20s until new and tougher legislation was passed in 1928. The policy solution which was subsequently to receive most government support was to gradually abolish the trade over the next ten years, and substitute it with 'intelligent and sufficiently trained Native nurses and Hospital Orderlies...' (NTS 1/376 Vol. 9301 18/02/1921, in Dauskardt 1994). But the magistrate of Escourt warned against policies aimed at abolishing the trade:

I think the Natives would feel that they were being oppressed by being denied the services of their own doctors and would conclude that this was done in the interest of white doctors. In my opinion the only way of ousting the native medicine man or woman from their position is to establish a sufficient number of properly trained medical men or women... and thus demonstrate to them the superiority of the trained over the untrained doctors ... It is nearly always want of means to pay the white doctor that prevents natives employing him in preference to their own untrained doctors. (Magistrate Escourt to Secretary for Public Health, 11 July 1929 in CNC 50A 43/25)

In 1909, there were 754 registered *inyangas* in Natal, and 937 in Zululand, making the *inyanga* : total population rate 1 : 360 in Zululand and 1 : 1050 in Natal, out of a total black population of 1 039 269 (Jackson 1911 in INR 1988, 5). The number of *inyanga* licenses issued in Natal during 1912 was 948, and in Zululand 937 (CNC 120 1913/604).<sup>20</sup>

### ***Muthi Traders at eMatsheni Beerhall and the Native Market. The CNC Hearing in 1915***

In 1915, the Chief Native Commissioner (CNC) in Natal conducted a hearing on the issue of 'Native herbalists practising in Durban', for the purpose of which all magistrates were asked

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<sup>20</sup> In 1911, the Native population in Natal was 808 620, and that of Zululand 266 641, or a total of 1 075 261 (CNC letter to SNA, 12 July 1911 in CNC 19 CNC 885/1911).

to solicit the opinions of the chiefs in their districts (CNC 193/1915/149). The documents regarding the hearing are relevant to this thesis not only because they throw light on an important historical event in the process of restricting the trade, but also in that they serve to unveil the attitudes and strategies of opponents to the burgeoning urban *muthi* trade. Documents in the CNC's file on 'Native herbalists in Durban' (CNC 193/1915/149) show that there was an increase in the numbers of *muthi* traders in Durban, and that this trend was increasingly seen as a major problem by the colonial authorities. But perhaps more interesting, the data also reveals a strong discontent among the rural chiefs regarding these changes to tradition brought about by urbanisation (this will be dealt with more extensively in Chapter 5). The CNC file starts with a letter from the CNC in Natal to the Secretary of Native Affairs (SNA) in Pretoria dated 11 February 1915, where he asked for permission to ascertain the views of rural chiefs on the matter of *muthi* trading in Durban:

When inspecting recently the Native Beer shops and eating houses in Durban, I noticed there were a number of Native medicine men who had procured stands - for which a small charge is made by the Corporation - upon which were exhibited their wares mostly consisting of roots, pieces of skin, and reputed fats of various animal, alleged to contain curative properties. As is well known, Natives are the most superstitious of mortals, and a great deal of money is made by these medicine men who trade on the credulity of the Natives working in the Borough ... I have little doubt that these medicine men are largely resorted to by Natives who desire to become intimate with a particular girl, or wish to bring bad luck or a 'curse' upon a person whom they dislike ... I am sure that the licences referred to in para. 194 of the Code [of Native Law] never contemplated the open sale to any Native of reputed medicines such as is carried on in Durban and other towns, and I think it would be a good thing if this practice - which is undoubtedly much abused - were stopped. (CNC 193 1915/149)

The *Ilanga lase Natal*, a black readership paper, noted on March 5 1915 that

the gradual disappearance of the lovepiltre and the decaying samples of questionable forms of medicine from the floors of the Matsheni [Native Market; now the Victoria Market], is satisfactory; it cannot be claimed that those things are either useful or ornamental, therefore the sooner they are gone for ever the better it will be for Durban and the Colony. (clipping found in CNC 193 1915/149)

This same newspaper clipping was later used to justify the removal of *muthi* traders from Ematsheni:

That the step taken was not regarded by influential Native opinion as being against the general interest, is shown from the following remark which appeared in a leading native paper at the time [referring to the above article]. (CNC letter to Ray Msimang, member of Native Advisory Board, 31 December 1920 in CNC 50A 43/25)

The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) gave warning to the illegal traders, and by July 1915 it was reported that only licensed men were selling at the eMatsheni (Letter from Chief Magistrate in Durban to CNC in Pietermaritzburg, 15 July 1915 in CNC 193 1915/149).

The end result of the 1915 hearing was a general consensus against the Durban *muthi* trade and in support for prohibition. There were some interesting replies from the magistrates, which shed some light on the manner in which the chiefs and magistrates viewed these changes in the *muthi* trade (these will be presented in Chapter 5). In general, the chiefs were against the commercialisation and urbanisation of *muthi* trading. In addition to the clear references to breaches of tradition, the chiefs were worried about increasing rural poverty and the drift towards urban employment, which was also threatening their power-base.

In his report to the SNA in Pretoria after the hearing, the CNC of Natal concluded that the opinion amongst the chiefs and leading natives was that a stop should be put to the indiscriminate sale of native medicines, whether in rural or urban areas. There was 'no doubt that a great deal of harm is done by the unrestricted sale of these reputed medicines' (CNC letter to SNA, 6 October 1915 in CNC 193 1915/149). The sale of love philtres and charms, he pointed out, was illegal under section 196 of the Code and section 9 in the Proclamation,

and transgressors could be prosecuted. He also stressed the fact that these medicine men were departing from old Zulu custom by travelling around the country canvassing for patients, instead of remaining at home until called upon. He suggested some amendments to the existing legislation which would help curtail the trade, amongst them a special monthly license for those who wished to sell medicine, which specified where and what the trader was allowed to sell:

The monthly license to be issued to the sellers of Native medicines is suggested because many of them carry but small bundles, and frequently do not regularly follow this calling. For instance, natives who come from districts where certain medicines are only obtainable, often bring small parcels with them to town for sale when returning from work. (CNC letter to SNA, 6 October 1915 in CNC 193 1915/149)

The CNC also suggested that a list of medicines which were of medicinal value and were harmless should be compiled and that licensed sale should be restricted to these medicines only. The District Native Commissioner of Zululand noted in this regard that any changes to legislation should consider the fact that

there are some roots and barks well known to most Natives and of which they like to have a supply; as these only grow in particular localities they can only be procured through the agency of travelling vendors. (Letter to SNA in Pretoria, 21 September 1915 in CNC 193 1915/149)

By the end of 1920, it was reported that there were no *muthi* traders at the eMatsheni. The CNC ordered the Durban Corporation not to allow *muthi* traders to occupy stands in the Durban Native Market (as it was also called), on the grounds that the licenses ‘...were never intended to cover the masquerading in European communities of unqualified persons as chemists or medical practitioners’ (CNC letter to Mr Msimang 31 December 1920 in CNC 50A 43/25). During the period from 1926 to 1930, the number of licenses in Natal dropped from over 1 200 to 500 (9 May 1931 in CNC 50A 43/25).

### ***1930s: Medical Consumerism, Professionalisation, and Commercialisation***

What happened in the Durban *muthi* market between 1920 and 1930? Archival documents only state that *muthi* traders were barred from trading at eMatsheni, not from other places in Durban. It seems as if the unlicensed trading in *muthi* and other medicines expanded during these years, even as legislation became tougher and fewer licenses were granted. This meant that the trade developed on the fringes of the law, i.e. as a typical illegal informal activity.

As mentioned above, the *muthi* trade established itself in Durban due to the emerging African proletarianisation and the concomitant demand for commercial traditional medicine and healing services. But this growing African mass-consumer market also attracted other commercial interests. The pharmaceutical sector saw the potential of this growing market, and started advertising campaigns for products pitched at African consumers, which spurred a counter-attack from African *muthi* enterprises (Dauskardt 1994). This rivalry, together with the “D’Urbanisation” of traditional medicine, changed notions of urban African health, as hybrid forms of medicines and cures evolved - African medicine being influenced by biomedicine and vice versa.

The next cluster of archival documents (CNC 50A 43/25), dates from the implementation of the Dental and Pharmacy Act No. 13 of 1928, which was passed after twelve years of Union Senate and Assembly debate. The Act lays the foundations for the national structuring, and more importantly, for the official recognition of biomedicine alone in South Africa (Dauskardt 1994). From this time on, all applications for herbalist licenses were dealt with by the Secretary for Public Health, through the Native Commissioner of the district concerned.



New licenses were issued according to the new law, but renewals were allowed for licenses governed by previous legislation.

The period from 1928 - 1935 was marked by new attempts to clamp down on the *muthi* trade in Durban. This time the authorities had an ally in the Natal Pharmaceutical Society.

Archival documents shed some light on the confrontations between the Natal Native Medical Association and the Natal Pharmaceutical Society and their bids to secure their own positions.

In the early 1930s, the Natal Pharmaceutical Society was alarmed by the latest developments in the *muthi* trade in Durban. The *muthi* trade boomed as more traders and customers entered Durban, and the society was particularly provoked by the *muthi* shops that opened up and the new mail-order businesses that emerged.<sup>21</sup> The archives reveal that it was the Natal

Pharmaceutical Society who alerted the authorities about these latest developments and who subsequently started lobbying for tougher legislation. It also seems that they were better

informed about the situation in the *muthi* trade than the authorities. In 1931, Central

Government in Cape Town wanted to know how many licenses governed by the old

legislation were still being used in Natal and how many of these license-holders practised in

Durban (Telegram 11 February 1931 in CNC 50A 43/25). From this survey (which was

unofficially informed from a 'reliable source' since official figures were not available) it was

discovered that 507 old licenses under previous legislation were still operating (only four of

which were held by women!), but only five of these license-holders practised in Durban (none

of which were women!). According to a telegram from the Magistrate in Durban to the CNC

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<sup>21</sup> The earliest reports of mail-order *muthi* businesses are from 1905, when the Native Affairs Department learnt from the Post-Master General that as many as 872 parcels of medicine had been posted to Native chiefs in Natal in the first four months of that year (SNA 1/1/320 in Dauskardt 1994, 86).

in Pietermaritzburg, 22 new licenses were issued in 1928, 26 in 1929, and only 16 in 1930 (Telegram 12 February 1931 in CNC 50A 43/25).

The State and the Natal Pharmaceutical Society wanted to get rid of the *muthi* traders because, as they said, *muthi* traders 'were never intended to practice their trade in towns like Durban' (CNC 50A 43/25). Many of the traders also allegedly sold European patent drugs in addition to *muthi* from their stalls. In 1930 the Natal Pharmaceutical Society declared that the society had taken a very serious view on the matter of Native herbalists:

My society is only too willing to assist the [Durban] Corporation in any way, to suppress this evil, and a sub-committee will be prepared to await the Native Affairs Advisory Board, if necessary to further discuss this dangerous practice. (18 June 1930 in CNC 50A 43/25)

The biomedical professions perceived the traditional medical system to be a threat to their economic and social positions. Dauskardt (1994) has shown how profit margins ranging between 1 000% to 3 000% on a selection of medicines sold via post-order created a highly contested terrain of pharmaceutical sales, but also indicated that pharmaceutical producers had substantial funds available for advertising (Dauskardt 1994, 84). *Muthi* traders responded quickly by establishing their own mail-order businesses, by advertising in African newspapers,<sup>22</sup> and by distributing pamphlets. This response involved the restructuring of the nature of the *muthi* products they sold and the manner in which they were prepared and packaged. The trend was to sell more processed medicines instead of, or in addition to, trading *muthi* in its natural state. This meant that the *muthi* was mixed at these small factories and sold as specific cures or remedies in bottles or boxes in the same way as the pharmaceutical sector products. This restructuring was a considerable breach of tradition, as

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<sup>22</sup> Dauskardt suggests that in African newspapers (between 1940 and 1980) some 10% of advertising was concerned with the sale of traditional medicine (1994, 86).

there were strict rules and taboos around how to collect and administer *muthi*, which were not compatible with factory processing. Finally, there emerged a new range of cures and medicines which were predicated on new experiences and values associated with early (contemporary) urban African life and which was also perceived by some as constituting a breach of tradition (see Chapter 5).

The 1930s also saw an emerging *professionalisation* of the *muthi* trade. This meant that the *muthi* trade increasingly became an organised profession like its scientific counterpart, attempting to define for itself a relative autonomy, establishing a statutory monopoly (through the issuing of non-official licenses), laying out a code of ethics and an ideology of service, and embodying and protecting an esoteric knowledge (with the provision of training) by serving as experts and specialists in traditional healing (using the professional title ‘Doctor’ etc.).<sup>23</sup> *Muthi* traders and healers organised themselves in order to defend their right to practise against the antagonisms of an expanding scientific medical and pharmaceutical profession and the State. It was around 1928 that the early surge of urban traditional healer associations occurred, as the passing of Act No. 13 posed a serious threat to the activities of *muthi* traders. Contrary to Dauskardt’s (1994) assumption that most professionalisation attempts failed,<sup>24</sup> there was at least one organisation in Natal that had tangible success. The official response to this professionalisation was a strict refusal to grant any recognition to these organisations.

The Natal Native Medical Association was founded in 1930 by Solomon Mazibuko and Mafavuke Ngcobo. The two founders were wealthy and educated, and soon managed to

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<sup>23</sup> Professionalisation through the use of titles (Dr/TrDr) acts as ‘symbols and guarantors of expert “knowledge”’; and it is by its knowledge that a profession ultimately defines itself’ (Last & Chavunduka 1986, 9).

organise strong opposition to the Natal Pharmaceutical Society in their struggle for medical rights.<sup>25</sup> By 1931, the Association, which was based in May Street (Durban), had 56 members, who each paid a membership fee of £10 (which also proves that the official counts referred to above were at best imprecise) (Telegram 12 February 1931 in CNC 50A 43/25). There were several unsuccessful attempts to convict the secretary of the Natal Native Medical Association, Mr Ngcobo, for his practice. There were also official claims that the Natal Native Medical Association was 'nothing but a fraud and a means of obtaining money from ignorant Natives fraudulently' (5 September 1934 in CNC 50A 43/25). The Native Commissioner in Durban, in a confidential letter in 1935 to the CNC in Pietermaritzburg, explained that:

Mafavuke is a well educated Native with - for a Native - an extraordinary business ability. From a small genuine herbalist practice, he has built up by advertisement and other means an extensive business, conducted largely through the post, which covers practically the whole South Africa. He produced to me Income Tax Receipts for the years ending 30.6.1931, 1932 and 1933 for £19/19/5, £27/14/3 and £42/18/1 respectively... his income is considerable. (12 February 1935 in CNC 50A 43/25)

The Natal Native Medical Association worked hard to amend sections of Act 13 of 1928, which they claimed were in conflict with their legitimate *profession*. They claimed that the Act made it almost impossible for any Native to get a new license, and complained about the clauses that ordered the cancellation of old licenses (issued under previous legislation from 1895) which were not renewed within two months (20 April 1931 in CNC 50A 43/25). They had their own peculiar style of opposition:

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<sup>24</sup> Dauskardt (1994) contends that many of these organisations were mere frauds and were initiated largely for the financial gain of their leader. This claim he bases on official documents, which are highly biased. He mentions the 'African Dingaka Association', based on the Witwatersrand, as one of the exceptions.

<sup>25</sup> Dauskardt (1994) suggests that the organisation (which he calls 'the Native Medicine Mens' Association, formed in 1938) was formed to strengthen the position of one of the key members (Israel Alexander) who was in serious legal trouble with his wealthy practice. He also claims that the organisation's lobby attempts were 'unsuccessful'.

We do not consider for a minute that it was a Government Measure, but we think it was a persuasion on the part of the European Medical Practitioners and Chemists. The Government failed to, [sic] protect the undefended and unrepresented Natives. The Opinion and Views of the Native Leaders were not sought and this has become nothing else than *the deprivation of the Native Medical Rights* ... We are a *profession* and we do not wish to become Political Agitators what we want is to appeal to the Union Government in a constitutional Policy, and push through the right channel. We have faith in the Union Government and we claim that the Govt. is guided by principles of Fairness and impartiality towards both white and Black, and the Association trust that our appeal will be accorded a careful investigation. There is no justification of the Act except upon the grounds of professional jealousy and commercial rivalry, which is one of the chief causes of uneasiness between Europeans and the Natives. (letter to CNC, 20 April 1931 in CNC 50A 43/25. My emphasis)

This is the first mention of the terms 'Native Medical Rights' and 'profession' that I have come across.

In 1930, the newly established Native Advisory Board brought forward some recommendations to the Town Clerk in Durban regarding medicine men and herbalists and argued for the acceptance of the reality. First, they suggested that all practitioners or traders wanting to operate in the town had to be registered as such. Second, that a site be provided for them in order to have direct control of their activities; they would of course have to pay rent. Finally, they argued that unscrupulous and ignorant people should be debarred from trading, and '...thus safeguard the life of the ignorant Native workmen in Town'. They pleaded that the site be somewhere near the Native Market, or on the Berea Flats near Warwick Avenue (Native Advisory Board to Town Clerk Durban, 16 April 1930, in CNC 50A 43/25). This request implies that the Warwick Avenue area was the most important economic area in Durban for Africans at the time just as it is today. It is also interesting to note that it took almost 70 years before Durban authorities followed up this recommendation.

Records from a meeting of chiefs in 1931 expressed the view that it would be pointless to try to get rid of the trade as 'there are certain ailments which affect Natives and are not common amongst Europeans', and that certain European doctors had stated that they did not understand their African patients' sicknesses and referred them to *inyangas*. 'Natives were born and brought up with native medicine', they maintained. 'Hundreds of Natives do not as yet believe in European medicine, and they are in these urban areas for the purpose of work'. It is interesting to note the resolution from the meeting, where the chiefs stated that the belief in *muthi* would die out by itself (2 April 1931, CNC 50A 43/25).

The Natal Pharmaceutical Society approached the Pharmacy Board and the Medical Council to prohibit *muthi* traders from selling anything but 'Native medicine' and further, to prohibit them from practising in 'European towns or villages' (29 October 1930 in CNC 50A 43/25). In their drive to get rid of the 'evil practices', they found out that that there was no existing legislation under which the State could prosecute, as most of the practitioners in Durban had renewed their old licenses which were governed by previous legislation, and were thus indemnified from the new act's regulations.<sup>26</sup> The Pharmaceutical Society was hoping that the process of issuing fewer licenses would continue, so that there would not be a need for new legislation. However, it was quite convinced that '*the men of the class in question* will take special care in regard to the annual renewal of their licenses and they are, I believe, mostly comparatively *young men*' (9 May 1931 in CNC 50A 43/25). My emphasis). Unless there was an amendment to the Act, it stated, '... the only cure for this evil is that of time, as the existing licensees die, etc.' (9 May 1931 in CNC 50A 43/25).

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<sup>26</sup> The Act No. 13 contained a clause that overruled the entire Act: 'Nothing in this Act (No. 13) contained shall be construed as prejudicing or terminating the right of any Native entitled under the commencement of this Act under the provisions of Ch. 14 of Law 19 of 1891 (Natal) ... or under the provisions of Zululand Proclamation No. 7 of 1895...'

The Pharmaceutical Society was becoming increasingly irritated by the two founders of the Natal Native Medical Association, who, it claimed, 'were becoming a serious menace to both the public generally and to the Pharmaceutical profession owing to their holding themselves out to be qualified doctors and using and selling drugs ordinarily confined to professional doctors and qualified chemists...' (9 May 1931 in CNC 50A 43/25). The Society reported to the CNC that in 1930 the two had opened up *muthi* shops '...with all the outward appearance of European chemist shops', masquerading as fully competent dispensaries according to European standards. Their practices covered the entire region, as they advertised widely and used post-order to send *muthi* (9 May 1931 in CNC 50A 43/25). They allegedly also sold certain patent medicines from their shops.

By the late 1930s, one of the key members of the Association, Mr Alexander, had two shops to keep up with demand, lived in a £6 000 house, and profited £9 000 in the financial year 1938 (from Dauskardt 1994, pp 90-91). These first *muthi* shops were situated in the areas where most Africans lived or passed through in Durban at that time; Umgeni Road (close to Station Road belonging to Mr Alexander), Cathedral Road (belonging to Mr Ngcobo living in 17 Cross Street; Secretary of Native Medical Association in 116 May Street), and Mayville near Tollgate (belonging to Mr Shangase) (serving an emerging Cato Manor community).

To curb the *muthi* trade further, the Pharmaceutical Society also lobbied to make it illegal for the *muthi* traders to advertise their practices, cures or medicines in any newspaper, pamphlet or hand bill, as it claimed this was 'entirely opposed to the spirit of the Code and to the calling of these people under Native custom' (9 May 1931 in CNC 50A 43/25). The extension of their practices, by post-order sale by the Natal traders also provoked the other provinces in the Union, who did not allow traditional medical practitioners to operate.

In 1927, the Black Administration Act No. 38 was passed restricting the advertising of 'Black medicines'. In 1932, Proclamation No. 168 was announced which ensured that *inyangas* or *sangomas* were prohibited from 'assuming the European title of "doctor" or "chemist"', that they were prohibited from serving any person 'other than a Native', and that they were restricted to trade in 'Native medicines only' (Proclamation No. 168 of 1932 Chapter XIII. Also cited in letter from Natal Native Medical Association to CNC 7 January 1935 in CNC 50A 43/25).

The Natal Native Medical Association protested against the implementation of all these steps, arguing that they were based on professional rivalry and fear of competition and jealousy:

While these restrictions are only confined to Native herbalists, European chemists are privileged to transmit circulars and pamphlets describing their remedies by post to Natives throughout South Africa, and to advertise in every Native newspaper. (letter from Natal Native Medical Association to CNC 7 January 1935 in CNC 50A 43/25)

The above-mentioned amendments were enacted as a result of a resolution passed by the Transkeian Territories (19 April 1934), which was regarded as 'an expression of responsible Native opinion...' (CNC to Natal Native Medical Association, 12 January 1935 in CNC 50A 43/25)

The Natal Native Medical Association wrote to the *Bhunga* Council in Transkei, who had formulated the resolution against the trade and the advertisements, claiming they were 'greatly misinformed', as there were only two licensed Native herbalists in Natal who issued circulars by post, their pamphlets were passed through the hands of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) in Durban before publication, and that, to their knowledge, no Native



herbalist advertised in newspapers (24 January 1935 in CNC 50A 43/25). They claimed that circulars and pamphlets issued by European chemists must have been mistaken for theirs, owing to the fact that all trademarks and pictures in them were Native, and that some European chemists even gave themselves Native names. They expressed their disappointment that the *Bhunga* Council worked against 'Native development':

The Native herbalist carrying on mail-order business is educated, has sound knowledge of the anatomy of the human body, and has spent huge sums of money on Native medical research. To support such progress is a gross injustice to the Native population as a whole. (24 January 1935 in CNC 50A 43/25)

The Natal Native Medical Association later sent a delegation to Cape Town to speak to the Minister of Native Affairs regarding Proclamation No. 250 of 1934. The association complained that the amendment to Act No 13 was unfair, and that Europeans should also be prohibited from sending out pamphlets. They argued further that the Transkeian resolution only represented a small portion of the African population of the Union, and that the remainder had made no complaints regarding their services:

We employ a large number of clerks and assistants, and thus assisting to find employment for our own people. One of our members - Mafavuke Ngcobo - pays income tax. Postage is also paid on all our parcels. (12 January 1935 in CNC 50A 43/25)

The Natal Native Medical Association was later forced into silence. It is not clear what happened to the organisation and its members. It would appear that the two founders managed to keep their businesses running, as traders today still talk about their great ventures. Although they were unsuccessful in their bid to legalise their trade, they managed to lobby authorities at all levels in Durban, Pietermaritzburg and in Cape Town. Their efficiency and professionalism must have surprised the authorities. Subsequent attempts to organise the trade both locally, provincially and nationally were largely unsuccessful. There has since

been a substantial amount of organisations representing the actors in the *muthi* trade, and this has caused great problems in co-ordinating a unified voice against attempts to regulate and develop the trade. Many organisations were indeed private enrichment schemes for power-hungry individuals, while others were infiltrated and sabotaged by the apartheid state. One of the exceptions to this trend is the Pretoria-based African Dingaka Association, formed in 1930, and which is still active today. This lack of an efficient and representative organisation of the trade is still a major problem in the present.

### ***The Rationale Behind Apartheid Muthi Policy: Legislation After 1928***

Official legislation continued to develop along more or less the same lines after the implementation of the Dental and Pharmacy Act in 1928. The main characteristics of apartheid *muthi* policy were a) a general trend of confusion and contradiction which took the form of official opposition in tandem with tacit recognition; b) paternalistic legislation, especially during the early years, which was based on an early version of modernisation theory (development as progress); c) state intervention in the commercial rivalry between the two health sectors; and d) official reluctance to curtail traditional medicine, acknowledging that the State would not provide alternative health care facilities.

This inherent ambivalence of official apartheid policy towards the *muthi* trade is an example of what I have termed 'development': apartheid policy was instituted both to 'develop' and to control the Native. This section will briefly deal with the apartheid state's strategic use of tradition as part of its separate development policy and rule through 'decentralized despotism' (Mamdani 1996).

In accordance with the above mentioned segregationist policies, apartheid city planners were concerned to emphasise and maintain ethnic, racial, and cultural difference between the city and the countryside, and within the city (Mamdani 1996). Efforts were made to maintain as many rural (homeland) values as possible amongst the African 'temporary sojourners' (in Mamdani's terms the 'subjects' or the migrant workers) of the city, in an attempt to limit and control the process and pattern of urbanisation and to enable the functioning of the migrant labour system. Native policy in South Africa was institutionalised according to the modes of direct and indirect rule (Mamdani 1996). Whereas direct rule took the form of urban civil power (the exclusion of natives from civil freedoms), indirect rule signified a rural tribal authority which involved incorporating the natives into a state-defined and state-enforced traditional order (Mamdani 1996). The *muthi* trade was thus an important instrument for apartheid city planners to sustain the apartheid city dream by regulating the influences of the rural in the urban (and the urban in the rural) (Mamdani 1996). As much as the pharmaceutical profession and others wanted to get rid of the trade, the apartheid state was inclined to do this only partially and ineffectively. In addition, separate development meant separate amenities, which again meant separate health care systems. Traditional medicine provided the apartheid state with a free addition to the second class hospitals and clinics that the latter created.

Notions of health have undoubtedly constituted important features of apartheid policy (see Comaroff 1993 and Swanson 1977). Swanson has shown how the promotion of Native health and the control of African males in the urban workplace went closely together in the Cape Colony in the early 1900s (Swanson 1977). Swanson further demonstrates how the social and architectural character of Cape Town was transformed in response to contagion and medical emergency (Swanson 1977). Health was also a powerful tool of social engineering in Natal,

where the colonial authorities (and later the apartheid government) followed a dual and contradictory policy of paternalism, tolerance and disregard for the *muthi* trade, allowing it only in so far as it could be incorporated and actively used in apartheid policy.

The most important legislation to be passed after the Dental and Pharmacy Act was the Witchcraft Suppression Act (No. 3 of 1957). During the debates prior to the passing of the Act, the apartheid state's contradictions with regard to the *muthi* trade became evident (Dauskardt 1994). Apartheid doctrine, which emphasised the preservation and maintenance of African social structures and norms, was not compatible with anti-*muthi* trade legislation. The official stance therefore was inconsistent in that it prohibited aspects of the African culture that it deemed 'barbaric', 'evil', and 'dangerous', at the same time as endeavouring to advocate and promote black cultural identity. One parliamentarian noted:

This [Witchcraft] Bill once again shows the dichotomy of thinking by the Government; that in the one compartment, in the economic sphere and technological sphere they think in the modern Western way of developing all the people of the country and recognising those economic trends which are occurring and aim to educate the people, to emancipate them, to make them better citizens, more productive to the whole economy of the country, and to fill their place in a multi-racial society. Whereas on the other hand, the ideological way of thinking rules supreme; they want to keep the African people static, and revert them to that golden age of the savage - so called - with what is best in their own culture; which is in complete anti-thesis of the intentions and principles behind this Bill. (Mr Stanford, Hansard, 28/01/1957: 257 in Dauskardt 1994, 61)

Another concerned MP expressed the view that:

... the only real solution ... to the evil practices of [traditional medical practitioners] ... is the spread of Christianity and the advancement in the scale of civilization, and the promotion of this object will certainly not be attained if the policy of the hon. Minister of Native Affairs of reverting to tribalism and encouraging the natives to develop along their own lines is to be continued. (Dr Smit, Hansard, 28/01/1957: 246 in Dauskardt 1994, 65)

Traditional medicine was not to be totally outlawed, but controlled and directed by biomedicine to eliminate its competition. A middle way was found by avoiding either overt recognition or overt prohibition of the *muthi* trade. Before the passing of the Witchcraft Suppression Act, it was cautioned that tougher legislation could drive ‘witchcraft’ underground. The Witchcraft Suppression Act totally outlawed all persons or actions that ‘*imputes to any other person the use of supernatural means in causing any disease in, or injury or damage to any person or thing, or who names or indicates any other person as a wizard*’ (section 1, paragraph (a)). It also became illegal to employ or solicit anyone who could name such wizards, and to even profess to have such knowledge. More importantly for the *muthi* trade, it became an offence to exercise any kind of supernatural power for gain, such as ‘*witchcraft, sorcery, enchantment or conjunction*’, to tell fortunes, or to pretend from ‘*skill in or knowledge of any occult science to discover where and in what manner anything supposed to be stolen or lost may be found*’ (section 1, paragraph (e)). This bizarre piece of legislation formalised witchcraft into legal terms, and thereby made it part of official discourse.

In 1974, the Pharmacy Act No. 53 was introduced to enhance the image of the pharmaceutical profession. That same year, two other important health-related Acts were passed. The Medical, Dental and Supplementary Health Service Professions Act (No. 56 of 1974), to replace the Medical, Dental and Pharmacy Act, and the Homeopaths, Naturopaths, Osteopaths and Herbalists Act (No. 52 of 1974) were passed. In 1982, the Associated Health Service Professions Act (No. 63) was implemented. In addition to these health related acts came the first elaborate nature conservation laws pertaining to *muthi* trading (Nature Conservation Ordinance No. 15 of 1974), which put further constraints on the trade (see section that follows on conservationists and the *muthi* trade).

### *Anti Street-Trade Legislation in Durban*

In addition to the above anti-*muthi* trade laws, there were a number of other laws and regulations which made it illegal for *muthi* traders to operate in Durban. Street trading in Durban has been viewed in the same way as the notorious 'birds in the cornfield' - to borrow an analogy from Stadler's (1979) study on squatter movements in Johannesburg. In the view of the dominant discourse, street traders symbolised the manifestation of 'non-whiteness', disorder and the primitive, and their 'de-urbanising' activities were perceived as sponging off the urban capitalist project. Street trading and other informal sector activities also posed a serious threat to labour intensive industry and undermined the entire logic of the migrant labour system. The development of repressive legal and regulatory systems made it almost impossible to trade before the 1980s. Legislation pertaining to street trading was as elaborate and strict in Durban as in other cities in South Africa, and there were a number of acts, ordinances and bylaws at the various levels of government that restricted street trading.

In general, the most important official instrument for controlling and regulating street trading has been the concession or withholding of trading licenses (Rogerson 1989). In addition to Act No. 18 of 1897 relating to licenses for wholesale and retail dealers mentioned earlier, the Black (Urban Areas) Consolidation Act No. 25 of 1945 and the 1950 Group Areas Act were the most significant pieces of legislation which contained clauses that restricted street traders (Rogerson 1989). Both Acts debarred African street traders and small businesses from trading in the city. The Natal Ordinance 11/1973 further restricted street trading. This provincial legislation restricted hawking of goods within 100 metres of a fixed formal business, and prevented hawkers from taking up fixed stands by allowing them to occupy a

spot for only fifteen minutes, after which they were to move at least 25 metres away.

Furthermore, the Ordinance stipulated that all traders required a suitable license to hawk or trade. But it was the Durban city street trading bylaws of 1962 (section J6) that were the most comprehensive and specific, and which totally outlawed street trading. The effect of the above restrictions was to define street traders as illegal intruders into the city, making them eligible for prosecution by the Durban City Police. Therefore, the experience of street traders in Durban was, up until the mid-1980s, marked by regular harassment by city officials in the form of arrests, confiscations and fines. However, despite the harsh legal and regulatory environment, there was defiance and resistance, mainly led by African women. To these women, who had no other means of survival, the constant threat of prosecution was regarded as less of a burden than the threat of starvation (Naidoo 1993).

The combined effect of these segregationist and later, apartheid laws, ultimately forced the Durban *muthi* trade underground or out to the peri-urban areas (the new townships that were subsequently built). Illegal underground post-order sale was the *modus operandum* for the big *muthi* companies. From the 1940s, Indian entrepreneurs started to fill the void left behind and opened *muthi* shops in the Indian commercial district between Central Park and Warwick Avenue. They quickly came to dominate the Durban trade, up until the late 1980s and the early 1990s.

### *Indians and the Muthi Trade*

According to Mr Govender, a *muthi* shop owner and chairman of the Natal Herb and Traditional Medicine Traders' Association, his grandfather was the first Indian to open up a *muthi* shop in Durban over fifty years ago.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Interview with Loganathan Govender, 28 August 1997.

He could remember that the shop, which was in Grey Street, was operating during World War Two. He would come and help in the shop after school. Most of the Indian *muthi* shops that came later emanated from this family business. Mr Govender's father subsequently opened up a shop in Queen Street, and an uncle started another one in Victoria Street. Asked why Indians opened up these shops, Mr Govender replied:

We learnt it from the blacks when we were working together on the sugar plantations, and they even learnt some things from us. The blacks were not allowed to open up shops in urban areas. In European areas we were not allowed to take up business, but we used a white nominee. In the Grey Street area it was OK.<sup>28</sup>

In July 1976 Mr Govender was one of the founders of the Natal Herb and Traditional African Medicine Traders' Association: 'We needed the organisation to protect our interests towards the Natal Parks Board, and it was them [sic] who wanted and helped us to form this association'.<sup>29</sup> In 1974, Nature Conservation Ordinance No. 15 made it illegal to sell most of the medicines on the market, and the Natal Parks Board were responsible for the policing of the law. They wanted the *muthi* shop owners to organise so they could have a channel for communication. All shops needed permits from the Natal Parks Board, which needed to be renewed every year. In 1985, the Executive members of the Natal Herb and Traditional African Medicine Traders' Association met Mr Jamile of the Inyanga Association in a failed attempt to amalgamate the two organisations. In 1986, the Association donated R6 000 to the Cunningham Research Fund for Mr Cunningham's research project on behalf of the Institute of Natural Resources into the *muthi* trade (INR 1988). In 1997, the Association changed its name to Natal Herb Traders and Healers Association. The shop-owners bought *muthi* from gatherers who also needed licenses from the Parks Board. Shop owners would normally buy

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<sup>28</sup> Interview with Loganathan Govender, 28 August 1997.

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Loganathan Govender, 28 August 1997.



from the same suppliers who worked as 'free-lance *muthi* collectors'. Mr Govender claimed that Indian *muthi* shop owners merely acted as middlemen in the industry, buying from Africans and selling to Africans. Mr Govender's shop is located in Commercial Street, close to the Workshop, where he has been for the last 25 years. His business was very good when the train station was there, he said, but recently, since the street traders started operating in Russell Street, business was going down and he could barely pay the rent.

In the mid-1980s, things started to get tougher for the Indian *muthi* shops in Durban. The Sunday Tribune (26 January 1986) reported that in 1985, five shops had to close down because of increasing pressure from conservationists. Mr Govender told the newspaper that the industry was going down, because there were too many restrictions. The newspaper visited some of Durban's 100 *muthi* shops and practices and reported that some were still doing good business. These shops were tucked away into alleys and arcades in the Grey Street area (Sunday Tribune, 26 January 1986). There are less than 15 Indian *muthi* shops in Durban today (1997), and they are all members of KwaZulu-Natal Traditional Herbalist Association. Today, these *muthi* shop owners are facing serious competition from street traders who sell *muthi* much cheaper than they can, as they do not pay rent. Some Indian shop owners now use the street markets as their suppliers.

### ***A New Approach from the Biomedical Sector (1970s )***

Up until the 1970s, the approach of the biomedical sector towards traditional medicine was antagonistic. In 1977, the World Health Organisation (WHO) started to encourage its member countries to include the traditional healers in the orbit of their national health systems, rather than competing with them for patients. The argument was that the advantage

of traditional medicine was that it was at least in the reach of most people in the Third World. This marked the beginning of a process that led to the formal recognition of traditional medicine and healing by the biomedical sector. I will only briefly describe these changes by listing in chronological order some of the many statements and developments on the issue that were reported in South African newspapers.

In 1977, a former senior psychiatrist and neurologist at a Johannesburg hospital said that 'African herbalists [*inyangas*] were sometimes better equipped than psychiatrists to deal with neuroses in patients' (The Natal Witness, 3 June 1977).

In 1980, the Medical Association stated that although a lot of discussion had taken place on the subject, it was unlikely that *inyangas* would ever become part of the recognised health service in South Africa. In the same article however, it was reported that a principal specialist from the intensive care units at Addington and King Edward Hospitals had instructed his staff to accommodate traditional beliefs and adapt to African patients. Staff used the strategy of speaking in terms of evil spirits rather than germs and bacteria because to many patients disease and trauma were merely manifestations of the presence of evil spirits cast by wizards or due to the failure in honouring ancestral spirits. The specialist said it did not make sense to use the medical jargon in these circumstances, but rather to practise in the same way as the 'witchdoctors' (sic) by telling the patient what was wrong instead of asking and examining them too much. This approach, he said, gave meaning and psychological comfort to the patient; 'you have to appreciate the thought processes of the patient' (Sunday Tribune, 14 September 1980).

In 1984, a psychologist wrote an article in the South African Medical Journal arguing that traditional African healers should be included in the formal health care system in South Africa (The Natal Mercury, 19 November 1984).

In 1988, the Sunday Tribune reported: “*“ethnic-mumbo jumbo” is out - animal skin clad psychologists are in*’. This was according to ‘academics at some South African universities’, who now argued for the recognition of *sangomas* and *inyangas* for their positive role in mental health. The academics now believed, according to the newspaper, that traditional healing embraced ‘the most modern concepts of Jungian and humanistic psychology and that their holistic methods could help pave the mental path to the future’. But the Medical and Dental Council remained adamant: ‘We do not acknowledge traditional healing as a medical profession. No one registered with us is permitted to co-operate with people such as these’, a spokesman said to the reporter (Sunday Tribune, 7 August 1988).

The Natal Witness (9 October 1991) reported on the renaissance of traditional medicine and a renewed attention from Western authorities focusing on its values, methodology and ethics. Some recent developments were mentioned in the article that illustrated this change in attitude: firstly, the report published by the Medical Association of South Africa, accepting the role that healers play within the community; and secondly, a national conference on complementary forms of therapy, which included herbalism in its programme (The Natal Witness, 9 October 1991).

In July 1993, the Government finally began to pay heed to the traditional healers’ pleas for recognition and started preparations for a new draft bill on the subject of traditional healing. But they were hindered by communication problems, as it was difficult to locate a

representative body amongst the hundreds of associations involved in the trade. This marked the inception of a new approach from the National Department of Health (Daily News, 22 July 1993).

In the late 1980s, multinational pharmaceutical companies began to arrive in South Africa to exploit the knowledge of indigenous communities in their bid to short-cut expensive research. According to the director of a natural resource management programme at the Land and Policy Centre (LAPC) in Johannesburg, the current value of medicinal products derived through leads given by traditional doctors was valued world-wide to be about US\$43 billion. Most universities also started their own units for research into the uses of traditional medicine, the Centre for Indigenous Plant Use Research (CIPUR) at the University of Natal being one of many. There were plans underway to design regulations and a statutory framework to ensure the ethical use of the country's plants and wildlife (Weekly Mail & Guardian, 4 and 31 August 1995; Daily News, 21 August 1995; Sunday Tribune, 8 October 1995).

In 1997, the Medical Research Council funded a research programme at the Department of Pharmacology at the University of Western Cape which was to test the effects of traditional medicine (Electronic Mail & Guardian 5 March 1998).

### *Conservationists and the Muthi Trade*

The *muthi* trade has long been targeted for its over-exploitation of rare indigenous animal and plant species. These species vary greatly in their geographical distribution, growth rate, growth form, and population biology. Many of the plant species involved in the trade are particularly vulnerable to over-exploitation due to their popularity, limited distribution, slow

growth rate, low population density and sensitivity to root or bark removal. Their availability has also been affected by a dramatic decrease in areas of indigenous vegetation containing medicinal plants (Cunningham 1992; INR 1988, 1996, 1998; FAO 1998).

One of the first to point to the environmental problems of the *muthi* trade was Father Jacob Gerstner, a priest and botanist (Gerstner 1946). In an article on 'factors affecting our indigenous silva', Gerstner expressed his concern about the effect of *muthi* trade on the wild population of rare species. A stationmaster at Hluhluwe told him that sometimes 40-50 bags of *muthi* were railed into Durban on a single day. Gerstner complained that the magistrates who issued licenses were unaware of the damage these traders did to the woody flora. He also complained about the forest preservation policies, which he saw as merely protracting and not preventing the lamentable process of extinction. The solution he suggested was mass cultivation of *muthi* plants (Gerstner 1946).

The Natal Parks Board have been involved in the issue of *muthi* trading since its foundation in 1947. But it was only after the Nature Conservation Ordinance No. 15 of 1974 (Chapter 11), which made it illegal to gather or trade indigenous plants without a permit from the Natal Parks Board, that they started confiscating goods and prosecuting traders and gatherers. The relationship between conservationists and *muthi* traders has been tense up until the present. Conservationist bodies (The Natal Parks Board) have been the most important outside actors to influence the trade. They lobbied for strict legislation governing the gathering of herbal and animal *muthis*, and were later given the authority to implement these laws. This resulted in numerous raids and prosecutions of *muthi* traders and gatherers. Traders argue that it is the Natal Parks Board and other environmental groups who have been the most powerful and oppressive outside body. The following section will briefly describe the change in attitude

towards the *muthi* trade by conservationists. This will be done in the same way as in the previous section, by using assorted newspaper clippings.

The mid-1970s saw the first of a number of newspaper reports of clamp-downs by the Natal Parks Board on the illegal trading of indigenous plants and wild game. These newspaper reports were supportive of the Parks Board and capture the general mood of the media, who portrayed the women gathering *muthi* as 'muti thieves' (sic).

In June 1976, about 100 bags were confiscated by the police in a raid (The Natal Mercury, 22 June 1976). Later that same year, a herbalist was fined R100 for trading in protected species without a permit. A ranger from the Natal Parks Board had inspected the shop in Durban, and found the owner to be without the necessary licences (Daily News, 18 August 1976). In June 1979, the Natal Parks Board raided the area around the old Indian Market (where the *muthi* market is today), netted seven tons of *muthi* and arrested 73 collectors (70 women and three men). The *muthi*, which was loaded on two large trucks, was valued at more than R3 000 and was to be sold to the Indian *muthi* shops in the city. None of the arrested women had the necessary licenses to collect the *muthi*. Mr Colin Hugo, Natal Parks Board investigator, told the Daily News that 'a thriving black market existed and the countryside was being stripped bare'. He said that there were about 60 licensed herbalists in Durban. The sacks were sold by the collectors for between R4 and R6 to the shop owners, who would then sell them in small packets for 20c each (Daily News, 29 June 1979; The Natal Mercury, 30 June 1979).

In 1981 there were numerous reports of Natal Parks Board raids on *muthi* collectors who were on their way into Durban. The fines were high, ranging from R80 to R500. A driver of a vehicle was fined R500 (or six months imprisonment) for conveying and assisting in the

gathering of protected plants. The 20 women who accompanied him were also arrested (Daily News, 24 March 1981). In another case, 57 women were fined between R80 and R120 for gathering *muthi*. They were caught in a raid at the *muthi* market in Isipingo (Ezimbuzini), where over 100 other people were netted (Daily News, 24 March 1981).<sup>30</sup> There were other cases reported that year, and over 250 *muthi* gatherers were fined during that period according to Durban newspaper articles that I have come across. Other cases must have occurred which were not reported in these newspapers.

The year 1984 saw the start of the Silverglen *muthi* project, which marked a new approach towards the *muthi* trade. The project, which aimed at helping traders cultivate their own *muthi*, was initiated by Geoff Nichols with support from the Natal Parks Board, the KwaZulu Bureau of Natural Resources and the City Parks Department. The Silverglen Nursery was started in the Silverglen Nature Reserve near Umlazi south of Durban. This was the first constructive approach from conservationist bodies towards the environmental problems of the *muthi* trade.

Also in 1984, Ian MacDonald, an ornithologist from the University of Cape Town, argued that:

... the only solution to this [conservation] problem lies in replacing traditional African magico-medical practices with those of modern scientific medicine. It is not even as though you would be harming the people currently resorting to these practices: I know of no instance where traditional African remedies have been shown to be better than modern medicine. In fact there is an ever-growing body of information indicating that most of these remedies are useless and some are definitely deleterious to the treated patient. (MacDonald 1984, 9)

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<sup>30</sup> These clippings are from the same sheet of paper in the 'herbalists' file at the Natal Newspaper's archive. Only one of them is dated (24 March 1981).

In 1985 came the first conservation study of the *muthi* trade, which was conducted by Isolde Mellet at the Centre for Rehabilitation of Wildlife. Her study showed that in one area in Umlazi alone (Ezimbuzini), an estimated 1 000 tons of *muthi* were sold per year by about 100 traders. She found that an average of 600 bags were brought into the market, or seven bags each weighing 30 kg (210 kg per trader, or 21 000 a week). She also pointed out that there were at least seven other trading outlets for *muthi* in the Durban area. She proposed that a large-scale nursery project should be put into operation as soon as possible (Natal Mercury, 21 May 1985).

At an Environmental Affairs and Tourism debate in June 1986, it was noted that moves by forestry authorities to curb the *muthi* trade could cost more than 40 000 people their income as *muthi* gatherers and traders. It was reported that in Natal there were 110 Indian herbalists (*muthi* shop owners), and more than 1 000 *inyangas* were members of the Inyanga Association. In addition, over 3 000 people earned their income through collecting *muthi* in Northern Natal and the South Coast (The Natal Mercury, 1 June 1986).

In 1991, the Sunday Times ran a story on the Russell Street *muthi* market with the headline: '*The Greens cry over rare plants-for-muti harvest*'. The collection of the *muthi* plants was still illegal, but offenders were no longer prosecuted, the report claimed. Past attempts to police the trade had failed, and concern was expressed that any attempt to clamp down on the trade would drive it underground rather than stopping it. Conservationists wanted instead to try to encourage people to grow what they needed, and new *muthi* nurseries had been opened throughout the region (Sunday Times, 11 October 1991).

At a conference in Magaliesberg, delegates advocated 'effective and feasible management strategies for the utilisation of wild plants which should lead to generation of work for the



rural poor, not their marginalisation'; in other words, a complete about-turn. Conservation bodies would now start working *with* resource users, instead of against them (Sunday Tribune, 24 January 1992).

In 1996, the Institute of Natural Resources (INR) initiated an extensive study into the *muthi* trade in Durban. A preliminary report was done for the Informal Trading and Small Business Opportunities Department on the Russell Street and Ezimbuzini *muthi* markets. The report was used in the development project of building a new *muthi* market in Russell Street (see Chapters 3 and 4). That same year, the Natal Parks Board formed a Resource Utilisation Division that would help provide the *muthi* markets with legal animal parts. Traditional healers had trained Natal Parks Board staff in traditional culling methods for animals used for medicine; what to do when the animal is killed, what parts they needed, and how to harvest them. However, the Natal Parks Board did not seem to have proper structures to deal with the ways in which the products would be distributed and marketed (The Natal Witness, 15 July 1996).

In 1997, the provincial minister of Traditional and Environmental Affairs stated that the *muthi* trade in KwaZulu-Natal was worth R61 million a year, and that the total market in the country was worth R1,2 billion a year. He announced that a Traditional Healers Liaison Committee had been established in the province to help establish a nursery system (Daily News & The Natal Witness, 14 May 1997). At the Convention on Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) summit in Harare (1997), a new accord between traditional healers and conservationists was hammered out. Hundreds of Western conservationists adopted a new co-operative approach to the practices of traditional medicine in Africa and Asia (Mail & Guardian, 18 June 1997).

### *Witchcraft, Violence and the Muthi Trade*

The history of the *muthi* trade is not only related to the processes of capitalism, urbanisation, and the growth of the informal sector. The demand for *muthi* has always been closely linked with social and political issues in the form of unemployment, crime, violence, war, and witchcraft. Many traders and healers have attributed the recent growth in the demand for *muthi* directly to the increase in violence and crime and 'the war' between Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) and African National Congress (ANC).

In March 1990, the Natal Witness ran a story under the heading: '*The mighty muti spawns a booming business*' (The Natal Witness, 20 March 1990). The article claims that the 'warriors in Natal's civil war' had turned the *muthi* trade into big - but risky - business, as no fighter from either side would neglect to visit an *inyanga* prior to battle for *muthi*. It was reported that in some areas, a community would be taxed to pay for the *muthi* given to local soldiers. In one case, it was R10 a household, in another, each adult man was charged R30 and each women R20. The exact content of the medicine was not readily revealed, but often contained bark and the fat or bone of an animal whose characteristic the client wished to share. For example, a python is believed to be unidentifiable to its prey in the forest, so if a fighter wanted to take on these properties, he would use a *muthi* mixture containing python fat. Sometimes, the *muthi* would be in the form of a liquid which is sprinkled over the warrior, or drunk, or rubbed into cuts made on the body by a razor blade. If you paid enough, and went to the right *inyanga*, you could get *muthi* that could deflect bullets. Some of the leaders, especially within the IFP were credited with particularly strong magical powers as a result of good *inyangas*. The Natal Witness cited a story about an IFP leader who was in hospital after one of his sons had recently been killed. Two comrades decided to visit him disguised as IFP

members, pretending to pay their condolences over his son's death. When they approached him, he suddenly turned into a tree. The Comrades then went out of the room to confer, and decided to trade on the leader's known greed. They went back into the room and offered the tree money as a symbol of their sympathy. When the leader saw the money, he changed back into a human to take the money. The Comrades were thus able to shoot him, although not fatally. The same leader was also credited with 'bi-location' (sic) and an ability to change his appearance and voice (The Natal Witness, 20 March 1990). *Muthi*, the newspaper report continues, can also protect against arrest and conviction, and weapons could be made more effective by being treated by an *inyanga*. All this costs money, but is considered an essential part of the armoury of a warrior. However, it involves a great risk for the *inyangas*, and several have become casualties of the fighting because of their skills, or because they were suspected of going too far and using 'witchcraft' in favour of the other side. The violence also supplies the *muthi* markets with human parts, which are seen as particularly powerful and expensive *muthi*, especially if removed before the person dies (The Natal Witness, 20 March 1990).

The growth of black businesses in South Africa has reinforced the *muthi* trade as new entrepreneurs and executives resort to tradition to protect their businesses, their cars, taxis, and homes from misfortune. The Electronic Mail & Guardian give an overview of the fees of some of the most popular cures today:

- Strengthening a home: R400-1 000 a year
- Curing *mafunfunyani* (mental illness): R700 to R1 000.
- Muti for enlarging penises: R450.
- Muti for bringing financial success: R350.
- Muti for attracting women: R450.
- Powerful animal fats, bones or skins: R950.
- Cure for pubic lice: R200.

- Strengthening a Golf: R700; BMW: R1 000; Mercedes R1 150; minibus taxi: R1 250.  
(Electronic Mail & Guardian 24 June 1998)

In Durban, these prices vary greatly from healer to healer. Depending on the area and size of the house, I heard of prices ranging from R500 to R4 000 for protecting a house against bad luck. One *sangoma* told me that she did not set the price, but that it was revealed to her via her ancestors. Others said that they charged according to the client's wealth. In 1996, just before the local government elections, when the situation was very tense in KwaZulu-Natal, some of the traders in Russell Street were confident that their side – i.e. IFP – would win the election, and even a war, should that be necessary. The reason was simply that they had the control over the supply of *muthi*. In July 1996, 50 *inyangas* from across KwaZulu-Natal introduced a peace medicine (*Uhlambo*), which was to replace the war medicines used in the violence over the last 10-15 years (Weekly Mail & Guardian, 26 July 1996). 'People on the ground' had told peace monitors that the *inyangas* were the only people who could stop the violence, since they were the custodians of the traditions and ethics of their communities. The *inyangas* claimed that traditional cleansing ceremonies and the slaughtering of animals had to be revived to appease the ancestors, and that this would end the cycle of violence. The exact formula and price of the *muthi* was not yet identified. As one *inyanga* said, 'The killing of people is the end of our jobs. We get money from curing people, but if they die we get nothing' (Weekly Mail & Guardian, 26 July 1996).

### ***Deregulation of Street Trading in the 1980s***

The deregulation of street trading in the 1980s had a profound impact on the *muthi* trade in that it opened up, or facilitated, the re-establishment of *muthi* trading - albeit in a new form - in the streets of Durban. It changed the 'traditional' specialist *muthi* trade into a popular and

female based street trade enterprise. In the early 1980s, the Durban local authorities started to reconceptualise street trading. This was partly due to changing sentiments at a national level, where focus shifted towards acceptance, encouragement and upgrading, resulting in the formation of the Small Business Development Corporation and Urban Foundation. But more importantly, as a result of the growing mass defiance by street traders, the city accrued increasing costs for policing the small enclaves of street trade that had began emerging in the Warwick Avenue area. The liberal regime of Progressive Federal Party (PFP) City Councillors and a new generation city planners were slowly coming to the realisation that law enforcement was increasingly impossible, and they started to concede the economic immorality and dysfunctionality of existing legislation. The combined effects of massive urbanisation due to the collapse of apartheid influx control measures in 1986, escalating urban unemployment, organised mass resistance and strong international pressure, as well as the general international move towards economic liberalisation and increasing international focus on the informal sector and its potential contribution to solving problems of unemployment and poverty, all led the process towards deregulation and formalisation of street trading.

These developments resulted in the launch of two studies into street trading in Durban: the Market Survey in 1983 and the Hawker Report in 1984 (City Engineer's Department, 1983, 1984b). These reports, which studied the street market system, its extent, location, and policy options, marked a watershed in official policy towards street trading in Durban and later, in other South African cities. The reports concluded that the illegal status of the street trader had to be re-evaluated. The two documents were relatively well received and the necessity for this form of trade was later recognised in principle by the City Council. In 1985, a sub-committee was established to find practical ways of implementing more favourable policies towards street traders. In addition to the institution of designated trading areas, a more lenient

policing approach was adopted. Another outcome of the report was the introduction of a new vending license to replace the archaic hawker license. This move created a simpler and more appropriate set of licensing requirements (Rogerson 1989; Naidoo 1993). Three years after Durban's reconceptualisation of street trading came the 1987 White Paper on Privatisation and Deregulation. This central state policy document saw the imperative for encouraging entrepreneurship and stressed that the approach to regulation should emphasise the promotion of economic activity and be less directed towards its control. Although Durban's approach towards street trading in principle was in line with this deregulation move, officials in Durban were still struggling to find practical ways of putting these principles into action.

The policy of non-prosecution towards the end of the 1980s contributed to a dramatic increase in street trading in Durban, which had the positive effect of creating much needed employment, but also gave rise to a number of problems. The deregulation process resulted in problems of co-operation between traders and the authorities, as street traders were uncertain of their rights. It also meant that city officials were unable to respond to problems and complaints - which again resulted in public perceptions of lack of interest or initiative on the part of the City Council. An increasing number of complaints came from the media and commuters, ratepayers and residents associations about the growing 'problem of street trading'. Ironically, this relative lack of official regulation and control also brought in new problems for the street traders. New sorts of informal control mechanisms came to fill the void, including arbitrary 'take-overs' of trading areas with extortion of 'rent', informal supply cartels with their own means of controlling prices, and protection rackets and mafias. This mainly affected female traders and those with the least resources and weakest networks. The opening up of informal trading also introduced new conflicts between traders, often based on

race (Indian vs African vs whites), or stemming from newcomers who had no respect for, or knowledge of, the existing 'informal' rules governing the organisation of street trade.

When the Hawker report was drafted in 1984, there were approximately 200 traders in the entire Central Business District (City Engineer's Department 1984b). Counts done in September 1988 revealed that there were approximately 600 traders in the Warwick Avenue area alone, which had increased to approximately 700 in February 1989, and 800 in June 1990 (City Engineer's Department 1989, 5; 1990, 70).

### *The Street Trading Boom in the 1990s*

The re-establishment of the *muthi* trade in Durban, and the establishment of the Russell Street *muthi* market (which will be dealt with in Chapter 3), was closely linked to other developments in Durban. The 1990s saw a boom in street trading in Durban, with the numbers of street traders reaching a formidable 19 800 in 1997 (Markewicz Report 1997 in the Daily News 21 August 1997). The lenient policies formulated in the mid-1980s were seen as one of the reasons for this growth. Other important factors were natural disasters (two floods and a severe drought) and the widespread political violence that dominated the province in the 1980s and 1990s, which drove people from their rural homes and into Durban. Not only did these developments result in an explosive change in the volume of street trade, but they also led to an important shift in the form and structure of street trading. The burgeoning informal street trading sector in Durban is today a predominantly female-driven economic sector. Estimated mean for all sectors and trading areas of Durban's street trade economy show a 60:40 percent split between female and male traders (Economic Development Department 1998, 8). In the case of the *muthi* trade, which is one of the largest

and most profitable sectors, approximately 80% of the traders are women (INR 1996). I have argued elsewhere that instead of focusing entirely on the problems facing marginal women *placed* in the informal sector, one should not exclude the possibility that these defiant and determined women may have *conquered* the streets (Nesvåg 2000a, 2000b). In a situation of growing formal unemployment due to global recession in the late 1990s, the informal sector, and especially street trading in *muthi*, has proven a successful route to accumulation.

Although at times minimal and often highly fluctuant, this new income has already altered the position of women in the household and in society in general (Moser 1989; Tripp 1997).

In 1991, the Business Act (No. 71 of 1991) regarding the licensing and conducting of businesses was passed by Central government. The Act introduced a new dispensation for street trading, restricting the powers to pass regulations or bylaws that prohibited street vending. Durban local authorities were dissatisfied with certain definitions and provisions of the Act, as they wanted greater control of street trading. For example, the Act did not authorise Durban's 'immune zones'. During the following years, Durban officials worked hard to amend sections of the Business Act, as it took away their legislative means to regulate street trading. A unique situation occurred where a degree of anarchy in Durban's streets prevailed for three years (between 1993 and 1996), which also saw a massive increase in street trading. The informal management problems faced by street traders in the late 1980s were intensified.

The early 1990s were dominated by the lack of state legitimacy and an unstable political climate due to the negotiations leading up to the democratic elections in 1994. Being in international focus, white administrators were increasingly bound by an emerging 'political correctness' that focused on human rights and democracy and which made it practically



impossible to attempt to clamp down on informal trading. These factors, combined with the Business Act's deregulation policy, forced the Durban authorities to sit down and formulate new street trading bylaws, and this turned out to be a slow and complex process. The Informal Trading and Small Business Opportunities Department (Informal Trade Department) was established in 1993 to help address the growing problem of street trading and the lack of functional legislation, as well as to negotiate with street traders - who by now had organised themselves into various bodies, all claiming representation in the process. Not all of these organisations were taken seriously, as some of their leaders operated more in self-interest than common interest. There were, however, a few exceptions to this trend. Most important of these, was the formation of the Self-Employed Women's Union (SEWU) in 1994 (see Chapter 4).

After amendments to the Business Act in 1993, which conceded some powers back to local authorities, new street trading bylaws were finalised in September 1995 and implemented in January 1996. Street trading now became restricted to demarcated sites within two main areas: the Central Business District core and the Beachfront. Traders were now restricted to operate between 06h00 and 00h00 only; overnight sleeping at the place of trade was forbidden; the erection of any structures was prohibited; and certain health and hygiene provisions were laid out (Municipal Notice 96 of 1995). As will be shown in Chapter 4, the new street trading by-laws were met with strong opposition from street traders and their organisations.

Throughout 1997 and 1998, Durban officials have continued this drive to gain control over the growth of street trading. In an attempt to regulate the trade, and to 'inculcate a culture of payment', a monthly trading site rental fee was introduced in January 1998 (R10 for those

without shelter; R35 for those with shelter). The generated revenue was to go towards a special fund, which in the words of a Councillor would 'bring us some money, and will pay for the control measures, such as security for street traders' (in Daily News 24 September 1997). The new policy in this regard has worrying similarities with the oppressive and notorious 'Durban System' initiated some 80 years earlier. Perhaps not surprisingly, the response has been similarly recognisable, taking a typically anti-apartheid form of non-compliance and defiance, which has to a certain degree rendered these measures unsuccessful. Towards the end of 1997, City Councillors moved to enforce street trading legislation and were once again forced to apply for either an amendment to or the repealing of the National Business Act. According to a recent report, Durban's 20 000 street traders earn between R200 and R1 000 per month, totalling a monthly earning power of over R3,8 million (Markewicz English & Associates 1997 in Daily News 21 August 1997).

### *New Trends in the Muthi Trade*

Aside from the development of mass street trading of *muthi*, which will be dealt with in Chapter 4, there were some other important changes in the Durban *muthi* trade in the 1990s. Chief among these was perhaps the introduction of traditional hospitals in 1996. Today there are five such hospitals operating in Durban (1998). Running these hospitals is difficult as many patients fail to pay up, but they are still very lucrative enterprises and can generate a turnover of between R1 200 and R5 000 per day.<sup>31</sup> Another important development has been increased recognition for traditional healing practices, which has led to medical aid schemes which include the services and costs of traditional healing services and medicines.

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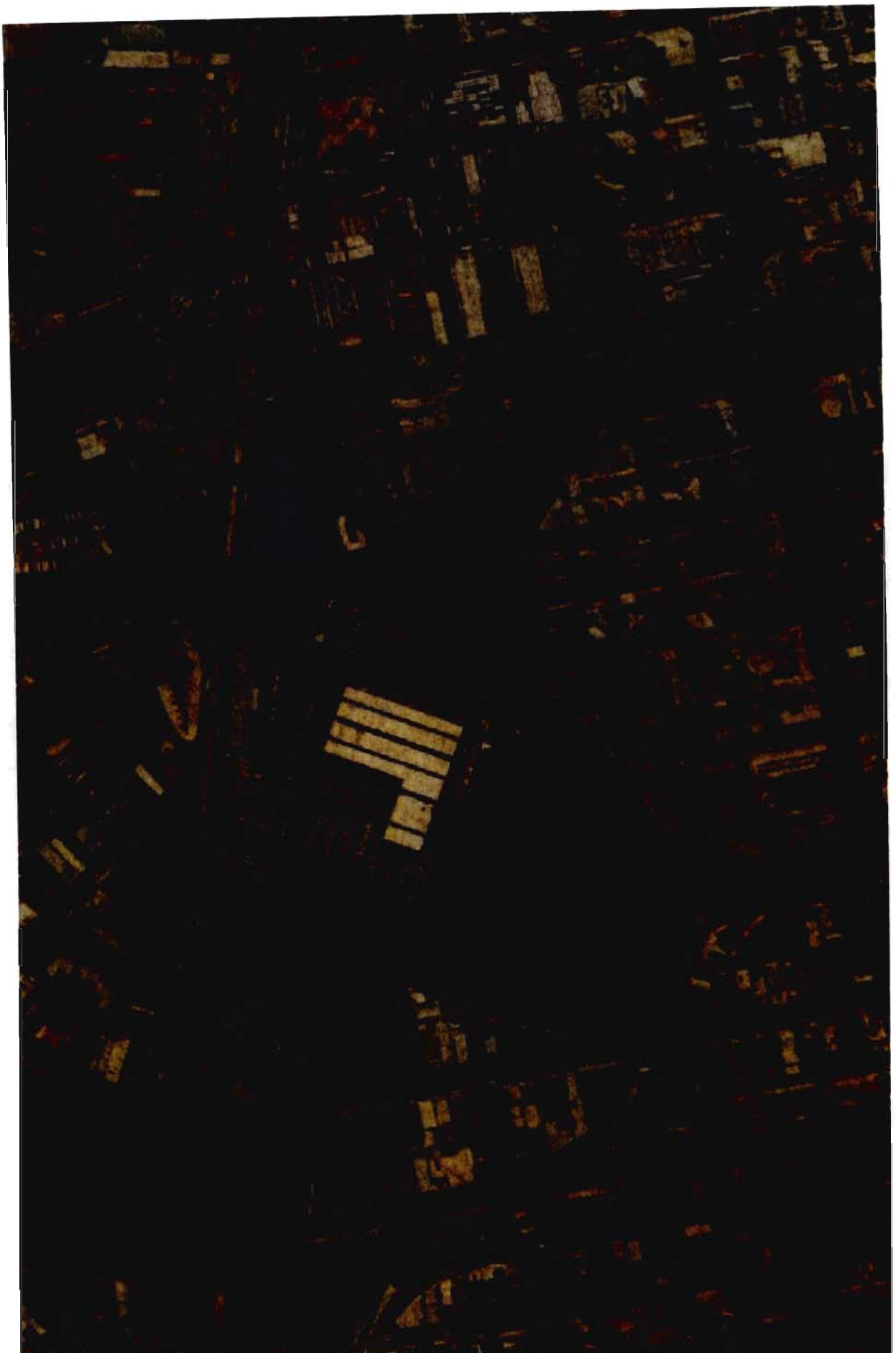
<sup>31</sup> Interview with T. Hlope and P. Gwala at Sunrise Traditional Hospital in Berea Road, 12 September 1997.

In 1992 came the first moves by trade unions to include African medicine and healing into medical aid schemes (Sunday Tribune, 2 February 1992). Medical aid schemes had for a long time been trying to include traditional healing as part of their services for their customers, but there was a need for proper registration and regulation to maintain certain standards in the industry before it was possible (The Natal Witness, 13 February, 20 March 1996; The Argus, 6 May 1996). In June 1996, the City Press reported that '*sangomas now have the same status as medical doctors*', following the launch of an innovative new medical aid package by *Medimo* and *Thamba* (City Press, 23 June 1996). In 1997, Eskom's 40 000 employees were given the chance to choose between traditional healers and medical doctors on the company's medical aid schemes, and other big companies (Telkom, Post Office etc.) were considering adopting the same scheme (Daily News, 14 January 1997). The use of medical aids by black members has tended to be low as they used on average only 54% of the money they paid into the funds. This was far less than other race groups, according to the regional manager of the Medical Aid Advisory Services (The Natal Mercury, 20 January 1997). All in all, the combined results of these developments has been an increase in the demand for *muthi*.

### **THE "D'URBANISATION" OF MUTHI TRADING: A SUMMARY**

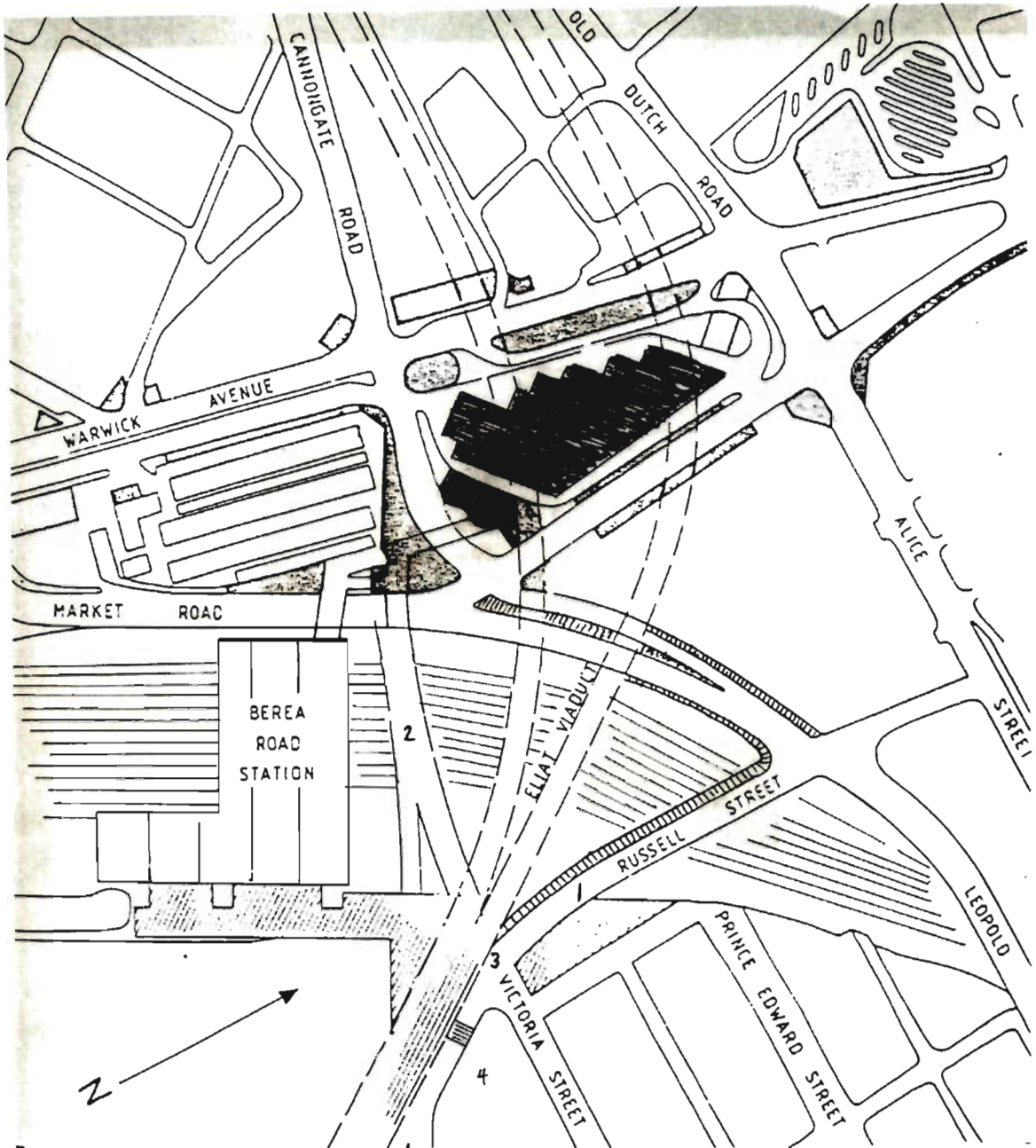
This chapter has tried to describe how the *muthi* trade has developed since it was introduced into Durban. In order to show how it changed from the idea of an 'original tradition', I included a section, tentative and incomplete as it is, on the pre-"D'Urbanised" *muthi* trade. The main changes in the "D'Urbanisation" process, in chronological order, are: the establishment of the trade in Durban (around 1900); increasing commercialisation and professionalisation (1920s and 1930s), the forcing of the trade underground and its take-over by Indian entrepreneurs (1940s); and the massification of the trade as it gradually re-emerged

on the streets and was taken over by women traders (late 1980s and 1990s). The most recent developments have been the introduction of traditional hospitals and the inclusion of traditional medicine into medical aid schemes (1990s). What is apparent, despite assumptions to the contrary, is that the *muthi* trade has been on the increase throughout the course of the twentieth century. One of the reasons for this growth is that *muthi* is becoming more easily available to people through the growing network of informal outlets. This chapter has attempted to show that the *muthi* trade has developed as a result of a dialectic between 'restructuring' from within and 'development' from above. The next chapter will deal with possibly the most important centre for the Southern African trade - the Russell Street *muthi* market.



Aerial photograph of the Warwick Avenue market area. The Russell Street *Muthi* Market is situated on the bridges stretching over the Berea Road Train Station in the centre of the photograph (courtesy of Economic Development Department, Durban Metropolitan Council).

## Map of the Warwick Avenue Informal Market Area



1: The pavement market on the Russell Street Bridge where the *muthi* market has been situated since 1990. 2: The site of the newly added market (since July 1998). 3: Under the Eilat Viaduct – a popular trading site for many years. 4: The Victoria Street Market. This is where the Ematsheni Beerhall and Native Market was situated, and where *muthi* traders started trading around 1900.

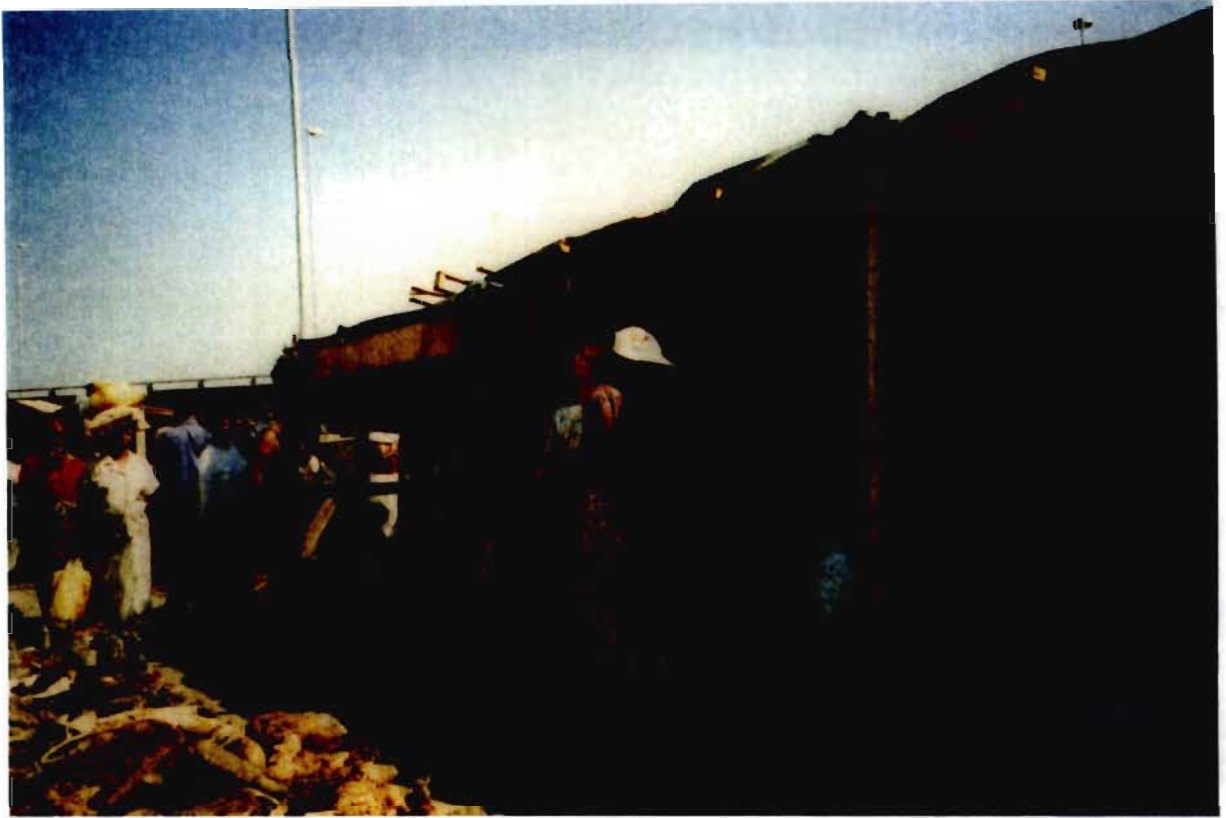
Photographs from the Russell Street *Muthi* Market 1995-1998



1: Customers buying herbal *muthi* (1995).



2: Assorted animal *muthi*.



3: Traders erected their own shelters to protect the *muthi* from the weather (August 1995).



4: The SEWU branch leader, Madlamini Khumalo (standing), talking to traders before the police raid (3 a.m., 30 September 1996).





5: Madlamini Khumalo talking to the police before they start their *clean-up* operation.



6: View of the Russell Street *Muthi* Market from under the Eilat Viaduct. The market started at the bottom under the viaducts in 1990, and gradually mushroomed over the bridge and down Leopold Street. The photograph is taken in 1997 before the new market was built.



7: The new market facilities were ready in July 1998. In Russell Street this meant the erection of proper shelters.



8: The upgraded pavement market on Russell Street Bridge was supplemented with new facilities on the two unfinished bridges stretching over the Berea Road Train Station.

## **Chapter 4: Economic Change, Power and Gender in the Russell Street *Muthi* Market, 1990-1998**

The Russell Street *muthi* market has, since its inception in 1990, gone through various changes. From being a small market operated by a dozen traders, it soon mushroomed into a bustling street market with over 400 stalls. Today, the *muthi* market has been developed and formalised by the City Council, who has recently provided the Russell Street traders with Durban's finest street market facilities. This chapter will describe the work and life of the traders in Russell Street as viewed by me during my fieldwork conducted on and off between May 1995 and July 1998. I will first try to present some of the general supply and demand characteristics of the market and then sketch a brief and general history of what remained the most important political issue for the *muthi* traders throughout the period: the demand for the development of a new *muthi* market. The analysis of the processes which led to the opening of the new Russell Street *muthi* market in October 1998, offers some illuminating insights into the themes of power and gender in Russell Street.

### **THE RUSSELL STREET *MUTHI* MARKET**

The pavement of the northern end of Russell Street, from the Victoria Market over the Russell Street Bridge and around the corner down Leopold Street, has since early 1990 been the main *muthi* market area in Durban (see photographs and map pp 116-121).<sup>32</sup> Up until early 1998, the *muthi* market was an informal pavement market, with rudimentary and improvised shops

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<sup>32</sup> Up until 1990, the Ezimbuzini market in Umlazi was the main market place for *muthi* in Durban. It has never been as big as the market in Russell Street, with only approximately 100 stores compared to Russell Street's 400. In 1996, the Ezimbuzini market had an estimated annual turnover of R288 000 compared to Russell Street's R1 584 000 (INR 1996, 7).

and shelter (see photograph on cover page). Today, the pavement market has been upgraded with proper shelters and is adjoined by a new market complex (see photographs p. 121). The Russell Street *muthi* market is regarded as the most important centre of the Southern African regional trade in *muthi*.

The Russell Street *muthi* market is part of a larger informal market area in central Durban, the Warwick Avenue Triangle. Durban's main bus and taxi rank, plus the Berea train station, forms the setting in which the market is situated. The area constitutes the main gateway to and from the city for Africans and Indians using public transport. It is roughly estimated that 170 000 people pass through the area daily.<sup>33</sup> The surroundings are not very typical of, or conducive to, a market place. The market is situated in a highly polluted 'traffic-machine', consisting of a grid of highways and bridges forming one of Durban's main traffic outlets.

The stalls display a wide diversity of *muthi*, ranging from drying skins and carcasses of various animals and reptiles, a variety of dead birds, gaping shark jaws, lions' teeth and monkey paws, to hundreds of plastic bags ('*checkaz*'- 'Checkers')<sup>34</sup> filled with different herbs, pieces of stripped bark, roots and soil. Behind the neatly stacked piles of produce, sit the women on whom this study is based, some with their children sleeping in their laps, chatting with customers, passers-by and neighbouring sellers. While the pavements are dominated by Africans, the motorised traffic rushing by is more mixed. Windows are rolled up, and the speed is high. Warwick Avenue is the stereotyped 'Africa', placed between the skyscrapers of the modern city and the surrounding low-density sprawl of suburbs and parks. It is the site of the 'de-urbanising' tradition of *muthi* trading.

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<sup>33</sup> Interview with Dean Botha, Director of Informal Trade Department, 8 March 1996.

<sup>34</sup> 'Checkers' is a supermarket chain brand name.

### *Supply Characteristics*

Aside from being one of the largest and most visible sectors of the street market economy in Durban today, the *muthi* market also has a high proportion of women (constituting approximately 80% of the traders). According to a recent report from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO 1998), the *muthi* trade generates some 14 000 jobs in Durban. The Russell Street market alone generates between 600 and 1 000 jobs, including the actual traders, their assistants and gatherers (INR 1996). Furthermore, the FAO report estimates that 1 500 tonnes of plant material are traded in Russell Street annually, with a value of R21 million (the raw unprocessed products) (FAO 1998). These products have added value when prescribed by healers, and the report has estimated that in Durban alone, some 4 million products are dispensed annually, adding R152 million to the R21 million traded in raw products (FAO 1998). In 1996, there were approximately 400 retail stores in the *muthi* market, with an estimated 200-300 traders active at any one time. Currently (1999), there are 400 stalls with at least one trader at each outlet.

The Russell Street *muthi* market focuses mainly on the sale of plant and animal products used in the preparation of traditional medicine, but many traders can also perform various healing services (both divination and the treating of ailments). The *muthi* is sold to passers-by, to Indian *muthi* shop owners, to practising specialists (*inyangas* and *sangomas*), and to the newly established hospitals for traditional medicine. Some of the goods are sold unprocessed (whole live plants or dead carcasses), while the bulk of them are more or less processed by being chopped up, powdered, dissected, or bottled in certain mixtures. In Russell Street, 88 species of plants and 58 animal species are traded, with plant products being the most popular

(INR 1996). The total mass of plant products stored at any given time in Russell Street has been estimated to be 13,5 tonnes, while between 10-15 tonnes are traded weekly (INR 1996).

The *muthi* is harvested from wild populations within South Africa, and from neighbouring countries such as Swaziland, Lesotho, Mozambique and Namibia (FAO 1998). It is gathered from a wide range of habitats situated mainly on communal land, but also from commercial farms, forestry areas, and in protected areas. As the areas close to Durban are depleted of *muthi*, gatherers are forced to travel longer distances to find *muthi*. Increasingly, gatherers are forced to travel to neighbouring countries to find sufficient stock of the most popular species.<sup>35</sup> There is only limited cultivation of *muthi* plants, which has been initiated by the Institute of Natural Resources and the *Silverglen Muthi Nursery*. Some of the *muthi* is imported from neighbouring countries, mostly on an informal basis. This is done through the existing structures and routes of migration in the region, which allow for a complex and far-reaching network of market information and transportation systems. Some types of medicine sold in Russell Street are only available in other countries and are brought into Durban through this type of organisation. Recent contributions to informal supply routes are Mozambican sailors, who sail between Maputo and Durban and who transport and sell *muthi* to Russell Street as an extra job.

Since the Indians actively joined the trade in the 1940s, a range of traditional Indian herbs and medicines have also formed part of the 'African' 'traditional' medicine. These are imported on a formal basis by Indian shop-owners and then find their way to Russell Street. Another popular product in Russell Street is concentrated mercury (*izigidi*) sold in bottles, which comes from the chemical factories around Durban.

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<sup>35</sup> The FAO report estimates that 66% of the most popular medicinal plants in their study are now being harvested in either Swaziland and/or Mozambique and then transported to Russell Street (FAO 1998, 38).

In general, rural women constitute the main supply function of *muthi* plants for Durban's *muthi* market. They gather from the wild and transport these plants into Durban on a regular basis. These women often lack a specialist knowledge of *muthi* plants, and gather whatever they are asked to, or concentrate on the most popular or common species. Some specialise in certain *muthi* to which or about which they have privileged access or knowledge, while the majority keep to the more common and low-priced varieties. The gatherer's modus operandi varies greatly according to seasonal changes, to availability of *muthi*, to whether the transportation is successful (no prosecution) and to the demands of household life and its duties. Most of the gatherers have regular buyers who place orders, which enables the former to spend as little time as possible in Durban. Most of the gatherers operate by themselves, only receiving limited help from husbands or children. The work is strenuous, and involves stripping bark with an axe or machete, digging up bulbs and roots, and carrying it all back to the homestead. Here the bark is dried to make it lighter, and then packed into huge plastic/nylon bags. Buyers (traders) in Russell Street prefer to purchase unprocessed *muthi* so that they can see the quality themselves, and also because it is cheaper. They will then chop it up into small pieces during the mid-day break, when business is quiet. The Institute of Natural Resources has estimated that there are approximately 8 000 gatherers supplying the total market in Durban<sup>36</sup> (FAO 1998, 49).

Although individual rural women dominate the supply function of the trade, there are also other organisational sources for supplying *muthi*. Especially at the beginning of the 1990s, *muthi* traders in Russell Street collected their own *muthi*, or had a partner or husband who collected for them. But in 1992 and 1993, the trading spaces became so sought after, that to

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<sup>36</sup> Including all shops, practices, the Russell Street market, and the smaller market in Umlazi (Ezimbuzini).

leave them unattended could lead to someone taking over the space. Another reason for the increasing purchase from rural gatherers has been the growth in trade, which means that traders would lose more income if they left their shops temporarily. Alternatively, traders may pool resources and arrange for some to head up to the old market places in northern KwaZulu-Natal, such as the Imona market north of Nongoma. Here, they buy large stocks of *muthi* and transport it down to Durban. A last solution used by mostly affluent traders and practitioners, is to employ own full-time gatherers, who often use their own trucks or 'bakkies'.

In general, there is tough competition between the gatherers, which has led to unsustainable resource use. This is also the reason why rural women predominate in this niche: they are so desperate for money that they will sell their produce cheaply. Men do not enter this niche because as one male respondent asserted: 'there is no way of making money because these women sell themselves too cheaply'.<sup>37</sup> Women are not powerful enough to demand valid prices. They are also anxious to get out of Durban as soon as possible. It was said that 'they are weak in the city... they don't know how to do business'.<sup>38</sup> This is partly the reason why animal products are generally more expensive than plant *muthi*: men generally supply animals, while women deal in plant products. Men are seen as more fit to collect animal *muthi* as it takes courage and skill to kill animals. In addition, gathering animal *muthi* more often involves breaking the law. Thus, in the Russell Street market, the few men who trade have specialised in animal *muthi*. They use a similar argument as for the gatherers - they do not want to compete with female traders, who generally sell their products too cheaply: 'they always push the price down, because they are afraid the customer will go to someone else ...

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<sup>37</sup> Interview with male trader who wished to remain anonymous, 20 July 1998.

<sup>38</sup> Interview with anonymous male trader, 20 July 1998.



they are not tough'.<sup>39</sup> Thus the gender distribution of 80% female traders in Russell Street also relates more or less to the distribution between plant traders and animal traders.

The Russell Street market functions mostly as a retail outlet; selling small volumes to large numbers of people, but there are also some regular customers who buy bulk orders. The trading starts at approximately 08.00 in the morning. Peak trading hours are during the morning and afternoon rush-hours. The trading activity in Russell Street calms down at 5 p.m. in the winter and around 6 p.m. during summer. Some traders work seven days a week, while others take Sunday off. Market intensity is determined by various factors such as climate, holidays and general consumption trends, such as the major pay-days and pension pay-outs. In general, trading activity increases towards the end of the month as people receive their salaries and pensions. The Christmas holidays are the busiest times in Russell Street, and some traders struggle to meet the demand, as they do not have time to ensure a sufficient stock. But these are also strenuous times because of the heat. The new market complex, with proper shelter and access to water, has helped the traders in this regard.

Before the new market was built (up until 1998), the goods were packed under plastic covers over-night, and guarded by the few women who were temporary sojourners in Durban, or did not have a home to go to and were therefore forced to sleep on the pavement. Internal trader networks are complex and intricate, based on a mix of interdependence, mutual trust and competition. These networks are essential for such a market to function. This was especially so during the more oppressive conditions of the past, but also applies today, with the day-to-day challenges of crime, violence, household duties, finance and investment, *muthi* gathering, and finally, the constant battle for political legitimacy voice. Traders often look after their neighbours' store when she/he requests it, knowing that they too will receive help if needed.

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<sup>39</sup> Interview with anonymous male trader, 20 July 1998.

They will sell from their neighbour's stall if a customer stops there, even if they themselves are offering the same *muthi*. Some days, husbands or older children help with the selling, while the women pursue other activities such as shopping.

The prices and profits vary greatly according to the different types of *muthi*. One trader told me that if a sack of unprocessed herbal *muthi* cost R40, she would make approximately R100 in profits.<sup>40</sup> An animal trader who bought animal *muthi* for R500 said that he hoped to make approximately R800 in profit.<sup>41</sup> In general, the profit calculations range from 1,5 to 3,5. In the end, profitability is a function of time and volume.

Street trading, and the informal economy in general, has often been romanticised as operating under a particularly social and communitarian logic or ethos, which has been portrayed as being very different, both morally and functionally, from the modern capitalist mode of production (see Latouche 1993; Tripp 1997). My findings suggest at best a modification of this view, as the Russell Street *muthi* market functions more or less in accordance with the classic capitalist values and the principles of supply and demand, and free competition. This is evident in the pricing system, which reveals that in certain cases, the current demand for *muthi* exceeds the supply. The resource management problems of the *muthi* trade and the consequences for the natural environment have been the focus of recent studies of the trade (INR 1988, 1996, 1998; Cunningham 1992; FAO 1998). The combination of mass demand and unsustainable mass gathering (along with practically no cultivation) has created a biodiversity crisis, with many plant and animal species being threatened by extinction.

Traditional harvesting practices, which were governed by ritual and customary rules, have been discarded for short-term individual profit, despite the risk of prosecution. The

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<sup>40</sup> Interview with anonymous female trader, 22 February 1996.

<sup>41</sup> Interview with anonymous male trader, 20 July 1998.

sustainability of the *muthi* trade is therefore doubtful, a problem which is reflected in the prices in relation to scarcity<sup>42</sup> and which will create significant economic and welfare losses in the future (INR 1996). Traders and gatherers know this, but argue that they need to feed their families; this introduces the endemic problem of survivalism vs the environment and global ecology vs global economy (see Chapter 5).

### *Demand Characteristics*

As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, the main reason why the *muthi* trade constitutes a viable venture is the fact that approximately 80% of the African population in South Africa use traditional medicine, most often in conjunction with some form of biomedicine (INR 1988,1996, 1998; Cunningham 1992; Dauskardt 1994; FAO 1998). The *muthi* market fulfils a need by supplying a diversity of *muthi* which would otherwise be spread over a wide range of natural habitats. With more than half of the province's population concentrated in two urban areas, there is a great demand for a centralised market for traditional medicine products (FAO 1998, 17). The Institute of Natural Resources has estimated the total number of *muthi* users in Durban alone to be around 2 million (84% of Durban's 2,442 million blacks)<sup>43</sup> (FAO 1998, 18). In 1995, it was estimated that 1 500 tons of *muthi* was sold in Russell Street (INR 1996). This figure has probably grown, as traders say that sales have increased since they moved into the new market with more and more people buying *muthi*. The growth of the *muthi* trade in general is due to the combined effects of population growth, increased urbanisation, increased poverty and the liberalisation of laws and regulations. There are also indications of an increase in export to other Southern African

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<sup>42</sup> An examples is *Siphonochilus* (a scarce plant): R82/kg and *Scilla natalensis* (a common plant): R1.60/kg.

<sup>43</sup> This figure may be an exaggeration. According to the Urban Strategy Department 2,2 million people live within the boundaries of the Durban Metropolitan Council (Urban Strategy, 1995: *Settlement Areas and Population Estimates Project*. Durban Metropolitan Council).

countries and to Europe and the United States, as so-called 'alternative' medicines are becoming more mainstream<sup>44</sup> (see Washington Post, 11 November 1998).

The consumers of *muthi* come from a diverse social stratum. As most of the African commuters to the CBD have to pass through the *muthi* market twice a day, the buyers reflect the variety of backgrounds of these passers-by. Traders claim that they sell to all strata of the population, with the African clientele dominating. The Institute of Natural Resources found that the majority of the African population in Durban uses *muthi* irrespective of religion, age, education and class (FAO 1998). The Russell Street market does not only serve Durban and its surrounding areas. Many traders have regular customers who travel long distances to stock up on *muthi*. Most of these customers come from Johannesburg and from the Transkei. These regular customers, who usually spend between R1 000 and R1 500 on each trip, are much sought after. But most of the trade is with passing traffic, who spend on average between R2 and R20, depending on the quantity, mix or type of *muthi* they buy.

Many customers of herbal *muthi* know what they want, and can point at or name the herb or the mix. There is a high degree of self-medication of herbs, especially among women, but in some cases the trader will guide the customer in preparation and application. Traders sell by the handful (using their hands to measure up) or preferably by using a plastic bowl (to keep the *muthi* clean). The *muthi* is then wrapped in newspaper and handed over to the customer in a 'checkaz' plastic bag. In some cases, the customer may request a particular *muthi* which the trader does not stock. The latter will then shout out to her neighbours and ask for the particular herb or mix. If she has already sold some *muthi* to the customer, she will take money for the whole transaction and then pay the trader who helped out her entitled share.

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<sup>44</sup> According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), the total world sales of herbal medicines in 1993 amounted to more than US\$2,5 billion (WHO Fact Sheet N 134, 1996).

The animal *muthi* products, which are mainly sold by men, are costly and often sold wholesale. Unprocessed animal *muthi* (i.e. whole dried carcasses) is sold mainly to traditional healers, while animal *muthi* which has been processed – i.e. ground into powder, dissected into bottles (animal fat, testicles, eyes, brain material etc.), or skinned – can be sold directly to customers. However, this normally requires that the trader is a trained specialist (either *inyanga* or *sangoma*, as in most cases he is) who knows how to apply or use the *muthi*, which he will often do on the spot. These medicines and cures are often more expensive, due to both the relatively higher retail price (from gatherers) and the added service fee.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, the recent developments of traditional hospitals and the inclusion of traditional medicine into medical aid schemes, is bound to increase the demand for *muthi*. As in most households, health related goods are seen as essential, even to the very poor. *Muthi* serves needs far beyond the realms of health, and it is regarded as an important and basic household commodity.

### *The Traders*

As mentioned earlier, 80% of the 400 traders in Russell Street are women. Their ages vary from 18 to 75, with most of them being around 30 and 50. The traders come from all over the region, but most of them now live in or close to Durban. According to the INR survey, 52% of the traders have no schooling, while 44% have junior schooling and 4% have passed Standard 8 (INR 1996, 8). The SEWU survey of street trading members shows that 26% had

no education at all, and 25% had more than Standard 7<sup>45</sup> (SEWU 1995, 5). In general, the younger traders have a better education.

Most of the women do not have specialist skills in healing or in administering *muthi*. They have a basic knowledge, from which they have developed additional skills. The early generation of *muthi* traders (some of whom had been active in the trade as gatherers, while others came directly from the Ezimbuzini *muthi* market) seemed to have been more knowledgeable than the new-comers, and have passed this knowledge on. Many of these early traders helped their friends and family members to join the market by giving advice and passing on their knowledge. The traders come from different backgrounds and have a wide range of work experiences. Many of them, especially those from rural areas, were housewives who were forced into wage work as they became widowers, while others had operated as part-time or full-time *muthi* gatherers. Most of those who had been living in or close to Durban tended to have more work experience both in the formal and informal sectors as domestic workers for white households, shebeen-owners, factory workers and second-hand clothes sellers etc.

A majority of the women are household-heads and sole providers of food and other necessities: 'We are feeding the children *and* the men'.<sup>46</sup> A survey done for SEWU showed that 62% of their street vendor members saw themselves as household heads, and 75% said they were the main breadwinners (The Self-Employed Women's Union Survey 1995).<sup>47</sup>

Some of the women have unemployed husbands who help in the business by collecting and

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<sup>45</sup> Approximately 150 of the women in Russell Street are SEWU members (letter from Pat Horn, 24 November 1998).

<sup>46</sup> Interview with Madlamini Khumalo, 19 September 1995.

<sup>47</sup> Snedden's (1990) study of clothing sellers in the Warwick Avenue Triangle showed that 75% were from women-headed households (in Preston-Whyte & Rogerson 1991).

purchasing new stocks of *muthi*. Others are 'widows of violence', or separated from their husbands.

Despite the impression of poverty and marginality, trading in Russell Street is a relatively lucrative occupation. As mentioned above, the intensity of the market fluctuates according to seasonal and climatic variations. But incomes also differ according to sales and marketing skills, customer base, knowledge of *muthi*, and the amount of working hours. The most successful and hard working traders can earn up to R4 000 a month.<sup>48</sup> According to the INR survey, the incomes ranged from less than R200 to more than R2 000 a month, with a mean of R440 (INR 1996). I would estimate the mean income ratio to be approximately R800 (or R27 a day).<sup>49</sup> The total incomes earned (including operating costs), was estimated to be between R1,06 and R1,58 million per annum (INR 1996). In general, my own estimations would almost double those of the INR study. This divergence in income estimation between the INR report and my own research is mainly the result of what I have called a 'strategic marginalisation discourse', which will be dealt with towards the end of this chapter.

### **A HISTORY OF THE RUSSELL STREET *MUTHI* MARKET**

Throughout the repressive apartheid years, a small group of defiant *muthi* traders erected stands on a temporary basis on the pavements under the Eilat viaduct between the Berea Station and the Old Market site (now the Victoria Market) (see map p. 117 and photograph 6 p. 120), servicing the increasing flow of African pedestrians and commuters. These traders were constantly harassed and threatened by the Durban City Police and had to anticipate and

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<sup>48</sup> Practising *sangomas* and *inyangas* with offices in central Durban earn between R4 000 - 7 000 per month. They pay between R500 - 1 000 per month to rent their offices.

<sup>49</sup> Based on interviews and conversations with traders.

allow for regular confiscations of their wares in their daily business.

*Muthi* traders had been operating in the area since the early 1900s. It was stated in Chapter 3 that traders initially sold *muthi* inside and outside the Ematsheni Beerhall, also called the 'Native Market'. When the former were chased out of the market in 1915, some started trading on the pavements surrounding the market. This illegal trade was performed on a very small-scale basis up until the 1970s, with only a handful of traders risking breaking the law. After years of harassment and persecution, most traders had to opt for other income generating activities. It was in the early 1980s that traders started gradually to take up trade in the area again, following a general increase in street trading in Durban. This, however, represented a negligible increase, and before 1990, there was only limited street trading in *muthi* in Durban, mainly concentrated around the Berea Train Station, the Old Market site (now Victoria Market) and under the Eilat Viaduct (see Chapter 3).

According to the Director of Informal Trade, even when the Department marked up trading squares on Russell Street Bridge in 1989, there were many empty spaces.<sup>50</sup> He said he had noticed a pattern whereby a truck arrived on Wednesdays, dropping off people and sacks of *muthi*. The traders would then stay on the street until the end of the weekend. The bridge would gradually fill up as the week progressed.<sup>51</sup> Eventually, these women, most of whom were rural gatherers entering Durban on a temporary basis, started trading on a permanent basis. They were joined by traders from the Ezimbuzini *muthi* market in Umlazi (which was the main street market at that time), who had fled the increasing violence. More and more entrepreneurs joined them throughout 1990, and the *muthi* market mushroomed, gradually expanding up the broad pavement on the Russell Street bridge and around the corner down

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<sup>50</sup> Interview with Dean Botha, 8 March 1996.

<sup>51</sup> Interview with Dean Botha, 8 March 1996.



Leopold Street towards Market Street. Within weeks, as rumour spread about the spontaneous invasion of these prime trading sites, all available trading spaces were occupied. These developments coincided with other mass defiance invasions of urban space (i.e. the resettlement of Cato Manor in 1990). As mentioned in Chapter 3, Durban authorities could do little to stop this process because of the peculiar conditions that the political transformation created. They attempted to send in the police to confiscate goods, but the traders responded with further defiance:

We only moved up on the bridge, they still chased us here, they always take all the stuff, the corporation throw it by the dump, we start again with other *muthis*, they said we were not allowed to sell here, but we were still carrying on to get the money to save our children... there were no jobs...but I kept on until I get (sic) into SEWU. Then they would help us to stop 'corporation' and police... SEWU went to talk to with corporation, tried to help us... now they ['corporation/police'] don't do nothing... They said alright, they are going to find a place for us to sell...we are waiting now...we are selling nicely now.<sup>52</sup>

Thus, between 1990 and 1992, the pavements on the Russell Street bridge and down Leopold street towards Market Street were gradually filled up by *muthi* traders. The first account of the emerging *muthi* market in the local press was an article in the Natal Mercury 23 February 1991 entitled: "*Starving families" force women to sell muti [sic] in the city*. The reporter interviewed a trader, who had arrived in Durban in January the same year, from northern Zululand. The article gives some valuable insights, and provides us with oral records from this period. The vendor told the reporter:

"Many of the women here come from rural areas where they cannot earn a living. Our husbands cannot find jobs and one has to find means of ensuring that the family at home is not starving. We come from different parts of Natal, even from Transkei. What brings us here is knowledge of traditional medicine. At the beginning of this year we were few, but now we are about 100. Apparently word has gone out that in Durban business is good. On the best of days I make R40 and I am not complaining." Asked where she gets traditional medicine she said: "Every two weeks I go home where I have people whose

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<sup>52</sup> Interview with Madlamini Khumalo, 19 September 1995.

job is to ensure that there is constant supply of medicine. Things like skins of snakes and crocodiles are hard to get and I buy these from certain people". She said they had never been harassed by anyone for selling on the streets but she wished they had shelters to protect them from the weather. Most of the women said they lived in the squatter camps while others sleep on the pavements or at the railway stations. A traditional medicine man, who asked not to be named, attributed the good business to African belief. "We Africans believe that traditional medicine has the power to bring luck. When one cannot find a job one uses traditional medicine to bring them luck. The high rate of unemployment has boosted the business of traditional medicine", he said. (The Natal Mercury 23 February 1991)

During the early years of the Russell Street market, most of the traders came from rural areas, and only stayed and traded in Durban temporarily. They would remain in Durban until they had sold their stocks and then return to their rural homes to collect new supplies. Many of these traders had formerly operated as gatherers supplying *muthi* shops and the practices of Durban-based *inyangas* and *sangomas*. They now saw the opportunity to reap all the profits from the *muthi* they gathered. This rural-urban oscillation is the reason why up until 1995-96 the market was also used for accommodation purposes by many of the traders who had no other place to stay in Durban (the nearby Thokoza hostel for women was always full). At night therefore, the pavements in Warwick Avenue were covered with makeshift shelters of plastic bags and cardboard boxes, and the whole area looked like a typical squatter settlement. These traders, who lived under constant threats of crime and (sexual) violence, helped to look after other their colleagues' produce.

In 1994, the Self-Employed Women's Union (SEWU) was formed, and shortly after, managed to organise a branch amongst the women in Russell Street. The traders (even some of the men) argue that the formation of SEWU improved their situation as they were given the resources to defend and propagate their interests. One of the main issues for SEWU was to help the traders lobby for a new market, and shortly after its formation, they were promised a

new market. These promises were vague, and were made with no serious intent in realising them. In the end, it took four years for the local authorities to implement their plan.

The union was inspired by a similar union called SEWA in India, and was initiated by Pat Horn, a feminist and former trade-unionist. The main aims of SEWU, as stated in a pamphlet from 1994 is to:

- Build unity between women whose work which they do for a living is not recognised.
- Develop negotiating skills so that women can negotiate directly with the City Council, police, small contractors and middle-men, civic, and political organisations, through their own representatives.
- Assist women with legal advice.
- Assist women to organise how to solve problems, such as child care problems, credit problems, lack of maternity, sick or disability benefits.
- Develop lobbying skills so that women can organise to get laws changed if they are not suitable to their needs.
- Develop leadership skills among women who work outside of formal sector work.
- Provide access for women to other organisations which offer facilities such as:
  - skills training;
  - credit and loan facilities;
  - health advice and assistance;
  - relief or counselling for survivors of violent attacks including rape.

(SEWU pamphlet, July 1994)

The union has adopted a holistic approach to cover most aspects of the work and life of its members. Since its formation, SEWU membership has grown substantially, and is now expanding outside its original base of Durban to other provinces.<sup>53</sup> It has branches at all the major street markets and informal sector niches in the greater Durban area. SEWU leaders have represented their members in forums and conferences both locally and internationally. SEWU organises workshops on selling techniques and on how to run a small enterprise. They arrange English courses and leadership workshops to empower their branch leaders and

members with political capital. Most important, however, is their role in facilitating talks and negotiations with local authorities. Their underlying mission is to communicate ideas of sexual equality and female empowerment, and to make the members aware of their rights.

The formation of SEWU changed the life of the women in Russell Street: as one informant said, 'things are coming right [sic], all our needs are soon OK... we are selling nicely now'.<sup>54</sup> SEWU boosted the women's confidence and political skills. 'Not all the traders are members of SEWU, but we are all together'.<sup>55</sup> According to Tobias Mkhize of the City Health Department, the political situation in Russell Street before the formation of SEWU was organised along ethnic and regional lines. It was only later that gender became the prime dividing and defining issue, he claimed.<sup>56</sup> Shortly after its formation, SEWU was seen as controlling Russell Street, although there were some men who opposed them. Many female traders became members, and most of the men supported SEWU - or at least expressed confidence that the women also represented their interest, even though, as men, they were not allowed to become members. Many traders, including SEWU members, were also recruited by other organisations for *inyangas* and *sangomas* (i.e. the Sunshine Traditional Healer's Association).

In late 1995, after two years of preparation, the City Health Department facilitated the formation of an umbrella body for traditional healers and *muthi* traders in Durban: the Environmental Health Services Spiritual/Traditional Healers Umbrella Body for Metro (from now on 'Umbrella Body'). The Umbrella Body was formed so that the City Health

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<sup>53</sup> SEWU has approximately 3 000 paying members nationally (letter from Pat Horn, 24 November 1998).

<sup>54</sup> Interview with Madlamini Khumalo, 19 September 1995.

<sup>55</sup> Interview with Madlamini Khumalo, 19 September 1995.

<sup>56</sup> Interview with Tobias Mkhize, 2 February 1999.

Department and other Departments could relate to one body of stakeholders in the Durban *muthi* trade. One of the main goals of the Umbrella Body was the upgrading of the Russell

Street *muthi* market. The influential *inyangas* and *sangomas* on the Umbrella Body complained about the state of the *muthi* being sold there, which they saw as ‘dirty’ and ‘untraditional’ (see more on this in Chapter 5). They wanted a proper market where the *muthi* could be sold in a dignified and appropriate manner. A Street Committee was set up, comprising of both SEWU members and male traders, to represent the Russell Street traders. An influential male trader chaired the Street Committee. This new body was seen by the local state as more suitable to represent the Russell Street traders than SEWU, which was only for women and had no specialist competence on traditional healing. Through the formation of the Street Committee, the male traders were given the opportunity to voice their interests. However, it soon became a male dominated body as SEWU gradually withdrew due to an intensive power struggle (see section below).

In 1996, concrete planning for a new market was initiated through the Umbrella Body involving the City Health Department, the Informal Trade Department, the Urban Strategy Department and the Institute of Natural Resources. It was agreed by all stakeholders that the Umbrella Body and the Street Committee were the representative bodies with which they were to deal. The Institute of Natural Resources (INR) was commissioned by the Informal Trade Department to conduct a ‘situation analysis’ of the Russell Street and Ezimbuzini Markets:

The City of Durban has identified several health, welfare, road safety, and legal problems associated with the sale of traditional medicines on the streets and requested an analysis of the situation to promote informed planning and decision making. This report provides a brief overview of the market characteristics to assist short term planning. (INR 1996, 1)

The INR researchers worked closely with the Umbrella Body. The INR supported the traders’ demand for a new market (see Chapter 5), and the Umbrella Body saw the research and the

report as assisting them in their endeavour. The approach of the INR report was to emphasise the economic and health care values and potentials of the trade, and then to argue for the development of a formal market (see more in Chapter 5).

There were three alternative plans mentioned at that time, and they were all temporary measures. The first alternative was to build a new market in the Lorne Street bus terminal. The terminal is gigantic, and was regarded as suitable for an informal market. The traders objected to this proposition as they argued that the site was too far away from the main pedestrian flow to the transport nodes in Warwick Avenue, on which they depended. The city officials were forced to scrap the plan as they had difficulty in finding an alternative space for Durban Transport to build a new bus terminal. A second alternative put forward was the nearby Stable Theatre. The traders, however, saw this as being too small. The last idea mentioned was to develop the existing market in Isipingo (Ezimbuzini *muthi* market), which for many years had been Durban's main *muthi* market. The Informal Trade Department preferred this option, as it would move the problem out of the CBD. They were prepared to spend a lot of money on the market. They were under the impression that the traders in Russell Street originally came from the Ezimbuzini *muthi* market, and that they had moved into Durban as a result of both violence and poor facilities. They overlooked the most important and obvious reason: the massive thoroughfare of potential customers in the Warwick Avenue area. This latter planning initiative was also partially an attempt to resort to the old and notorious solutions of apartheid era 'separate development'.

The 'gift' of a new market was therefore no big concession for local authorities, who had been wanting to get the 'dirty' *muthi*-market off the streets for a long time. A new market would constitute the formalisation of trading through payment of rent and taxes (licences) and a

means of deriving revenue. But there were other more concealed benefits to be gained from such an enterprise. By engaging in negotiation with organised street traders, the authorities managed to find consensus on one key issue: organised traders agreed that once they were given a new market, they would support the new street trading by-laws. The simple reason for this was that the organised traders were concerned over the competitive threat posed by newcomers who would soon fill the empty 'free' prime pavement sites left behind once the established traders moved into the formal market with its compulsory site rentals. The SEWU branch leader made it clear that they would not tolerate this competition and that any such activity had to be effectively prosecuted:

*Don't you think that when you move away from Russell Street and in to a new market, that other people will move in and start selling? They won't, because of the by-laws. We agree with the by-laws, but not before we get our market. We 'closed' the by-laws, then we can 'open' them again. If someone trades here they will get more money than us, because there are more people here than in Lorne Street. The by-laws must work as soon as we get the market. All the *muthi* people must go, everywhere in Durban Station... everywhere... Anyone who wants *muthi* must go the market.<sup>57</sup>*

This point illustrates very clearly the conflict between formal and informal economies, but also the stratification at the marginal end of capitalism. The traders on Russell Street were themselves threatening formal economic viability (Indian *muthi* shops) in the same way as they feared the competition posed by informal newcomers once they themselves were 'formalised'. Similarly, after fighting eviction and legal suppression throughout the apartheid years, these traders now determinedly protected their own interests even to the degree where it meant imposing and supporting a legal and regulatory environment which they themselves had fought.

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<sup>57</sup> Interview with Madlamini Khumalo, 26 September 1996.



This problem was dealt with at a SEWU meeting which was referred to in SEWU's newsletter

*SEWU News:*

The struggle for a space to trade from is far from ending. It is no longer centred around the harassment of traders by City Police. It is the struggle between the people who come to trade in the area for the first time and those who have been in the area for long ... The Business Act does not require of certain traders to have licences or encourages Free Enterprise. This has its problem because people are crowded in one area. This makes the competition too stiff in a market that is already saturated. This means that SEWU has to lobby for changes in the Business Act that will make our members benefit. The changes should not be to suppress the emerging traders. (SEWU News No.5, March 1995)

As mentioned in Chapter 3, 1996 marked the re-intensification of anti-street trading policies. In between negotiations between traders and local authorities, the City Police raided Russell Street to clean up the streets and to evict illegal traders. SEWU and other organisations supported the need for regulation but complained that they were not consulted in the drawing up of the new by-laws. They forcefully argued that the new laws automatically criminalised street traders. They claimed that the prohibition of traders sleeping overnight at their places of trade was unreasonable, as there had been a long-standing demand for the provision of overnight accommodation. In addition, the by-laws ascribing comprehensive cleaning responsibilities to street traders unfairly shifted a public responsibility onto marginal street traders. They argued instead that the City had a responsibility towards the workplace of the traders (SEWU memorandum 30 November 1995). Despite these and other objections, city officials immediately initiated various 'clean-up operations' to clear the streets of illegal trade. I was present at one of these raids (at 4 a.m. on the 30<sup>th</sup> September 1996) when over 40 heavily armed policemen, together with several rubbish disposal trucks, moved into the Warwick Avenue area to remove illegal shelters that were erected by *muthi* traders in Russell Street and Leopold Street (see photographs 4 and 5 pp. 119-120). Traders put up the shelters because they were tired of waiting for a new market, and because the *muthi* (and the traders

themselves) needed protection from the weather (see photograph 3 p. 119). The City Police claimed that they had received complaints from the public about the conditions in Russell Street and that the structures hindered motorised and pedestrian traffic. 'Squatting in the city centre is unacceptable',<sup>58</sup> they stated.

The Russell Street SEWU branch seized this opportunity to show force and to strengthen their position in the area. Indeed, it is through times of turmoil that organisations can prove themselves worthy, advertise their strength and increase their credibility. The Street Committee was passively involved in some of the events, but SEWU dominated. SEWU members even teased the men and said that they could not fight for themselves. I will not go into too many details about this dramatic and eventful weekend, save to recount some of the themes and events that I found significant. It was an interesting experience to be so close to the traders and to be a part of their campaign machinery (I helped them write and distribute press statements and invitations to a press conference).

SEWU's response to the police raid was to 'put the women in the front': the women had decided to use their historically effective non-violent female defiance to challenge the police. At a meeting on the Friday before the raid they argued, and the few men present agreed, that the police were likely to be more restrained with women. They intended to emphasise that they were breadwinners who had no other option in feeding their families. They also wanted media attention and coverage, hoping that the police would be more careful with cameras present. It was further decided to compromise by removing the side walls of their stalls, so that they would be less provocative (i.e. turning the 'shacks' into 'shelters'), and to make sure the pavement was extra clean and open for passage. The meeting finally urged all traders to stay in Russell Street the whole night and be present when the police moved in.

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<sup>58</sup> Telephone interview with Mr Gaffney of the Durban City Police, 27 September 1996.

When I returned to Russell Street the next morning, most of the shacks had been turned into shelters as agreed the previous day. Only a few shacks remained. They were owned by men who did not want to take orders from Madlamini, SEWU, or any other woman. No journalists attended the press conference which was advertised for the Saturday afternoon, and the traders were very disappointed. At 2 a.m. Monday morning, traders started to prepare themselves. There was a nervous atmosphere as traders woke up and cleaned themselves. Some were feeding their children. It was chilly and quiet. Every time we heard sirens we thought the police were coming. It was my first and only night spent on a street in Durban and it was peaceful and safe, despite my fears. At approximately 4 a.m. a huge contingent of City Police cars and trucks followed by several waste disposal trucks moved into the area from all directions, and the police cordoned off the area. They stopped in Leopold Street and armed policemen dispersed around the area. It was a bizarre sight: women sitting at their stalls, some with babies in their laps, tucked in blankets, passively watching the armed policemen running around with their bullet-proof vests. Madlamini together with some of the other women walked over to the commander and handed over a memorandum (the press statement). I was standing in the background taking pictures and trying to listen to what was being said. The commanding officer spoke gently to Madlamini informing her that they had come to remove the shacks as a safety measure: If there was an accident here, would Madlamini like to be responsible? He said that the police supported the traders' demand for a new market. He reassured Madlamini that the police were not going to remove traders or their goods.

The police then started tearing down shelters in Leopold Street. Madlamini walked back to Russell Street and urged the traders there to start tearing down their own shelters. In this way,

they could keep the building material instead of it being confiscated, and avoid the police going through their wares. While the police were busy in Leopold Street, the traders in Russell Street quickly tore down their own shelters. When Madlamini was finished, she walked back to Leopold Street to see how things were going there. Many of the traders there were frightened, but Madlamini walked around trying to calm them down saying that the police would not remove them or their *muthi*. Apparently, these traders had not been informed about this before the raid. While she was in Leopold Street, Madlamini was interviewed by a journalist from SABC radio news with lots of traders gathered around.

The Daily News reported later that day that according to a senior police official, street traders supported the move to clear up the area, as it posed a serious health hazard (*'I have never seen so many cockroaches or such big rats. These traders have no ablutions and they live, sleep, trade and defecate in the same place...'*), and the structures were hindering both traffic and pedestrian flow (*'It was only a matter of time before a bus had an accident or a blow out, and drove into the shacks and killed dozens of people'*) (quotes from The Saturday Paper 5 October 1996). The street traders' version was different. Madlamini Khumalo, branch leader for SEWU in Russell Street handed a memorandum to the City Police condemning the police action. The statement said: *'We find it unacceptable that police are sent in to harass us without the responsible authorities being able to provide us with any alternatives'* (in Daily News 30 September 1996). She was quoted in the newspaper as saying that Informal Trade had promised them a new market for the last two years, and called on the department to allow the traders to continue trading as they did until a new and more suitable site was found for them (the Daily News reporter did not interview her or any of the other traders, he only referred to their press statement).

Both in Russell Street and in Leopold Street, Madlamini emerged from the police raid as a true leader with increased respect. Most of the traders (especially in Leopold Street) were unaware of the previous meetings and press statements, and indeed about what was going on in general, but they could all see her taking command, talking to the police and the media. She advised the traders in Russell Street to tear down their own shelters, and managed to calm down traders in Leopold Street. In the end, the traders saw themselves as victorious and believed that SEWU had saved them from police brutality. In SEWU's newsletter for October 1996, this incident was reported in the following way:

The muti sellers refused to move, and SEWU's Russell Street chairperson negotiated with the City Police, who agreed not to move the traders once they understood that the IBU [Informal Trade Department] themselves had promised the muti sellers that they would not [have to] move until the muti market is ready for them to move into. This is the second time that the power of SEWU's women has prevented the City Council from moving the muti sellers with nowhere else to go and no other way to make a living. (SEWU News No. 14 1996)

The traders, especially in Leopold Street, were afraid because they were not sufficiently informed. Traders thanked Madlamini for helping them, which she did in many ways, but the police never intended to remove them in the first place. The police did not enter into Russell Street at all that morning. They concentrated their efforts in Leopold Street. Traders in Russell Street believed that this was due to their resistance and strength. The City Police must have known through some form of intelligence that Russell Street was much better organised than Leopold Street.

This was the last of many police raids in Russell Street. After long bureaucratic proceedings and hearings with the Umbrella Body, it was decided in April 1997 that the new market would be built on the viaducts over Berea Station next to Russell Street. In late 1997, the construction started for the new market, and in October 1998, the market was officially

opened - although traders moved into the market in May. Currently (1999), approximately 400 traders fill the new *muthi* market on the pavement on Russell Street Bridge and the new market complex on the bridges over Berea Station (see photographs on p. 121). Now that the market issue has been dealt with, the main task of the Umbrella Body is to educate traders and healers about AIDS and STDs, to train them to cultivate their own *muthi*, and to provide them with business and management skills (see section on 'development' in Chapter 5).

### **THE POLITICS OF POWER AND GENDER IN RUSSELL STREET**

The *muthi* market development project, which started in 1994-95 and was finalised in late 1998, provides an interesting case study of the politics of power and gender in Russell Street. Shortly after the formation of the Umbrella Body and the Street Committee, SEWU gradually withdrew from these bodies and a power struggle emerged. In 1996, SEWU chose to continue on a separate lobbying bid for a market through their own established channels in the City Council structures and in the City bureaucracy. The result of this move was that SEWU sidelined itself in the development process. They later joined the Umbrella Body and Street Committee when the market was being built, and now co-operate with these structures in the day-to-day organisation of the market. They did not lose out on anything through the process, but failed to play an active role in the most important issue for their members.

There are many reasons why this power struggle emerged. According to other players involved in the issue (City Health Department, Informal Trade, Umbrella Body), SEWU's failure was due to their organisational form and style. Their assessment can roughly be

summed up like this:<sup>59</sup>

SEWU is a union for self-employed women (only). They need paying members to survive. In order to attract members they need to play an active part in all issues that relate to their members (and potential members). By and large, SEWU fulfils this need. But with regard to the development of a new *muthi* market, their role became limited. At first, SEWU had the sole command over the market issue, and could take credit for pushing the process forward. But local authorities needed a representative body of *all* stakeholders in the market issue. SEWU was only one of these. They were entitled to their place in the Umbrella Body, but the male traders also needed to be represented, as well as those women who were not members of SEWU. In addition, the developers wanted to involve consumers and 'experts' in the form of other organisations dealing with traditional healing and medicine. A 'Street Committee' for Russell Street was formed, and one of the male traders was elected as chairman (SEWU's branch leader was vice chairperson). When the market issue was brought under the auspices of this latter organisation, SEWU lost its leading role in assisting the traders in this regard; i.e. they lost their monopoly over the main issue at stake for their members (and potential members). Of course, SEWU continued to deal with a range of other matters, and were playing a leading role in challenging the new by-laws, but the market issue was the most important one in the day-to-day lives of the traders. This last point was not mentioned by the other commentators, but is nevertheless important for the wider picture.

Some Street Committee members tried to weaken SEWU's position by arguing that traders did not need to pay for membership in an organisation (referring to SEWU), because the process would be dealt with through the Street Committee and they did not charge

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<sup>59</sup> Based on interviews and conversations with representatives of those bodies.

membership fees.<sup>60</sup> By taking over the market issue, the Umbrella Body therefore took away a vital element of SEWU's power-base in Russell Street. There was never any real disagreement over needs and demands between the men in the Street Committee and SEWU, it was merely a struggle over who was to lead the process. SEWU, commentators claimed, were never comfortable with their new position, and therefore withdrew.

According to the facilitator of the Umbrella Body<sup>61</sup> and a SEWU organiser,<sup>62</sup> this power struggle was essentially a 'gender struggle'.<sup>63</sup> SEWU members did not like the fact that many men treated them as 'children'.<sup>64</sup> In general, the men (who mainly sell animal *muthi*) are traditionally more skilled and specialised as they are often *inyangas* or *sangomas*, while the women, who are in majority (80%) are mostly gatherers who have become traders or are untrained newcomers. The men's power base seems to derive largely from their superior knowledge of and position within tradition. The women had for a long time been in confrontation with the men who now controlled the Street Committee. They therefore withdrew from the male-based organisation and continued the lobbying process on their own.

During the period between 1994 and 1996, the Informal Trade Department viewed SEWU as the only serious and representative street trader body in Durban: 'SEWU is probably the best [street trader body]... best organised, and most effective... they know what they are doing'.<sup>65</sup>

At this time, most of the other organisations were seen as 'mafias driven by power-hungry

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<sup>60</sup> There was much confusion about these statements. SEWU's branch leader complained that the Street Committee were irresponsible in saying to people that they did not have to pay in the new market. Of course they had to pay for their trading sites, she claimed. Street Committee leaders claimed that SEWU had told the traders that they had to pay SEWU to get into the new market. There were many similar rows over misunderstood statements between the parties.

<sup>61</sup> Interview with Tobias Mkhize, 2 February 1999.

<sup>62</sup> Interview with Patience Magadla, 7 June 1997.

<sup>63</sup> Mkhize described a shift from ethnic and regional divisions between segments of street traders to a gender struggle (interview 2 February 1999).

<sup>64</sup> Interview with Tobias Mkhize, 2 February 1999.

<sup>65</sup> Interviews with Alan Wheeler, 29 February 1996 and Dean Botha, 8 March 1996.



people who take money from street traders and then make all kinds of false promises to them'.<sup>66</sup> But in 1996 Informal Trade started to perceive SEWU differently, and reconceptualised its relationship with SEWU:

We've got to be really careful, we meet regularly with SEWU on a whole bunch of issues - report back meetings. But they tend to sometimes misunderstand their role. We've been feeding them the information about the Russell Street traders and what our objectives were - on a purely information basis. But they seem to have felt that they were now the chief negotiators, which is not the case. They were also part of the Umbrella body, and they should have had representation there. But for reasons of their own, they have not been present at these meetings, and are thus not aware of the developments. And then suddenly they start jumping up and down, and complaining that they are not part of the process, but that is definitely their own fault. It's not our fault. We deal with who we consider to be the most representative of the people as a whole and not just the SEWU traders. I told them that I have got a letter from the Umbrella body saying that they are happy with the proposal [to build a new market on the viaducts over Berea Station].

*When did this start [SEWU falling behind]?* It depends really on the agenda of the association involved, and their general agenda is to build their profile and attract membership. So they can't get that in an Umbrella body. So, I have to be very careful - they are here to build their membership and to build credibility. In this area they lose credibility, and they lose membership, people start to think 'why should I be a member of your association?' So I don't get too frustrated when they start kicking up a fuss, you know. And then again, you will always find other players trying to emerge to also try to utilise the fact that the council chose to deal with the herb traders as a group simply because they are a major problem and a threat to the CBD, and a threat to the city. You know, we are not in the days when we could walk in with a police force and say get out of here, we don't want you here! So in this case, we are forced to develop on the one hand, but also we believe that there is a major...[pause] ...if they clean up, and the sector gets it act together, and it can only do that if it is facilitated and put into ..you know [?]. ...this can become a major source of attraction for the city rather than a problem.<sup>67</sup>

The market issue unveils both the strengths and weaknesses of SEWU. Madlamini *is* SEWU in Russell Street. She is also one of the main actors in SEWU's regional office in Durban. She is very proud of being an active member of SEWU, and she claims that that the formation

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<sup>66</sup> Interview with Dean Botha, 8 March 1996.

<sup>67</sup> Interview with Dean Botha, 29 April 1997.

of SEWU in 1993 changed her life and her working conditions in Russell Street: 'I get lots of things from [SEWU] office to open my brain... I need not only money... knowledge... I must think!'<sup>68</sup> Russell Street is also one of SEWU's most successful branches. Already in 1995, they had over 90 paying members, which had risen to 150 in 1998.<sup>69</sup> SEWU's 'victories for street vendors' in Russell Street are often referred to in their newsletters (see above and SEWU News No. 9, 14, 18).

The effectiveness of SEWU lies in its professional and bureaucratic organisation. SEWU's founder, Pat Horn, who came from a trade union background, set out to organise self-employed women in a similar way to the formally employed. SEWU's formal representative organisation, with its modern political rituals of democratic power and legitimacy (leadership titles, constitution, newsletters etc.), together with its timely post-apartheid political correctness (female empowerment, informal sector), and the commitment and political skills of its founder, made for a powerful body for self-employed women. Many SEWU people (and outsiders) attribute SEWU's powerful position to the skills of its founding general secretary, Pat Horn (her organisational and leadership skills, the fact that she speaks Zulu in addition to English). SEWU, they claim, is particularly able to communicate its members' needs and demands, due to the fact that its general secretary speaks English and can effectively articulate and agitate for their demands.<sup>70</sup>

In Russell Street, SEWU's political organisation contrasted sharply with that of the male leadership which reportedly dominated in Russell Street before SEWU was formed. In many ways, this contrast represented a clash between 'modern' urban trade-unionism, versus the

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<sup>68</sup> Interview with Madlamini Khumalo, 19 September 1995.

<sup>69</sup> Interview with Madlamini, 19 September 1995 and letter from Pat Horn 24 November 1998.

<sup>70</sup> Just before the thesis was submitted (March 1999), there were unconfirmed rumours that Pat Horn was about to resign as general secretary of SEWU.

'traditional' rural-based authority of elder men. Street Committee meetings were described as being 'quiet' and orderly, with few inputs from others than the chairman, while SEWU branch meetings were more 'democratic' and participatory. The SEWU branch meetings were seen by some as a more powerful forum because of 'the way they are done'. SEWU's style was regarded to be more effective and influential because of its association with 'modern democracy'.<sup>71</sup>

Even the men here in Russell Street say I'm better than the other men in Sunshine ... we have two unions here... Because I can explain the things nicely to them. Not shouting at them. I sit down in the middle of them and la la la la... They don't go to meetings if I'm not there!<sup>72</sup>

In times of crisis, the SEWU branch called in their leaders (organisers) from their main office, who in many cases acted as their protective asset. The SEWU branch saw this as an effective strategy, which the men either acknowledged or were frustrated by. One of the most effective strategies of the two competing leadership factions in Russell Street was to try to take command over the relationships with visiting outsiders such as journalists and researchers. Control of this function made it clear to the other traders who the true spokesperson and leader was. Thus, when a camera crew from the SABC programme *50/50* came to do a documentary on the *muthi* market (2 February 1997), they were directed to SEWU's Durban office, who sent one of their organisers to guide the team in Russell Street. She took them to the SEWU branch leader, who gave them an interview. When the crew had left, the chairperson of the Street Committee approached the SEWU branch leader and the organiser from the Durban office. He was furious that no one had asked him for permission or informed him about the shoot, and that he was not given the chance to speak. The two SEWU women effectively told him to mind his own business. On another occasion, the Street

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<sup>71</sup> These evaluations came from men who attended or observed both meetings.

<sup>72</sup> Interview with Madlamini Khumalo, 9 August 1996.

Committee leader chose to be interviewed on camera on the middle of Russell Street Bridge in front of the SEWU branch-leader's shop, instead of at the bottom where his own shop was (21 April 1997). I later found out that the interview was part of a *Technikon* student project, but it nevertheless was given the same weight as the SABC interview. I think that my visits had a similar unsettling effect, as most of the time (especially early in my research) I sat with SEWU people. This caused much uneasiness for the Street Committee, who at one stage thought I was working for SEWU.<sup>73</sup>

Another important strategy of the street traders, especially SEWU (but also the Street Committee), can be termed a 'strategic marginalisation discourse'. In their struggle to be allowed to trade in the street and in their bid to get a new market, traders often referred to poverty and the need to feed their families. They communicated a sense of despair and destitution, and 'under-communicated' the marketing benefits of trading *muthi*. This is evident in the survey done by the Institute of Natural Resources in 1996, where traders under-reported their incomes (my estimates would easily double those of the INR report). Traders knew that this was a policy document that was going to be used to inform the developers (Durban local authorities) about their needs and problems. This marginalisation discourse was quite clearly spelt out to me one day after I had spent several uncomfortable hours sitting talking to a trader (exposed to the hot sun, noise and fumes from traffic, and flying dust). The weather changed suddenly, and chaos erupted as traders tried to cover their *muthi* from wind and rain. Sitting under the plastic, I asked the trader why she did not buy a big beach umbrella or awning to protect her things. She replied:

No, they must give us the market! If we get umbrellas they won't give us the market! They must see how we are battling!<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> This misunderstanding was of course my own fault and based on naivete'.

<sup>74</sup> Interview with Madlamini Khumalo, 28 February 1996.

She said the traders put on dirty clothes not only because 'the job is dirty', but also to show that they are suffering ('it also keeps criminals away...').<sup>75</sup> The traders can in fact earn quite a good income by selling *muthi* (up to R4 000 a month). They do not get rich, but they generally earn more than the average street trader and the average industrial worker. I have used this fact to challenge the commonly held views regarding the position of African women, the informal sector and street trading in general, by suggesting that these women should be seen as having successfully conquered a viable niche, rather than simply being forced into it. It must be said that selling *muthi* in Russell Street is a demanding and time-consuming job, and these traders deserve their successes.

SEWU's strength is perhaps also its main weakness. Its union-type organisation is effective in organising and propagating the general needs of its members. But in the case of the development of a new *muthi* market, their organisation style was not conducive to an umbrella type of organisation such as the Umbrella Body and Street Committee. It is important once again to note that SEWU is very active and successful on a larger scale in working together with other street trader organisations in their bid to influence legislation. It seems that another reason why SEWU's Russell Street leadership stopped attending Umbrella Body meetings was that they were already burdened by meetings in SEWU. Being a branch leader is a voluntary position, and meetings entail traders having to leave their stalls for long periods of the day, thus losing out on trade. Although SEWU provides some compensation for their meetings, other bodies do not. Umbrella Body meetings were considered to be irrelevant for the SEWU branch and they therefore chose to prioritise SEWU meetings. Another reason indicated to me was simply that SEWU's strategy was to negotiate bilaterally with city

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<sup>75</sup> Interview with Madlamini Khumalo, 28 February 1996.

officials through their established channels, rather than through the Street Committee. In the end, these power struggles and rivalries did not have any major implications: the new market was built, and new accommodation facilities for traders and a child-care centre is about to be opened.

## SUMMARY

The goal of this chapter has been to introduce the reader not only to the *muthi* trade, but to a specific *muthi* market and to *muthi* traders. I have tried to describe some of my observations from my fieldwork and pass onto the reader the sense of pride and dignity that the women in Russell Street conveyed to me. Rather than focusing on the problems and challenges facing women in the informal sector (there are indeed many such problems), I wish to emphasise the ways in which women respond to and actively pursue these problems and challenges. I have argued elsewhere that the *muthi* trade not only provides these women with income opportunities, but that it also serves as a medium of self-assertion and resistance (Nesvåg 2000a, 2000b). Many studies of the informal sector and of African women in general tend to focus on the structural forces that marginalise and oppress women. I wish to present a case study of women who have successfully restructured tradition and thereby conquered a viable economic niche. With the help of SEWU, the women in Russell Street have gradually built up arsenals of confidence and political and economic power to face future obstacles. The next and final chapter will describe more closely the processes of restructuring and development. This will focus again on Russell Street and describe how the market women actively restructured tradition in order to operate according to tradition. The chapter will also describe how outside actors have strategically tried to develop the trade and the traders to meet their own ends.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion. The Strategic Uses of Tradition

...it must not be forgotten that the examination of the magician is a personal knowledge *which can be changed* and put in such a view to correct it, and put in the right way by those who see it fit and *be in harmony with the present days which are of progress*. (Letter from African Dingaka Association to CNC, 18 December 1931 in CNC 50A 43/25. My emphasis)

Is this man [referring to a Mr Shangazi, a famous 'Native *Inyanga*' practising in Durban] registered and, if so, is the use of a stethoscope included among the practices cognisable under such registration? (Union Health Department, Durban in letter to CNC, 23 April 1934 in CNC 50A 43/25)

In Chapter 3, I described a general history of *muthi* trading in Durban, while Chapter 4 dealt with the case of the Russell Street *muthi* market. This last chapter will describe in more detail the processes of restructuring and development with particular reference to Russell Street and the period from 1990 to 1998. The chapter is divided into two sections (plus a conclusion). The first will show how the tradition of *muthi* trading has been restructured by the women in Russell Street. The second section will describe and analyse how two of the most important outside actors – the biomedical sector and nature conservation bodies – have strategically attempted to use tradition to promote and achieve their own ends. As mentioned in Chapter 2, this process I have termed 'development' to denote the special relation and character of this strategic use of tradition: the fact that it is an external intervention and that it is based on modernisation theory's idea of development. The chapter serves to summarise the main trends of the "D'Urbanisation" of *muthi* trading. I will show, by using examples, that tradition is used strategically by both traders and outsiders. Towards the end of the chapter I will round off the thesis with a conclusion.

## RESTRUCTURING TRADITION

What precisely is meant by restructuring tradition? First, it is important to go back to Chapter 1 and the conceptual analysis of 'tradition', where it was argued that one must move away from the static and authoritative view of tradition, and rather see traditions as flexible social and cultural constructs which are constantly in flux. All traditions are constantly restructured (and developed) to meet new ends: they are refined to produce new multiple meanings socially, politically, and economically. Restructuring is thus an important and indeed fundamental aspect of tradition and of social life in general.

As shown in Chapter 3, the *muthi* trade has gone through various changes throughout the century, and the introduction of street trading of *muthi* was one of the most important of these. In the beginning of the twentieth century, it was mainly men - mostly young men - either specialists (*inyangas*) or just entrepreneurs, who challenged tradition by trading *muthi* in Durban and other towns. But these changes to tradition did not occur without resistance, both from rivals outside the trade (the pharmaceutical industry) and from the State, but also from actors within the trade (see CNC hearing in 1915). When Indians later took over the Durban *muthi* trade in the 1940s and 1950s, and women started selling *muthi* in the streets in the late 1980s and early 1990s, this was also deemed to be a breach of tradition. Restructuring of tradition thus has two elements to it: innovation and entrepreneurship on the one side, and resistance and conservatism on the other. There are always those who challenge and try to change the perimeters of tradition, while others see themselves as custodians and guardians of tradition. The following section will deal with the 'internal' challenges and struggles over tradition, and the outcomes of these dialectic processes of change and continuity.



### *Innovative Restructurings*

Why do people wish to change certain elements of tradition? Because they believe that they can achieve something from this, whether it is to promote political power or improve one's economic position. There are many examples of restructuring of tradition for political ends in academic literature (see Scott 1985, 1990; Hobsbawm & Ranger 1992; Lan 1985; Chabal & Daloz 1999). I have focused mainly on creative changes that are economically motivated (although the two should not be seen as mutually exclusive). In Chapter 2, I dealt with the concept of tradition and its basic traits. One of them was the inherent and often contradictory relationship of stasis to change. In a situation of economic depression and increasing unemployment, many people with only limited educational and professional skills have had to resort to informal sector activities. I have argued earlier that the *muthi* traders in Russell Street should be seen as *conquering* a viable niche rather than simply being *forced* into 'marginal street trading'. *Muthi* trading is a relatively lucrative activity because it involves essentials of human life: health, culture, tradition and identity. This peculiar mix places the *muthi* trade in an extraordinary position, and provides the trade with enormous market potential. It is not difficult to sell good health, success and protection against misfortune. Add a sense of cultural belonging, identity, and continuity with tradition, and you have the ultimate product. With low levels of processing, simple technologies and low investment requirements, it was relatively easy to start trading *muthi* on the pavements in 1990. Therefore, it was a viable economic strategy to challenge tradition and to introduce (or legitimise) female-driven street markets for *muthi*.

Although there had been some street trade in *muthi* before 1990, it had never been on such a scale, and never with a female majority. When the women started to occupy the pavements

on the Russell Street Bridge, they did not actively or openly set out to restructure tradition in a practical sense. This restructuring was a gradual outcome of the persistence of the female traders and also an acceptance of the need for a big urban market for *muthi*. The main argument used by the women was that they were unemployed and that they needed to feed their families (see Chapter 4). There was never an openly expressed agenda of changing tradition (as is often the case with 'development' of tradition, as will be shown below).

Tradition was used to promote sales to customers and to legitimise the existence of the market (externally to local authorities). The Russell Street *muthi* market was very popular amongst the majority of *muthi* consumers because it brought prices down, increased the selection, and made it all easily available for people living in, or commuting to and from, Durban. But there was opposition to the new market and this came mainly from other more established niches of the *muthi* trade (see below).

There are some brief references to changes in tradition due to urbanisation in the literature dealing with Zulu traditional medicine (Berglund 1976; Ngubane 1977, 1992; Cunningham 1992). In addition to the concrete examples of change given in the literature, one can also clearly infer such adaptations from the fact that many of the descriptions of the *muthi* trade seem outdated. Ngubane claims that there were fixed prices for healing services, that diviners were organised into traditional guilds, and that there was a strict sexual division amongst the specialists. She presents an image of a tradition which is being dissolved in the urban areas:

The big difference is that the control and discipline of diviners provided by the traditional mode of organisation has scarcely any parallel in town. There a confused and turbulent situation is prevalent, conducive to the operation of a variety of self-appointed healers, including not a few charlatans. (Ngubane 1992, 374)

*Muthi* as a tradition and as a commodity has proven to be inherently flexible and malleable, and thus easily adaptable to new situations and new needs. This is one of the main reasons for the continued – even growing – interest in *muthi*. This adaptation is mentioned briefly in Berglund (1976):

... while diviners to a great extent are bound to traditional views on divination, herbalists constantly experiment with new materia and mixtures of these, the demand for medicines in varying fields constantly changing [sic] ... New herbalists launching new treatments are popular in Zulu society ... herbalists of another nation have a high reputation. There are people who will go to great inconvenience in order to obtain medicines from Tsonga, Swazi or Sotho herbalists ... Indian practitioners in Stanger claim that many of their patients are Zulu who have, occasionally, said that they approached Asian doctors because they were Indian and not Zulu! The popularity of a herbalist increases with distance. (Berglund 1976, 347)

... herbalists are the progressive ones who constantly reach for new avenues of manipulating powers entrusted to them. In part Western medical practice has had great influence on the thinking and work of herbalists, and in part new approaches to life have challenged them to seek and find new medicines that will act and react in response to new cultural and social settings ... There is in no society no limit to both the legitimate and illegitimate usage of the powers of substance, the powers manipulated by those who gave knowledge of doing so towards destruction and strengthening. (Berglund 1976, 257-258)

Cunningham (1992) notes how new medicines have become part of trade:

Most changes occur through addition of new species to the range of species used...some animal and plant species that formerly were seldom (if ever) used have been adopted... Examples are the more than 20 exotic plant species commercially sold as 'traditional' medicines in South Africa... (Cunningham 1992, 26)

According to an *inyanga*:

Before one could not charge money, today we have to. Before they would bring a fowl or other animal to pay with, or a bag of beans or whatever. If I get money I must not put it in the bank, but put it in a

pot in the house – like putting the animals in the yard – so that the ancestors can see the money and be happy.<sup>76</sup>

But although tradition and *muthi* are susceptible to innovative restructurings, there are certain limits to their ‘malleability’. Some changes need a longer time to be accepted as legitimate while others will never achieve that sanction.

### *Opposition to Changes. The 1915 Hearing*

Restructurings of the *muthi* trade have always been met with opposition from various sectors with various agendas. All traditions have inherent and fundamental resistance towards change; indeed, they would not be traditions if they were not seen as relatively static and eternal. Berglund mentions briefly how ‘conservative diviners’ strongly resented certain trends in the *muthi* trade and how they viewed some of the popular diviners as not fully competent according to tradition (Berglund 1976).

In Chapter 3, I mentioned that the early *muthi* traders, who were mainly male *inyangas* and young entrepreneurs, met with opposition from chiefs (see CNC hearing 1915). Some of the chiefs (reportedly) argued that *muthi* trading in Durban was against tradition and therefore had to be stopped. It is interesting to look more closely at some of the replies from the chiefs (as reported by the magistrates, all filed in CNC 193 1915/149). The main arguments were that *muthi* traders were breaching tradition because the traders were ‘charlatans’, they were not trained specialists, the *muthi* products they sold were not ‘traditional’ medicines, and that *muthi* was never meant to be sold, etc.

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<sup>76</sup> Interview with TrDr Queen Ntuli, 21 August 1997.

This 'anti-tradition' argument was put forward very strongly in Verulam, where the chiefs complained that

...the sale of these articles is prejudicial to the health and well being of the Natives. Formerly there were well known roots and herbs in large quantities in this District which were used for medicinal purposes by the Natives, the use of which was thoroughly understood by the older Natives, but today, owing to the indiscriminate sale of roots and herbs by the Natives under discussion, these remedies are not available to us - being almost extinct ... We had in former times in Zululand Native medicine men only. There were no such sales of medicines and roots etc. as we see today, and we say that the Government is responsible for this state of affairs because it was the Government who brought in the Native Beer System in Durban, and the Government has allowed the Natives and Indians to collect and sell these potions ... Since the country has been in existence there has never been such a thing as this sale of roots, medicines etc. by Natives. The articles sold as medicines are not medicines but rubbish and are a source of danger to the Natives. We find women and children today carrying bags of medicine which they have obtained at the "eMatsheni". In all towns this practice obtains ... We desire the sale of medicines abolished throughout the country and the Native medicine men to carry out their practice as in days past. (CNC 193 1915/149)

The chiefs in Eshowe argued that *inyangas* '...should not be allowed to part from their drugs etc. *by sale*, and only permitted to make use of their medicines personally when pursuing their avocations' (CNC 193 1915/149. My emphasis). This was reflected in Mahlabatini, where chiefs considered it 'advisable that medicine men should only be allowed to administer *and not to sell*. Many serious cases are known resulting from purchases made from Natives in Maritzburg and Durban' (CNC 193 1915/149. My emphasis). In Paulpietersburg the chiefs were against the trade 'owing to the fact that the purchases are so frequently imposed upon'. From Bergville it was reported that the chiefs were against the Durban trade 'as the vendors are generally unknown...' (CNC 193 1915/149). As mentioned in Chapter 3, people in the rural areas always knew who their local *inyangas* and *sangomas* were and what their specialities were. Now, anyone could start practising as a healer or trader as no one could know whether they were properly trained or not.

In Camperdown it was noted that the *muthi* traders were earning a 'considerable amount of money trading on the ignorance of ordinary Natives', and that there were also white men trading in eMatsheni, as '*anyone could sell these medicines*'. The chiefs noted that their control over their Native doctors was 'very light as they could not prevent them from visiting Durban ... Chief Lutayi remarked that he had himself visited Ematsheni since this subject was brought to their notice and he found that any native, whether licensed or not, was allowed a stand at which to carry on his sale of medicines, skins, and fats supposed to be of various wild animals such as lions, crocodile etc., so long as he paid the required daily fee' (CNC 193 1915/149. My emphasis).

At Ixopo, it was reported that '...some of [the chiefs] go as far as to express the opinion that even recognised doctors should not be allowed to roam about the country looking for patients, *as with the old Zulu customs* a doctor only left his kraal to go and doctor when he was asked to do so' (CNC 193 1915/149. My emphasis). At Umvoti, the magistrate reported that the chiefs were against the trade on the grounds that 'these men were invariably absent from home selling these articles when required in cases of illness' (CNC 193 1915/149). This sentiment was echoed in Port Shepstone: '...the practice of medicine men establishing themselves in towns and villages for the purpose of selling medicine, roots etc. is most undesirable.' '[*Inyangas* and *sangomas*] ...should remain in their respective Districts and be available for treatment of natives when occasion arises.' The chiefs also maintained that '...medicines should be administered by the medicine men themselves' (CNC 193 1915/149).

From Helpmakaar it was noted that '...besides these so-called medicines being injurious to health they tended to corrupt the mind of the youth as some were sold as love charms, etc. The gathering also stated that there had been persons who had come from the Coast [Durban?]

selling medicines' (CNC 193 1915/149). Chiefs in Stanger argued that the place in Durban known as eMatsheni should be abolished, and stated that 'their children were led astray and disappeared through the evil practices at eMatsheni... They said they had not protested as they thought it had Government sanction, but now that it is not [sic], they urge its abolition.' (CNC 193 1915/149). In Krantzkopf they noted that 'many people die from the effect of these things bought in Durban and elsewhere.' Also, that young boys and girls spent too much money in Durban on love philtres and other '...useless articles, supposed to have various properties, some of which are harmful' (CNC 193 1915/149). The Inanda Division at Ndwedwe argued that '...the purchase of the articles in question not only absorbs the cash of the boys working in Durban but it is also a danger to the girls in the District when the boys return'. (The Inanda Division also wanted to add that the sale of beer at the eMatsheni 'is a great evil', as most of the money earned in Durban was spent there, and very little came home') (CNC 193 1915/149).

These were some of the remarks that were made by rural chiefs in Natal about the emerging *muthi* trade in Durban in 1915. There may be many reasons for this negative stance. Both the chief and the *inyanga/sangoma* were influential and powerful people in the social structure, and the sentiments the chiefs expressed could be attributed to rivalry of some kind. After the Code of Native Law in 1891, the *inyanga* came under the sway of the chief (needing the chief's recommendation to get a licence), while the activities of the *sangoma* were made illegal outright. An example of the kind of rivalry alluded to can be found in David Lan's famous account of the alliance between spirit mediums and guerrillas on the one side, and chiefs and government forces on the other in Zimbabwe during the war for independence (Lan 1985). Another motive could be jealousy over the economic benefits the traders accumulated over the years.

However it is most likely that the chief's position was simply a conservative stance against what they perceived to be shrewd manipulation by the young entrepreneurs who had abandoned the rural areas to take up businesses in the towns. The chiefs saw themselves as important custodians and protectors of tradition and were simply unable to accept such changes. They had a clear idea of what tradition granted, and what was unacceptable. The traditions surrounding *muthi* were very 'real' as urbanisation was still in its early stages. Furthermore, the rural chiefs had a vested interest in retaining a traditional environment, as their power base was ineluctably linked to traditional values.

### **RESTRUCTURING TRADITION IN RUSSELL STREET**

The real question to be asked is why such sentiments as the above have survived over the years and are still very much in evidence today, almost a century later? In 1995, Mr Mhlongo, a famous *inyanga* and president of the Traditional Healers Association warned about the 'charlatans' practising as so-called healers, who were only out to earn a quick buck (in Sunday Tribune, 8 October 1995). He was referring to the traders in Russell Street, who he said were 'trading on the growing interest in traditional healing to rip off the unsuspecting who believe they are buying *muthi* from an authentic healer or *sangoma*' (Sunday Tribune, 8 October 1995). 'People are becoming aware that traditional medicine is not as dangerous as has been made out. It does protect and prevent illness. We believe prevention is better than cure so even if we are not ill, we still use herbs as a preventive' (Sunday Tribune, 8 October 1995). Mr Mhlongo pointed out that this increase in interest in traditional medicine came with a negative side: 'an abuse of centuries-old tradition' (Sunday Tribune, 8 October 1995).



He argued that traditional healers should undergo an examination to prove that they were authentic, because the charlatans on the streets could not be trusted:

“These are just people who have lost their jobs, and are just looking to make money ... They pretend to be collectors, but the things they sell are not the right ones ... Not just anyone can become a traditional healer. It is a calling, and these people are the ones who are creating doubts about whether traditional medicine works or not ... A traditional healer must remain at home because his patients will come to him. You don't move around all the place. We must stop this abuse” (Sunday Tribune, 8 October 1995).

A few weeks later, the Natal Witness also had a long interview with Mr Mhlongo (The Natal Witness, 7 November 1995). Again, he used the opportunity to lash out at street traders and at the gatherers; ‘they are not traditional healers, and they should be arrested for treating people on the streets *where the wind blows everything onto those herbs*’,<sup>77</sup> he told the reporter. ‘There is useful medicine on the streets, but it is dangerous if sold in that fashion. Some gatherers purposefully give the wrong information and others have very little knowledge’ (The Natal Witness, 7 November 1995). Unemployment means that extinction of certain indigenous *muthi* plants is unavoidable, Mhlongo said. The gatherers were not trained properly in collecting *muthi* plants: ‘Gatherers will be told by commercial people that they need twenty bags of a herb. So gatherers will chop down twenty trees. They are collecting wrongly because no one has taught them properly. A traditional healer will not destroy the whole plant’, he said. ‘Traditional healing is a calling, and a proper traditional healer trains for five years under a traditional healer who is officially licensed by the Department of Health ... A real traditional healer must learn in the bush. He must see the leaves, the bark. He must know the feel, the taste and the smell. If you bring him to Durban to look at herbs on the street he will make mistakes because some herbs look alike’ (The Natal Witness, 7 November 1995).

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<sup>77</sup> The ‘wind’ referred to here will be discussed further below.

There are three kinds of traditional healers, Mhlongo said - traditional doctor, diviner and fortune teller. 'But now, because of unemployment, some are doing all three. A diviner might throw bones and tell you what is wrong, then he should tell you to see a traditional healer. But instead you have fortune tellers starting to become diviners, and then calling themselves traditional doctors' (The Natal Witness, 7 November 1995). He went on to describe how the old idea of traditional healers as people hiding in the bush was outdated: 'Now you find traditional healers wearing ties, high heels, even sitting in universities' (The Natal Witness, 7 November 1995).

According to Mhlongo, the changes in traditional medicine had implications for most aspects of daily life:

Where herbs are used correctly, there will be no divorces, no unmarried mothers and fathers, the male will choose the right partners who will not leave him and who will be happy. Even for those females who are cruel and jealous and don't want to share their men - there are herbs to tame them ...

And there is medicine to unify your children and for the correct upbringing. But because the right herbs are no longer being used, the children of today have become parents - they tell their mothers and fathers what to do ... There are medicines to strengthen the king's regiments. Traditionally, only the king can declare war and people will fight only when the king says fight, and stop when the king says stop. But now other people are taking the medicines, and so there is fighting all the time. (The Natal Witness, 7 November 1995)

There is at least one big difference between the traders in the early 1900s and the traders in the 1990s: while the former were young men (often in conflict with elders), the latter comprised mainly of unskilled/untrained women. Both groups were considered as radical elements and threats to 'traditional' authority and custom. While the negative voices in 1915 generally argued against the capitalisation of the *muthi*, the 1990s opposition was to female intrusion into the *muthi* trade.

According to 'Zulu tradition', 'pollution' (or *umnyama*) is a 'mystical force' which is closely associated with women (Ngubane 1977). *Umnyama* is conceptualised as a mystical force which diminishes resistance to disease and creates conditions of bad luck, misfortune (*amashwa*), 'disagreeableness' and 'repulsiveness' (*isidina*). This force is also considered to be highly contagious. Especially during reproductive periods (childbirth and lactation period) and menstruation, women are considered to be dangerously pollutive. During their menstruation, women are not allowed to touch or be near *muthi*, they must avoid crops and cattle, and not engage in sexual intercourse. Sexual intercourse is polluting for both women and men, and neither should be in contact with *muthi* the day after engaging in such activities. Pollution is also associated with death, and mourners are considered to be highly polluted and therefore to be avoided. It was mentioned in the introduction that according to Zulu cosmology, people are in constant threat from the negative elements in their environment. People both consciously and unintentionally absorb these elements or spread them. Thus the idea of a pavement market selling *muthi* is regarded as illogical and dangerous according to tradition because the *muthi* is under constant threat from the 'wind' which '*blows everything on to those herbs*' (see above interview with Mhlongo in *The Natal Witness*, 7 Nov. 1995 My emphasis). What Mhlongo referred to was this 'mystical force', which could stem from passers-by or, perhaps most importantly, from the female traders who sell *muthi* every day of the month the whole year. The female gatherers, who had been active since the 1930s and 1940s, were also included in the criticism, but since their pollution was not as visible as that of the street traders, it was still possible to assume that they in fact adhered to the customary cleanliness rules. But in the case of the street traders who worked on the streets every day, many of them could clearly be seen breastfeeding their babies. Thus, the main complaint of

the *muthi* market in Russell Street is that the *muthi* is 'dirty' and 'polluted', and therefore weak or even dangerous (as it could be contaminated by an evil sorcerer).

When people say the *muthi* in Russell Street is 'dirty' they also refer to the 'physical' dirt from dust and traffic fumes, and from the street traders who are considered to be filthy and poor people. The *muthi* in the Indian shops is cleaner because they are more protected from 'the wind', fewer people can be in close contact with the medicines, and they are nicely stocked on shelves or in clean containers. They are more expensive, however, as the Indian traders have to pay rent for their shops. Thus, most people, even healers and the hospitals, buy from the traders in Russell Street, even though they complain about the *muthi*'s quality. When the Umbrella Body heard about plans for a new market they supported it not necessarily in solidarity with the street traders, but so that the region's main *muthi* market would be 'cleaner'.

An *Inyanga* at one of Durban's traditional hospitals said that traditionally, it is important to pick the *muthi* yourself:

It is important to go to the forest and bush so that your ancestors can be with you and show you where the *muthi* is. There are certain rules or customs which we have to follow, you have to talk to the ancestors to help you put power in the *muthi*. Sometimes you put white beads or five cent coins on the ground around the tree, especially those *muthi* for luck. You must leave something back. If you see only one herb there, you must kneel down on your knees and ask and give the ancestors to help them find you more. Then after you will see lots of herbs. This communication is very important. It is the *sangoma* or *inyanga* who must do this, not the patient. Even the ladies in Russell Street who pick these things do this ... Russell Street is a problem, that is why we don't want to buy there. But we have to...<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Interview with TrDr Queen Ntuli at Freedom Traditional Hospital, 21 August 1997.

Early in my fieldwork, one of my informants had swollen legs and she was in pain. She was convinced that someone had sprinkled 'tiny worms' in front of her 'shop', and that her legs were contaminated. When I heard this I thought that she meant it in a physical sense, and I made sure I did not wear sandals the next time I visited. The next day, I found out that the 'tiny worms' were in fact invisible, and that they only attacked certain people. I urged her to see a doctor (her skin was about to burst open), but she said she had everything under control and that she knew exactly what to do and what herbs to mix. There was nothing a doctor could do in this case, she claimed. She said she did consult biomedical doctors and medicines in some cases but that in most cases she would treat herself.

Later, I learnt that the women traders had made (or invented) a certain *intelezi* mix called *intolwane* (*Elephantorrhiza*) which they sprinkled over their *muthi* every morning to protect and clean them from the contamination threats. All female newcomers were ordered to do the same. The women also planted sticks of a certain type of herb called *isiqunga* (*Cymbopogon*) in their bags of *muthi* to further protect the *muthi* from pollution. These herbs are also used in other cleansing rituals and for washing during and after menstruation (see Hutchings 1996, pp. 18-19 and 126). A trader told me that if the women had to stay at home a week out of every month, the men would take over their trading spaces. In addition to these measures, traders make sure their ancestors are content by burning various herbs, and by sharing drink and food with ancestors by pouring a portion of it over the *muthi* before drinking it, and by leaving some leftovers from lunch, etc.

The women in Russell Street therefore restructured tradition in order to operate under the sanction of tradition. They 'invented' a purifying *muthi* mix for the *muthi* market, which was based on other similar mixes (one of the most important qualities of herbal *muthis* is their cleansing properties, together with their healing and protective powers). Thus, they

neutralised the traditional 'threat' of their femininity through the strategic (inventive) use of tradition.

As mentioned above, new cures and *muthi* mixes have been introduced to deal with new problems and diseases. The chiefs in the CNC hearing in 1915 complained about the new *muthi* products that were being sold at Ematsheni (the Native Market and the Victoria Street Beerhall). Although such things were illegal, there seemed to be a great market for particular medicines and potions which could improve the consumer's love and working life. A question to be asked is whether these new medicines emerged as a problem only when the trade started in Durban. In other words, were such potions completely new to the Durban markets (as suggested by archival documents), or did they in fact exist in the rural areas (in the 'traditional' context)? Since no one has been able to answer these questions, one is left to the claims of the archival documents. There is no doubt that the Durban *muthi* trade was influenced by its surroundings. In the 1920s and 1930s, traders learnt a great deal from the biomedical chemists (see Chapter 3), as did the healers from missionaries and medical doctors. Many traders, who opened shops, also started large mail-order businesses, and advertised widely in the press (see Chapter 3). They also started to process *muthi* in similar ways to the commercial methods and campaigns of the pharmaceutical industry, by packaging their goods and encouraging self-medication. This trend too was perceived as a major break with tradition, as the role and functions of the *inyanga* and the *sangoma* were undermined or even made redundant. Ready-to-use cures with specific applications, which saved people the time of going to a traditional doctor, were also introduced. But the pharmaceutical industry was also in some ways influenced by the *muthi* trade. Their advertisement campaigns used the same techniques of communicating to the burgeoning African consumer masses by referring to 'culture' and 'tradition'.

Recently, as mentioned towards the end of Chapter 3, hospitals for traditional medicine have been introduced, which perhaps will be the new growth industry within the commercial sector of traditional medicine. Another niche seen developing in the 1990s is colleges for traditional medicine, where candidates can learn the art of traditional healing and become 'licensed' professional *inyangas*.

### **THE DEVELOPMENT OF TRADITION**

I will now proceed to deal with the changes in the form and organisation of the tradition of *muthi* trading that were imposed externally - what I refer to as the 'development' of the *muthi* trade. This section will focus on the attempts by the biomedical profession and conservationists to change aspects of the tradition of *muthi* trading and consumption. As mentioned earlier, the reason for limiting my focus to these institutions is because these two bodies or groups have been the most important external agents of change in regard to the tradition surrounding *muthi* trading since the 1970s. It is these two 'developers' with whom traders in Russell Street deal most frequently, mostly through individuals in the City Health Department and the Institute of Natural Resources (INR). Some traders say that these bodies pose a bigger threat to the *muthi* trade than the Informal Trade Department. SEWU and the Street Committee are therefore both actively involved in protecting the traders' interests in relation to these bodies.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, in this thesis, 'development' is taken to refer to the ideology and actions of the colonial and apartheid state and other 'outsiders', who viewed traditional medicine as something which needed informed intervention and which also could be used

strategically in segregationist policies. These development interventions were therefore not solely instituted under the banners of 'progress', 'improvement', 'rationalisation' and 'modernisation' - as is the case in conventional development. In the same way as for many of the 'restructurings' mentioned above, these development interventions also involved the active strategic use of tradition to meet specific goals (governance and social control). The history of *muthi* trading was strongly influenced by these processes of development, because they assumed very real economic, political and legal forms, and were based on powerful superior ideologies.

I will refrain from making normative comments on these complex processes and the resultant hybridities, and will rather attempt to limit my presentation to merely describing two of the development initiatives involving the *muthi* trade that have taken place over the past 20-25 years. The point is to show that the tradition of *muthi* trading developed as a result of *both* restructuring and development. As will be seen below, the development of tradition – the active use of tradition by external agents – is not only about providing order and improvement (modernisation theory's development agenda) but also constitutes an important tool for agents 'outside' the trade to achieve their ends. It is only through the analysis of *both* restructuring and development that the hybrid 'modern tradition' of *muthi* trading can be understood, and the *bricolage* of the agents involved can be fully appreciated.

Historically, missionaries were the first 'outsiders' to start developing the *muthi* trade (see Chapter 3). They set out to save the 'innocent native' from the harmful practices of the 'witchdoctor'. Their perceptions and attitudes were mainly rooted in religious ideology, but they were also closely associated with the emerging medical science and colonial policy in general (see Comaroff 1993). In the late nineteenth century, the colonial state formulated



laws which were to govern the trade. The legislation pertaining to the *muthi* trade constituted a contradictory mix of strategies in service to modernist development ideology (upgrading the traditional) *and* those supporting the policies of separate development (see Chapter 3). The official policy was as much a paternalistic policy designed to protect the 'ignorant Native' against 'unscrupulous herbalists' and their harmful and evil practices, as it was a tool for apartheid governance. Ideally, authorities would have liked more than anything to abolish the trade. However, they also realised that this would be impossible, and that strategically controlled, the trade could be used to their advantage. Furthermore, acknowledging that the state could not (or would not) provide alternative health care, they implemented policies which neither banned the trade outright, nor fully recognised it. Their agenda was to develop the *muthi* trade by banning the practices within it that they deemed harmful and then limiting the remaining 'acceptable' traditions by putting up legal barriers. In line with (institutional and territorial) segregationist policy, tradition was to be tolerated and even encouraged, as long as it was kept separate from the urban areas. Custom and tradition, in this respect, was 'state ordained and state enforced' (Mamdani 1996, 22). In keeping with this, in Mamdani's terms, the apartheid state's rule through 'decentralized despotism' meant that *citizens* were to be 'above' or 'beyond' *muthi*, while *subjects* were 'deurbanized' and encouraged to re-traditionalise (Mamdani 1996). The South African state (as a typical African colonial state), Mamdani claims, was bifurcated:

It contained a duality: two forms of power under a single hegemonic authority. Urban power spoke the language of civil society and civil rights, rural power of community and culture. Civil power claimed to protect rights, customary power pledged to enforce tradition. The former was organized on the principle of differentiation to check the concentration of power, the latter around the principle of fusion to ensure a unitary authority. (Mamdani 1996, 18)

The state therefore used tradition strategically by attempting to change the *muthi* trade – or develop it – by use of legislation and force.

The developments of tradition, which brought specific changes to that tradition, (on which I will focus in the following section), started to emerge in the 1970s, during which time there was an international shift in attitude towards traditional medicine (led by the World Health Organisation, WHO) and the informal sector (led by the International Labour Office, ILO). Other organisations and institutions followed the trend, and more research into ‘traditional’ and ‘alternative’ medical and economic systems was initiated. This resulted in new approaches towards *muthi* traders, as health officials and environmentalists set out to develop the trade rather than discard it outright.

It is interesting to note that both ‘development’ agendas presented below have in common a similar scientific base. An important aspect of modernisation theory is the role of science and its invention of the underdeveloped and the informal, along with its intention to develop and formalise (Long & Long 1992; Sachs 1992; Cowen & Shenton 1996). Furthermore, whereas the so-called ‘development’ policies under segregation and apartheid were imposed by law, the development initiatives that I will deal with below are imposed in a different, almost contradictory way. While the apartheid state was openly against the trade, the developers referred to here claim that they support, understand and recognise the trade, while ‘only’ wishing to change or reform (at least) the worst aspects of it. They display the appropriate post-apartheid political correctness, accepting accolades for changing their view, but at the same time evincing a silent threat: ‘We didn’t have to consult you! Do as we say, and we will both win...’ The developers dealt with below (the biomedical sector and nature conservation bodies) have the resources (economically, politically, and ideologically: i.e. the scientific

basis needed) to lobby effectively for policies that restrict or even ban the trade. But, just as it was impossible for the colonial and apartheid state to ban the trade, it is even more so for the post-apartheid state. The new reality demands consultation and participation, but what we see emerging is a relationship based on a continuance of a discourse that allows for both recognition and condemnation, which emerged in the 1940s and 1950s (see Chapter 3). This is partly due to the fact that modern development doctrines (even post-apartheid development doctrine) are still based upon the intent to develop through the exercise of trusteeship over society (Cowen & Shenton 1996; Nustad 1999).

Before I begin this section it is important to note, that although they will not be dealt with below, SEWU was also an important actor in the process of changing the *muthi* trade in the 1990s. Although women were trading in Russell Street three to four years before SEWU was formed, SEWU helped traders to consolidate their position as legitimate *muthi* traders. Furthermore, SEWU's ideas of female empowerment and the introduction of 'modern' and effective political organisation has undoubtedly aided the women in Russell Street in conquering one of the most viable street market niches in Durban's informal economy.

### ***The Biomedical Sector and the Development of Traditional Medicine***

In the same way as I have demonstrated in Chapter 3, Comaroff has forcefully argued that the development of British colonialism in Africa as a cultural enterprise was inseparable from the rise of biomedicine as science (Comaroff 1991; 1992; 1993; Swanson 1977). In Chapter 3, I showed how scientific medicine sought to intervene into the *muthi* trade by lobbying for strict legislation. From the 1970s, the World Health Organisation (WHO) urged its member states, especially those in Africa and Asia, to implement policies of recognition and co-operation

with regard to their traditional health care systems. The argument was that more could be achieved by working with the sector than against it. It was acknowledged that up to 80% of the population in the Third World consulted traditional or alternative medicine, and that traditional medical practitioners were important role players. There were also emerging sentiments that biomedicine could learn from traditional medicine (the social aspects of healing, holism, and even some of the cures), nevertheless, the aim was to change, by persuasion, certain elements of traditional medicine in order to make it more acceptable.

South African authorities were very late in following this international trend. It was only in the 1990s that programmes were initiated to create a dialogue between the two health care systems. The following section will deal briefly with the Durban City Health Department's programmes directed at traditional medicine and the *muthi* trade, which took the form of health education, seminars and the creation of the Umbrella Body for traditional healers. The City Health Department has, through its Environmental Health Services Officer, established a good working relationship with both street trader bodies in Russell Street (Street Committee and SEWU).

The most important initiative from the City Health Department was to facilitate the formation of the Umbrella Body. It was through this forum that the market issue was negotiated, and a dialogue on various other issues was introduced (see Chapter 4). The approach towards the healers and traders was characterised by openness and lack of arrogance, which created a conducive atmosphere for interaction and co-operation. Both 'parties' had their own agendas. The healers and traders sought official recognition, legitimate access to the public health sphere, improved conditions, and new legislation. The City Health Department for their part, wanted to incorporate traditional medicine into its programmes in order to improve the health

of the City's inhabitants. The most important goal was to unite in combating AIDS and STDs (Sexually Transmitted Diseases); but that was the official agenda. In practice, to unite meant that traditional medical practitioners and traders had to change their ways. Tradition had to be restructured to meet the challenges of modernity. This time, however, it was not the traders who introduced the changes. Both the traders and practitioners needed to be informed and convinced that certain traditional practices were deleterious and had to be done away with.

The priority was to educate the healers in general hygiene and in the prevention and treatment of especially AIDS and STDs. It is believed that many people have been infected with HIV or have contracted other diseases after consulting *inyangas* and *sangomas* due to poor hygiene and dubious practices. Some common cures involve making incisions with a knife or razor blade and applying a powdered mix of *muthi* in order to introduce the *muthi* rapidly into the blood stream. This administration technique is often referred to as *mgaba*, and is often performed when treating inflammations and abscesses. In many cases, the *inyanga* uses the same razor blade on different patients with tragic outcomes. There are also reports of other cases of fatal treatments by less scrupulous elements of the trade.

In addition, the City Health Department has reacted to the fact that many traditional healers and doctors tell patients that they can cure AIDS and other serious diseases. A survey done in Russell Street by an Environmental Health Officer at the City Health Department revealed that 45,5% of the traders interviewed said they could cure AIDS<sup>79</sup> (Mkhize 1995). *Inyangas* I have interviewed regard AIDS in the same light as any other STD. According to one, AIDS stems from women who sleep around, and who do not wash themselves.<sup>80</sup> AIDS, one *inyanga* claimed, is just one of many misfortunes that others might send you, and although it is more

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<sup>79</sup> According to the survey, only 6,8% said they could not cure AIDS while 33% did not know (Mkhize 1995).

<sup>80</sup> Interview with Henry Mlangeni, 19 March 1996.

difficult to cure, it is curable. Thus, you can protect yourself against AIDS as you can protect yourself from anything else. The above-mentioned survey also found that 51,1% of the Russell Street traders believed that AIDS could be prevented (Mkhize 1995). Many *inyangas* and *sangomas* say they can cure AIDS because they claim there is no reason why ancestors and God can not control HIV when they can heal everything else. Therefore, from a 'traditional' rationale, there is no reason why they should be condemned for giving false hope.

At one of Durban's new traditional hospitals, Freedom Traditional Hospital, they have tried to incorporate the two medical systems in their treatment of patients:

We are trying to treat AIDS, but we do not have a cure. We can ease the suffering by treating the symptoms such as weakness, coughing, diarrhoea and so on. There is also no space for them in the other hospitals, so they can come here and we will care for them. Many are neglected by their families because of fear. We have to explain the patient how they got AIDS. There is no traditional version of how they got this because this is new, so we tell them the scientific version. We even give out condoms here for people with SDTs. We say when you are using our medicine, you must use a condom, and you must bring your partner in for treatment also. They must go to the doctor and get antibiotics before they come to us. We send patients for blood tests if we think they are sick sometimes. We have to explain them that it is not because someone poisoned them, but medical reasons.<sup>81</sup>

This meeting of two health care systems takes place in the interface of two powerful ideologies and forms of knowledge, but the relationship between them assumes the form of a modern *scientific* medicine developing a *traditional* medicine. In practical terms, this 'development' involves the transmission or superimposition of 'information', 'education' and rational scientific improvements on to an irrational 'traditional' knowledge which needs 'modernisation'. It involves separating the acceptable 'progressive' aspects which are able to be developed, from the 'regressive' aspects which are destined to disappear. The approach is

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<sup>81</sup> Interview with TrDr Queen Ntuli at Freedom Traditional Hospital 21 August 1997.

both politically and morally correct (co-operation, dialogue), and strategically justifiable in that it achieves its desired ends (more effective cures), which again are judged according to scientific standards.

But this development is not only about upgrading the traditional (i.e. modernisation theory's version of 'progress'). It also involves using tradition strategically to meet defined ends.

Another similar case of adapting tradition in service of the fight against AIDS was reported recently in the Daily Mail & Guardian:

Youth clubs in Mpumalanga are being urged to *introduce* the ancient SiSwati custom of virginity testing in an attempt to fight the spread of the pandemic. Mpumalanga has the second highest Aids and HIV infection rates in South Africa. The first youth club to *adopt the practice*, Vukuzakhe Youth Club ... has already tested 200 local teenagers. Club president John Mabaso said ... that the age-old custom has been *modified*, however, to also test boys, and not just girls. The club is assisted by well-known KwaZulu-Natal virginity tester, Fikile Mhlongo, who was responsible for *reintroducing the custom* in that province. "We want the children to be aware of the consequences of indulging in sex before reaching adulthood," said Mabaso. (Daily Mail & Guardian 19 January 1999. My emphasis)

Here, tradition is used in a very concrete manner to control adolescent sexuality as part of the fight against AIDS and STDs. In a similar, albeit less obvious, way, the *muthi* trade is considered an important role-player in combating AIDS. Tradition holds sway over its subjects in ways that become useful for those both 'within' and 'outside' the tradition who wish to influence the behaviour and ideas of the people concerned.

### *Developing Tradition for the Environment*

As mentioned in Chapter 3, environmentalists started becoming actively involved in the *muthi* trade in the 1970s. Their approach towards the *muthi* trade was uncompromising and often

violent: the trade in certain plants and animals had to be stopped at once or there would be an ecological crisis. At first, the concomitant result of their policy was that the trade was forced into an illegal underground activity, and prosecution only affected the weakest section of the market chain: the female gatherers, who were prosecuted on a massive scale. In the mid-1980s, a new approach was adopted, and *muthi* growing schemes were initiated (e.g. Silverglen Nursery). Following this came the first research projects into the *muthi* trade, which mapped the ecological dangers, and which argued for co-operation with traders and urged them to cultivate their own *muthi* (see Chapter 3).

The environmental problems of the trade are very real. Each year thousands of indigenous plants are gathered from the bushveld, grasslands and forests, putting severe pressure on a number of threatened species. At the same time, the habitats for indigenous plants are shrinking as more and more natural vegetation is destroyed for agriculture, forestry, industry, roads and rapidly expanding urban settlements. With a growing demand for *muthi*, it is expected that many of the most popular species will soon be extinct. This is reflected in the higher prices for many varieties of *muthi* which are becoming rare. At greatest risk are popular, slow growing species with a limited distribution.

Cunningham, one of the most influential researchers in this field, refers to the 'traditional conservation practices' which guided the trade in the past and which ensured a sustainable resource base (Cunningham 1992). He distinguishes between 'inadvertent controls' ('taboos, religious controls, technical inadequacies and seasonal and social restrictions') and 'intentional management practices' (Cunningham 1992, 18-26). In dealing with the inadvertent controls, he says that 'practising as a herbalist or diviner was a specialist activity and knowledge about resources was restricted by spiritual calling, ritual... and special



respectful (*hlonipa*) names for plants...that were not commonly known to outsiders' (Cunningham 1992, 18). Also, 'the predominance of women (rather than both sexes) practising as diviners in Southern Africa, and men as herbalists... also served to limit the number of resource users' (Cunningham 1992, 19). Amongst intentional management practices, he mentions the protection of trees and bushes for their fruits or shade, the protection of vegetation at gravesites, and the careful harvesting practices which were governed by 'religious belief'. He concludes that these conservation practices were put in place mostly to protect the powers of the chief rather than for reasons of scarcity. He then goes on to describe the changes to these traditions:

The emergence of commercial medicinal plant gatherers in response to urban demand for medicines and rural unemployment has resulted in indigenous medical plants as being [sic] considered an open access or common property resource instead of a resource only used by specialists. The resultant commercial, large scale harvesting has been the most significant change, although seasonal and gender related restrictions have also altered... In Natal, it appears that restrictions placed by traditional community leaders... have reduced commercial exploitation of local traditional medicinal plant resources. With cultural change, increased entry into the cash economy and rising unemployment however, these controls are breaking down. (Cunningham 1992, 24)

What emerges from Cunningham's and other presentations is that the African people (especially the female gatherers) are losing their respect for tradition, and that this is creating serious conservation problems.

The solution which conservationists have come up with, is to cultivate *muthi* on a large scale to meet the increasing demand. The main problem has been to convince the authorities that cheap land has to be made available so that a sufficient quantity and a low enough price can provide a sustainable solution to the resource problems of the trade. Conservationists have acknowledged that if the price of cultivation is too high, people will still gather wild stocks as

before. What they have not realised is that in order for these schemes to be successful, they would also have to get the thousands of *muthi* gatherers on board. If traders and healers start growing their own *muthi*, many gatherers would lower their prices even more rather than lose their only income source.

Many traditional medical practitioners, especially the older generation, say that the idea of *muthi* farms is against tradition, and that if gatherers and street traders had collected their *muthi* according to the traditional harvesting custom we would not be experiencing these problems. The power of *muthi*, whether animal or herbal, they claim, lies in the fact that God created these entities, and that the ancestors made them available to their children. Man cannot grow a *muthi* tree or bush and think that it will heal someone, they argue. The healing power lies in the *muthis* 'naturalness' and in the way the it is customarily gathered and prepared.

Another conservation strategy has been to try to change 'traditional' consumer habits by replacing *muthi* species that are threatened by extinction with similar species that are more prolifically available. Other opinions have argued for a new production method, whereby herbs or animals are processed into tablets, which is intended to distance the *muthi* consumer from the natural source and make it cleaner and more 'scientific'. The Institute of Natural Resources included a question on this issue in their surveys in Russell Street, and found that 98% of the respondents preferred 'more modern and hygienically packed medicines' (FAO 1998, 72). Many people I have spoken to have also indicated that traditional medicine should be more modern in this sense. This trend has similarly been reported in Indonesia, where the traditional medicine (*jamu*) industry has modernised rapidly into a high-technological multi-million dollar venture with over 350 factories (see Afdhal & Welsch 1988). The main

rationale for these modernisation sentiments is that it is believed that such practices would promote cleanliness, which is seen as imperative for traditional medicine. It is also believed that it would make traditional medicine more credible and acceptable in relation to biomedicine. In this case too, however, there has been strong opposition to these changes in tradition. Mr Mhlongo, in the interview cited above also said he was against traditional medicines being sold over the counter:

Research is being done by people who want to find out if certain herbs can be made into western medicine. We don't want to sell our medicine over the counter. It will put traditional healers out of a job. Our herbs are not like Western medicines, because ours are still as raw as they are in the jungle, and only the healer can give you the right dose and ingredients. (Sunday Tribune, 8 Oct. 1995)

The relationship between conservationists and *muthi* traders in the 1990s has been one of dialogue and exchange. Both parties have gained from the co-operation. The Street Committee in Russell Street gave much of the credit for the new *muthi* market to the Institute of Natural Resources and their research project into the trade (INR 1996).

Our ancestors told you [referring to Myles Mander of the INR] to help us, and you have, we are very grateful. We like Silverglen [*muthi* nursery], and we need more of this!<sup>82</sup>

Umbrella Body representatives believed that the INR report which was done for the Informal Trade Department, and which effectively argued for a new market to be built by emphasising the economic and health care values and the future potentials of the Russell Street *muthi* market, helped them in their endeavours. The report stressed the number of jobs created by the trade and the huge amounts of money saved by the state through the traditional health care

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<sup>82</sup> TrDr Patience Koloko, President of Umbrella Body at a meeting 18 June 1997.

sector in Durban.

You should use this information and go to government [applause...] Develop the industry! Grow plants! Where is the leadership to lobby government? If you don't do anything someone else more resourceful will do it before you! Don't let the established take it over, it belongs to the black people, the Zulus! Demand government support at all levels! Develop the industry, and start growing *muthi*! We have asked the customers if they mind buying cultivated *muthi*, and they don't mind, they want it cleaner and better, not from dirty streets!<sup>83</sup>

Co-operation was a strategy that helped both parties: the traders were acknowledged for their economic and health care contributions, while conservationists – by showing how big the trade is – could more effectively argue for immediate and effective measures and policies to solve the sustainability crisis of the trade. But this exchange has also worked against traders. As expressed by an Indian trader who has worked with conservationists since the 1970s: 'we gave them lots of information, and they use it against us by lobbying for stricter legislation'.<sup>84</sup> The INR strategy is different from that of SEWU, which has been mainly to present the trade as a marginal and survivalist activity which needs development and support (see Chapter 4). The Institute of Natural Resources strategy rather focused on the development potentials of an already successful and wealthy trade. Conservationists believed that an open and formalised market system would be easier to observe and that it would be easier to train and educate the traders once they were off the streets. According to Myles Mander of the Institute of Natural Resources, the new formal market had several conservation benefits:

Better preserved products = less waste and less harvested from wild

Better organisation = better institutions to work with for conservation or better management of wild populations

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<sup>83</sup> Myles Mander of the INR at Umbrella Body meeting 18 June 1997.

<sup>84</sup> Interview with Loganathan Govender, 28 August 1997.

Dispersed market = more people to work with = greater costs and less effectiveness of coverage

Benefits to INR for lobbying = agreement with traders = they help me with my research into marketing and I help them with the information produced and also develop additional info [not necessary for my work] that can be used to promote traders welfare.<sup>85</sup>

The question of the *muthi* trade's sustainability is an important one for both the people involved in the trade and all who wish to preserve South Africa's indigenous flora and fauna. The Institute of Natural Resources have, to some extent, been successful in making the traders aware of the dangers posed to their future operations. Most of the traders and gatherers are, however, more concerned with short-term income than long-term sustainability. The SEWU branch in Russell Street has now appointed an environmental officer who will try to convey the sentiments of the traders to conservation bodies. The environmental officer said SEWU supported the *muthi* farm schemes, but argued that there was a need for cheap land. She argued that unless the government helped them to get hold of *muthi* by other means, they would have to continue as before, despite the threat to the environment.<sup>86</sup> SEWU's strategy (the Russell Street branch) here seems to be to simply continue as they are, using the argument of marginalisation and 'meeting basic needs', while waiting for government intervention (in this case constructive development and conservation policy) to solve the crisis.<sup>87</sup> In the meantime, because this may take some time, they will carry on as before, and (rightly) blame the government for bringing the trade closer to an environmental catastrophe. Indeed, there is no way to deal with this issue without government intervention. If the traders in Russell Street stopped buying from gatherers or stopped selling, others would simply take

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<sup>85</sup> Myles Mander reply to questions via email, 19 January 1999.

<sup>86</sup> Interview with Jabu Mbele, 25 July 1998.

<sup>87</sup> The INR and traders have a strong argument: by addressing these issues – i.e. facilitating large scale cultivation of *muthi* – one addresses both the needs of the poor and of the environment.

over. The traders will never let go of their hard-won positions. They also know that when government starts to address the resource problems of the trade, they will stand to benefit. They are simply waiting for development intervention (practical and concrete 'development' as in the conventional use of the term). This is exactly the same strategy as that used during the struggle for a new market, which was the most important issue for the traders up until 1998. Traders knew that if they defied the threat of evictions and endured the horrific conditions on Russell Street they would in the end be 'given' a new market: i.e. that it would be worth it in the end to wait for development. It is therefore important to note that development is not an entirely 'negative' and overriding force, but that it also enables certain strategies, both political and economic, for those to be 'developed' (see Chabal & Daloz 1999; Nustad 1999).

To round off this section on conservationists and the *muthi* trade, it is interesting to note that neither party links these sustainability problems to a wider political economy of colonisation, apartheid and post-apartheid. If one contextualises the *muthi* trade in this way, one will see that the issue is far more complex. Agriculture and commercial forestry in South Africa pose a much bigger threat to the natural vegetation both historically and presently than the *muthi* trade has or ever will, and the wealth accumulated by the former not only far exceeds that of the *muthi* trade, but is also concentrated among fewer individuals. This is a classic case of the rich capitalist world, which controls and consumes most of the world's natural, economic and social resources, imposing environmental measures on the poorer classes, who try to make a living from the left-overs. In order to create a morally just and historically correct debate, these issues need to be addressed while trying to solve the very real problems involved. What makes the debate around the environmental aspects of *muthi* trading particularly difficult, is that it is not only about economy, but also involves a cultural institution.

## “D’URBANISED TRADITION”: A CONCLUSION

I have presented a history of one of the largest and most important sectors of South Africa’s informal economy, the *muthi* trade, which has included the analysis of agency from ‘below’ (‘restructuring’) and from ‘above’ (‘development’). I have shown how the tradition of *muthi* trading has changed since it was introduced into the Durban (urban) setting. This was done by using the paradigm of tradition and the concepts of ‘restructuring’ and ‘development’. I have described and analysed how this tradition has been changed and used by strategic actors (both inside and outside the trade) throughout the twentieth century. I chose to emphasise tradition as the paradigm from which to understand the history of *muthi* trading in Durban for the following reasons: Firstly, because it is tradition (traditional cosmology) that provides the *muthi* trade with social and cultural meaning and prominence and which gives it economic (commercial) value. It is its close link to tradition that makes the *muthi* trade a particularly viable and profitable enterprise. Secondly, this tradition is a social construct which is highly flexible and adaptable and thus in constant flux. It is therefore susceptible to what I have called ‘restructuring’ and ‘development’ – to strategic changes from within and from above. Thirdly, and because of this quality, the *muthi* trade has, despite assumptions to the contrary, retained and indeed enhanced its position as an important social and economic institution throughout the twentieth-century experiences of urbanisation and modernisation. Finally, I argue, this kind of analysis can explain why tradition has persisted as an important feature of South African (or African) modernity.

This study has emphasised the importance of acknowledging and analysing both the behavioural processes and the strategic agency of actors ‘on the ground’, and the wider

structural and ideological forces that influence these actions and processes. The tradition of *muthi* trading has constantly been challenged by *bricoleurs* both inside and outside the tradition. Thus, as I mentioned in Chapter 2, ‘traditions’ are always integral aspects of ‘modernities’. The thesis has shown that it is the *dialectic relation* rather than the dichotomy between tradition and modernity that has been the main feature of this history. Let me finally recapitulate very briefly the main changes in the *muthi* trade that were dealt with in the previous chapters. First, I described how the trade changed when it was first introduced into Durban around 1900, when young men started to sell *muthi* at social junctions in the burgeoning town. I then went on to describe how it gradually became more commercialised and professionalised with the establishment of *muthi* shops and post-order businesses. I also described how these early traders organised themselves to defend ‘Native medical rights’ as segregation and later apartheid policies threatened their trading activities. As the apartheid state steadily tightened its grip over the urban African populations, Indian entrepreneurs took over most of the ‘open’ urban supply function by opening up shops in the Indian commercial centre around Grey Street. Other established African channels were forced underground or out to the peri-urban townships and settlements. With the emergence of mass street trading in the city centre towards the end of the 1980s, *muthi* traders started to occupy trading spaces under the Eilat Viaduct. In 1990, this temporary and informal market place mushroomed over the Russell Street Bridge and down Leopold Street, and the Russell Street *Muthi* Market was established. This change in the nature of organisation also marked a gender ‘revolution’ as a majority of the street traders were women. Throughout the 1990s these women managed to consolidate their position of control over one of the most viable and fastest growing niches of the informal economy, and also succeeded in acquiring the finest street market facilities in the city. Throughout this history, these changes have been met by strong opposition from both inside and outside actors. This opposition, and the resulting dialectic between change and



continuity, has been based on different ideas of what both tradition and modernity was to entail. Furthermore, opposition to changes in tradition sometimes took another twist, as outsiders – mainly the apartheid state but also the biomedical sector and conservation bodies – actively intervened into the trade to achieve their ends.

Significantly for this thesis, in late 1998, legislation was being developed that was aimed at protecting and promoting South African traditional knowledge, with the view to transforming that knowledge into small, medium and micro-enterprises so that it could be of direct economic benefit to the practitioners and owners of such knowledge (Daily Mail & Guardian 18 December 1998). Restructuring and development of tradition for economic ends thus seems to have become a part of post-apartheid development thinking.

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