THE COMPLEXITY OF COMMUNITY BUILDING AND IDENTITY FORMATION IN THE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURIES: CASE STUDIES FROM SOUTH AFRICA AND THE AMERICAS

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Abstract

Community building, as opposed to ethnicity, seems more appropriate as a unit of analysis in the study of human settlements in KwaZulu-Natal (South Africa), the Americas and elsewhere in the 19th and 20th centuries. The KwaMachi chiefdom, in the far south of KwaZulu-Natal (one of the provinces in the north east of South Africa), and other cases in the United States are being used in this essay as examples to show how complex community building has always been. Analysis of the processes of community building in KwaZulu-Natal and the Americas shows that it is often difficult to categorize people along a single line. People of various backgrounds in the regions influenced the development of their own communities. Locating my case studies of KwaZulu-Natal and the Americas within this context, I argue that official and rigid distinctions are not completely dominant due to ongoing interaction through migrations, creation and shifting of identity boundaries, and other alliances, all of which clouded and undermined ethnic homogenization. Human settlements have been shaped by diverse socio-cultural transformations in which multiple identities operated in parallel and intersecting lines, where cultures were modified as people incorporated many cultural elements at local level.

Case studies in this essay suggest that socially and locally constructed identities resulting from such interaction do not always have an official name; rather the sense of belonging is accompanied by a sense of difference among people who embrace an imagined uniform of identity in the construction, negotiation and manipulations of identity that accompany the processes of community building in any changing system. Various stages and contours of this transition could be studied by following the evolution of the community, its geographical position, language, way of life and other aspects. Community building underwent various processes defined by social and political dynamics emerging at different times in history.

Keywords: Community Building, Identity Formation, Culture and heritage

INTRODUCTION

In this essay I use the case studies from KwaZulu-Natal, ¹ one of the provinces in South Africa, the Americas and elsewhere to show that community building and identity formation are dynamic, adaptive and historically situated. For centuries communities

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¹ For consistency, KwaZulu-Natal or Natal and Zululand will be used alternatively throughout the article. What is now the KwaZulu-Natal province in the southeast of South Africa began as Port Natal in the 1820s after the arrival of the early English traders. At the time, however, the traders only occupied the bay (now Durban). In 1839 what is now KwaZulu-Natal became the Natalia Boer Republic. In 1842 the British seized it and renamed it the Natal colony. Although many Zulu people settled in Natal, the Thukela/Tugela river (see map 1 attached, page 12) was defined by the Natal colonial government as a boundary between Natal and north of the Thukela/Tugela that was inhabited by the Zulu nation. After the Anglo-Zulu war of 1879, areas north of the Thukela/Tugela came be defined as Zululand. In the late 1890s, Zululand was annexed to Natal, hence the Natal and Zululand colony, which became a province after 1910. After the democratic elections of 1994 in South Africa, the name changed to the province of KwaZulu-Natal. Maps are attached at the back of the article.
in KwaZulu-Natal and elsewhere have been characterized by migrations, ambiguities of citizenship, and permeability of territorial boundaries, which opened room for interaction. Using KwaMachi, a chiefdom, in Harding, in the far south of KwaZulu-Natal, and experiences of people of African origin in the Americas and elsewhere, this essay draws attention to how human settlements were negotiated in the processes of community building. In the 19th and 20th centuries, ordinary people from different backgrounds met in geographical settings where they shared their lives and negotiated social and cultural spaces. Social formations developing out of such human interactions created a flexible sense of identity that reflected incorporation, amalgamation and cultural openness. Personal ties, geographical mobility and competing hegemonies produced complex social movements that were neither complete nor universal, but subject to challenges and reformulations. Based on the analysis and interpretation of available sources, the article concludes that KwaMachi residents and people in certain parts of the Americas operated in terms of changing historical forces which involved differences, common causes and interdependence in responses to specific conditions. Their experiences were drawn from broad social, cultural and linguistic contexts which cannot be defined within a single framework.

Background to the Study

For centuries, people of African origin settled in different parts of Europe, the Americas and elsewhere, thus forming the African Diaspora. 2 In these continents they established communities characterized by mixed settlement. Community building 3 operated under a wide range of relations. Cultures were modified as people incorporated many cultural elements at a local geographical level. Although the term Diaspora carries global dimensions, elements of social formations characteristic of the Diaspora communities in the

Americans and elsewhere are applicable within/at a national or continental level. Within Africa, due mainly to migration, communities have always been characterized by locally specific elements. The KwaMachi chiefdom 4 on the border in the south between KwaZulu-Natal, one of the provinces in South Africa, and Mpondoland (in some sources referred to as Pondoland, where the Mpondo people live), now forming part of the Eastern Cape province of South Africa, (maps attached, pages 12 and 13) is the best example of intra-racial dynamics characteristic of African communities. Within KwaMachi people of various cultural backgrounds became their own agency in building their community, irrespective of their origins.

The European colonial system in Africa, and South Africa in this case, designed systems that, influenced by colonial interests, carried new definitions of community building processes. For example, the British colonial system in South Africa drew up new boundaries that defined people as AmaZulu (Zulu speakers), or Natal Africans, AmaXhosa (Xhosa speakers), or AbeSotho (Sotho speakers). In the south coast of KwaZulu-Natal where the KwaMachi chiefdom is located, certain areas were defined as “No Man’s Land”. All these labels undermined African pre-colonial notions of a community that were characterized by free and open settlement. In this paper, using examples in KwaZulu-Natal and Americas, I argue that analyses of community building in Africa and elsewhere should place less emphasis on common generalizations, racial, ethnic, or cultural because, as case studies in KwaZulu-Natal and the African Diaspora suggest, these leave some communities marginalized outside the “official” scope of history. The meaning of these terms is not always precise and their definition depends on contexts in which they are applied. People of African descent shared certain experiences as “black” people. However, there are various images of African identity or blackness that are characteristic of any community

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2 Meaning the dispersion of African people from their original homeland/continent into different parts of the globe.

3 Community building in this context is defined as a process whereby people of different cultural, class, or ethnic backgrounds come to live together as one community.

4 I define chiefdom in this context as a political entity in a rural geographical territory under the administration of the chief. Chiefdoms are mainly traditional institutions ruled by the chiefs that operate in consultation with social structures. These social structures include mainly as headmen and traditional councils. At a chiefly level, power is hereditary. The chieftaincy itself remains an institution of the ruling clan.
that comprises people of African origin within and outside Africa.

This article is divided into four major parts. The first part looks at community building among black people and other minority groups in the Americas. The second part focuses on case studies in KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa. It challenges the manner in which South African/KwaZulu-Natal historiography has addressed issues related to community building in South Africa. The third and fourth parts focus on the colonial settlement and the colonial politics of naming in KwaZulu-Natal; the manner in which the British system in South Africa formulated certain names that undermined the pre-colonial African human settlement, and the incorrect use of certain labels referring to Africans living in specific regions. Studies of social formations among people of African origin in Africa and outside the continent should take into consideration commonplace themes of migration, adjustment, interaction, and conflict among groups whose lives intersect in a geographical setting.

**Europe and the African Diaspora**

Analysis of broad theories on popular culture and *ethnicity* in Africa, the Caribbean, and the Americas suggests that community building is/was open to modifications under changing socio-cultural conditions. As David Newbury argues, identity traits are not the artifact of the past, but rather locally produced by community residents to consolidate and negotiate their space in the community. Such scholars as Leroy Vail, Terence Ranger and William Samarin see *ethnicity* in Southern Africa as an invention of missionaries, colonial officials, and the African educated elite, known as *kholwa* (Christian converts) in Natal, in the twentieth century. Indeed educated Africans played a major role in enforcing collective bargaining for political purposes. However, as African Diaspora studies demonstrate, this approach undermines the role of non-elite people in the development and growth of a community in Africa and elsewhere. Richard Thomas and Gretchen Lemke-Santagelo demonstrate how black people from different regions of the United States created a common bond among themselves in Detroit (Michigan, USA) and East Bay (Berkeley, California, USA). Other studies show how the Caribbean and Mexican immigrants in the United States struggled between being an American community and keeping their original ties in the twentieth century in Harlem (New York, USA). Identity can also develop out of the notion of security. In her studies of inter-*ethnic* relations in Lesotho, Elizabeth Eldredge demonstrated how national identity was developed and forged in pursuit of security. As the Basotho re-emerged in the 1820s, they crossed *ethnic* boundaries and forged consolidation through incorporation of migrants from different parts of Southern Africa. Nationalism in this case reflected incorporation, amalgamation and cultural openness.

Within the African Diaspora and Comparative Black History discourse, race has played a collective role in the social make up of the community and should not be underestimated. However, race alone as a unit of

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analysis sets limits on the definition of social identification. Heterogeneity, arising from migration of diverse cultures into a particular region, not only reshapes social identities, it also competes against a single cultural unity. These variations illuminate alternative visions of a national identity within a multi-racial setting. Comparative black studies in Africa and elsewhere identify many forms of community building that should not be left out when studying race.\textsuperscript{11} In Cuba in the 1950s, national identity was adjusted and reconciled in support of notions of nationality.\textsuperscript{12} In Brazil in the twentieth century, with the emergence of home-grown national movements, race consciousness could not be sustained outside this nationalist framework. Kim Butler also gives a comparative analysis of two Brazilian cities. Although Afro-Brazilians shared common national ideals as a non-white race, their experiences differed, depending upon local social and historical conditions. In the southern city of Sao Paulo, Afro-Brazilians used racial discrimination as their focus of activism. In Salvador, a city in the north east of Brazil populated predominantly by people of African descent, African cultural manifestations gave a better meaning over race.\textsuperscript{13} The underclass debate in the United States of America in the twentieth century is another enticing subject.\textsuperscript{14} John Hartigan Junior, in his comparative study of three sites in Detroit (Michigan) namely Briggs, Warrendale and Corktown, reveals Detroit as a city in which the underclass is not uniformly black or Hispanic. His classification of white Detroiters as ‘Hillbilly’, ‘Gentrifier’, and ‘Racist’ sees whiteness and blackness as less hegemonic concepts.\textsuperscript{15} People negotiated their diversity and manipulated their space locally. All these cases may differ in some respects from situations elsewhere. But one significant framework that they share within the African Diaspora discourse is that experiences of people of African origin inside and outside Africa varied, depending on situations on the ground. These examples also demonstrate the role of ordinary people in shaping their own lives. Coming from, or living in, different regions of the Americas, life for them was what they made of it. Community building was a complex relational social phenomenon.\textsuperscript{16} The

contact between Europe, Africa and the Americas, as the case of Afro-Brazilians shows, produced circumstances that were local in orientation. These situations could neither be shared nationally within Brazil, nor between Afro-Brazilians and African-Americans or people of African descent living in the Caribbean or in Africa. Community building in certain areas in KwaZulu-Natal in and South Africa followed similar patterns of human settlement. Local forces shaped the manner in which people negotiated and shared their experiences with one another.

**Community Building and South African Historiography**

Until recently, one of the main problems of South African historiography was its selectivity. An African centered approach that exposed Africans’ everyday experiences in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and telling these accounts from their perspectives, was still underdeveloped in orthodox sources. It was only in the 1960s that African historiography stressed the centrality of Africans as actors in their own history and in shaping their relations with Europeans. One of the key academic achievements of the 1960s, and 1970s, was the acknowledgement of “non-literate” Africans in the recovery of the past. This placed oral traditions as raw materials at the center of scholarship. Nevertheless, many African communities remained outside this body of scholarship. With the reconstruction of South African history beginning in the 1970s, academic historians produced works on pre-colonial KwaZulu-Natal. Still, few attempts were made to closely focus on the development of African communities. Well into the end of the twentieth century, issues associated with community building remained on the periphery of South African history.

Within KwaZulu-Natal, the dynamics of social change in many chiefdoms have been hidden from the regional history of South Africa. This is because the study of KwaZulu-Natal has generally identified all Africans in the province as IsiZulu speaking, and thus as AmaZulu/Zulu, without investigating the role and influence of Orality in Southern African studies.


20 The usage of Zulu as a surname, a language and a name of the kingdom in KwaZulu-Zulu is linked to King Shaka Zulu who founded the Zulu kingdom in...
different processes which fostered their other identities. Other identifications have been made invisible by this top down perception of African political systems. Before the early nineteenth century, Zulu was a clan name, other groups existed alongside it. The adoption of Zulu identity by people of diverse origins took different forms. Carolyn Hamilton’s work illuminates various social and economic forces and ideological shifts which informed the definition of the Mthethwa identity in the late 18th century and Zulu citizenship in the early 19th century. The history of many chiefdoms in KwaZulu-Natal predates political transformations of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that accompanied the rise of the Zulu kingdom under King Shaka Zulu. These chiefdoms were never ethnic entities. Many of them became conglomerate of cultural groups that co-existed and altered social boundaries that distinguished one group from another. For example, people who formed KwaMachi were of Zulu, Xhosa, Mpondo, Sotho, Griqua and other origins. The linguistic or cultural combination arising out of these interactions does not always have a name and should thus not be defined within a single ethnic paradigm. Well into the present, the changing demographic, social, political, economic and religious conditions were translated into local idioms and operated in a manner that made ordinary residents part of that changing history. The colonial administration and later homeland system in South Africa operated within certain local relations of power; boundaries were not completely sealed. Therefore community building since pre-colonial times in KwaZulu-Natal has been affected by various historical events, and its history should be unearthed and presented in less relational terms.

In the study of Zulu historiography, Norman Etherington correctly points out that before the last third of the twentieth century, scholarship did not admit that there were political structures predating the Shakan era, simply because Zulu had “loomed so large as to overshadow all rivals”. African political entities existed before the Shakan era, many of whom have remained invisible in South Africa history. John Wright provides an example of such entities in his study of the Hlubi and Thuli groups in KwaZulu-Natal. As the argument by John Wright and Carolyn Hamilton states, before 1840, Zulu identity in what is now KwaZulu-Natal was not stable. Many chiefdoms became vassals of the Zulu kingdom, but were never fully incorporated into the Zulu empire, which left a strong desire for self control.

In other words, while dynamics that the colonial and apartheid systems brought should not be undermined because they introduced significant changes in the history of African communities in KwaZulu-Natal, life on the ground since the nineteenth century supported continuity of certain local traditions.

The Zulu kingdom has not existed without being contested. For example, recent media reports suggested that some groups might be claiming their status as ‘equal to His Majesty King Zwelithini Zulu’. See for example The Natal Witness newspaper, July 7 2005.

21 In this study a clan is defined as a group of people sharing family ties, culture, and a line of descent. In KwaZulu-Natal males take surnames from some common distant ancestors, from whom they claim direct descent through male lines.


23 Under the Homeland System in the 1950s, Africans were grouped according to their languages, for example isiZulu speakers in KwaZulu-Natal. Africans were supposedly holding to distinctive sets of practices and common belief systems in each homeland.

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British Colonial System and the Reformulation of African community building

The British colonial system in South Africa introduced socio-economic and political changes that redefined community building. During colonization, Europeans drew up locations that, cutting through African traditional territories, separated Africans from one another, without regard to pre-colonial settlements. Natal became a British colony in the 1840s. In the late nineteenth century the Natal colonial government imposed a strong territorial distinction that defined Africans who lived beyond the uMzimkhulu River as Mpondo. Those beyond the uThukela River in the north, and to the uMzimkhulu River in the south were Zulu. “Zulu people” were regarded as refugees when found among Natal Africans living in Port Shepstone and Harding. The identity of KwaMachi people nevertheless remained controversial. This was because of the chiefdom’s borderland status, being located right on the Mthavuna border between Natal and Mpondoland (see map 2, page 13). As late as the 1940s and 1950s, such labels as Mpondo/Zulu, Mpondo/Bhaca, and Mpondo/Xhosa were used as identifiers in the official documents of some KwaMachi residents. Some colonial documents referred to them as border natives, Mpondos, Natal Africans, or simply Africans in “No Man’s Land”.

KwaZulu-Natal Historiography: A “No Man’s Land”

The notion of a “No Man’s Land” was itself a colonial design. The name “No Man’s Land” was a definition loosely given to the territory lying between the uMzimkhulu and uMthavuna Rivers by

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Europeans before it was annexed to Natal in the 1860s, after which the territory came to be called Alfred County. The name “No Man’s Land” is evident in earlier studies on Natal. A. T. Bryant maintains that although there were “tribes” living there, none of them had permanently occupied the territory. This explains why, when the first Europeans arrived prior to its annexation, the territory was called “No Man’s Land”.

The name may have different meanings for both Africans and Europeans. “No Man’s Land”, from a European settler’s or colonizer’s point of view, carries a specific meaning. It may be linked to settler historiography of the nineteenth century that caricatured Shaka Zulu, the founder of the Zulu kingdom, as a blood-thirsty monster who allegedly killed people and left many spaces “empty”, a justification for European settlement. “No Man’s Land” also raises the whole question of how colonial maps were “manufactured” and for what purposes. The Cape and Natal colonial governments in what became South Africa in 1910 defined the territory between the uMzimkhulu and uMthavuna Rivers as a place without law and order. Because the territory was located between Natal and Cape colonies but forming no part of these states, it was defined as a place that “belonged to nobody”. Between the 1850s and 1860s the notion of a “No Man’s Land” justified Natal’s expansion into the territory. Hence “No Man’s Land” could have been defined as such because Europeans had, until the 1860s, not yet “discovered” the area. In 1966, Reader defined “No Man’s Land” as:

Displaced persons’ camp without the service of a camp commandant. Within its borders thousands of destitute tribesmen wandered hopelessly. Clan life had in all cases been destroyed, chiefs had been slain, customs cast aside. The consequent ignorance of tribal origins, indiscriminate mating, and scrambling over insufficient portions of land must be held as casual factors in the patchwork distribution of many of present day tribes of Natal.

Bryant’s and Reader’s works were part of historiography that was influenced by the writings of settler and missionary historians of the nineteenth century. These writers saw Africans in general as mere objects in history. Records that were written by certain Europeans in Port Shepstone and Harding reflect this mentality about the African inhabitants of the county. One of these Europeans was Mr. C. Karlson, a biochemist by profession, and an amateur historian and research expert in his spare time. In the 1950s he gathered some information and wrote a general history of Port Shepstone. He contributed many anecdotes from his research among old newspapers, court records, and the Natal archives. Karlson’s writings, including his letters of correspondence with other white families/members in Port Shepstone, only covered European settlements in Port Shepstone and Harding.

The settler attitude apparent in Karlson’s research is also reflected in the Natal south coast white newspapers, notably the *South Coast Herald* and *Southern Review*, established in the late 1940s. Some of the newspaper reports were based on his research. In such reports Africans were rarely mentioned only in passing, being referred to as “natives” who greeted the first Europeans with a warm welcome and provided them with food and

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36 The term ‘tribe’ has been attacked as dysfunctional in Southern African historiography. Africans in Southern Africa were perceived as divided into smaller distinct groups known as ‘tribes’. This colonial definition helped to facilitate the ‘divide and rule’ policy in South Africa, the Homeland System, according to which Africans were supposedly separated along language and thus ‘tribal’ lines.


39 NAB, Accession Number 1492, newspaper clippings, undated, “History of the South Coast of Natal”.

40 *Ibid*, The *South Coast Herald* newspaper, October 12 1951.
refreshments. In many instances, stories about Africans of the south coast of Natal give a reader negative impressions. South Africans of Norwegian descent (many of whom have lived in Port Shepstone to the present), claimed in their records that when the first Norwegian settlers arrived in Port Shepstone in 1882, Duka Fynn, the son of Henry Francis Fynn, staged a war with 400 Zulus as a welcome. Dressed in full war regalia, with spears and cow hide shields, they made a terrifying impression on the new comers and they came down with the cries, began stamping back and forth, until sand and dust were blowing in a cloud. Such one sided records are still used in the present. On the Internet of today, the reader can find, for instance,

The Harding area, once known as ‘No Man’s Land’, was inhibited by Xhosas and Pondo people long before the arrival of European settlers. Legend has it that the first European to put down roots was a sailor who was wrecked off the Pondoland coast in 1782. In those days it was a wild, untamed land, with hunters and traders roaming the hills and skirmishes taking place between the local tribes, including the Zulus who moved down from the north. Names like Gun Drift provide a clue to this way of life.

One may borrow David Beach’s words, in his study of Zimbabwe, that in general Europeans in Africa were not interested in the possibility that Africans had a historical past of their own. Until about the early 1960s, there was a general belief that only the history of Europeans in Africa mattered. In cases where Africans appeared in written records, the picture was not always inviting. The definition of the territory as a “No Man’s Land” was therefore not a coincidence. Since the territory formed no part of a “civilized” British colony, the mentality of disorder in a “No Man’s Land” remained unquestioned in official documents. As this study shows, although settler writers claimed that for centuries before European settlement the area where KwaMachi and other chiefdoms were established was unoccupied, Africans in fact occupied it.

However, the notion of a “No Man’s Land” may not necessarily be viewed negatively by certain African groups. The KwaMachi ruling house claims that they and their adherents were the first group to establish a stable chiefdom known as KwaMachi between the uMthavuna and uMzimkhulu Rivers in the pre-colonial era. The idea of occupying a vast space that was almost “empty”, except for a few fluid groups that occupied it, reinforces a sense of a “No Man’s Land”. The KwaMachi leadership and their adherents would emphasize it to justify their rights to land and their political authority in the southwest of KwaZulu-Natal that predates the rise of the Zulu kingdom. What all this means is that the British colonial system, and European settlement, in Natal came up with labels that suited colonial interests and manipulated the manner in which, on paper, contacts between Europeans and Africans in southern KwaZulu-Natal were defined in order to justify colonial occupation in the region. However,

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42 Henry Francis Fynn is one of the earliest English traders who arrived in what became the Natal colony in the 1820s. Following political transformations after the rise of Shaka Zulu, the founder of the Zulu Kingdom in the 1820s, Henry Francis Fynn and his brother Frank Fynn established their own chiefdoms in the south coast of KwaZulu-Natal. The name of Henry Francis Fynn’s chiefdom was Nsimbini.
43 Halland AA and Kjonstad I, (translated by Andreasen AHE and Halland A) The Norwegian Settlers, Marburg, Natal, 1882: Coinciding with the 50th Jubilee of Landing of Settlers on the 29th of August 1882, published by the Marburg Norwegian Church, printed by the South Coast Herald (PTY, LTD) Port Shepstone, 1932, p. 16.
44 South Coast Web for Tourist Industry, Margate.co.za- South Coast, KwaZulu Natal, South Africa, reviewed May 2004 and September 2008.
Europeans did not always have overall control over how Africans built their own communities at a local level. Cross frontier human settlements grew as people of different backgrounds came to live together, creating frontier communities. Because of its geographical position, the KwaMachi community developed into a Mpondo/Zulu frontier community in which linguistic and cultural affiliations took place, creating a negotiated sense of belonging in which bonds of kinship were refashioned at a local level.

The Black Frontier Communities

The study of frontier communities in South Africa has focused mainly on black-white frontiers. Such prominent scholars as Martin Legassick, Robert Ross, Christopher Saunders, Hermann Giliomee, Richard Elphick, and Jeff Peires published impressive works on interactions between various racial groups in South Africa. Leonard Thompson and Howard Lamar define a frontier as “a territory or zone of interpenetration between two previously distinct societies”. In any given region, the frontier, a zone of interaction, “opened” when the “intrusive society” arrived, and “closed” when a single political authority established hegemony over that space.

Thompson and Lamar published a comparative analysis of this interaction between America and South Africa. The focus was on the interaction between indigenous groups and “intrusive” west, eg between black South Africans or Native Americans and Europeans. Studies on contacts between Europeans and Africans/ Americas overshadowed other pre-colonial contacts, colonial/pre-colonial, between people of the same race but different cultural backgrounds. The historiography of a “black frontier”, an interaction between African groups of different cultures, is underdeveloped. Studies nevertheless suggest that there were frontier processes in pre-colonial Africa. The contact between the indigenous Khoisan peoples of Southern Africa and migrant Bantu-speaking farmers who entered the region in the early AD centuries is a good example. In the Americas, as studies by Thomas, Lemke-Santagelo and Watkins-Owens show, cultural contacts between black people of varying backgrounds also took place.

Records show that the rural areas of the present Port Shepstone and Harding were from the beginning open to mixed settlements. Place names within the territory partly demonstrate this. For example, next to Port Shepstone is a village called Nobamba. Nobamba is the name of a place presently known as Weenen in Zululand. It was given to the kraal of a brother of King Cetshwayo Zulu, successor to King Dingane Zulu (who succeeded King Shaka Zulu). Chief Duka Fynn adopted the name for his kraal on the Bhobhoyi area, near Port Shepstone. Legends say that Duka Fynn adopted this name because the Fynns’ chiefdoms comprised people who were defined as “stragglers” from the Zulu kingdom.

Isandlundlu, a bush clad in Port Edward, a small town further south from Port Shepstone, is believed to have been a scene of massacre of AmaMpondo who lived there at the hands of Shaka’s army in 1827. Isandlundlu is now within the KwaZulu Natal province. There are African villages known as Ganyaza and Mtengwane in Port Shepstone. Ganyaza is one of the earliest leaders from Zululand who asked for political asylum from Faku, the king of Mpondoland, and settled in the present Port Shepstone. Mtengwane was the son of Ngqungqushu, Faku’s son. Legends say that Mtengwane had a kraal there and the village was named after him. The existence of Zulu and Mpondo


49 Thompson and Lamar, “Comparative Frontier Outlook”, in Thompson and Lamar, _The Frontier in History_.


51 Interview with Mbanjwa, May 2003, Bhobhoyi, Port Shepstone. Mr Mbanjwa is a community resident in Bhobhoyi.

52 Campbell Collections (KCM), Durban. C. H. Lugg, “Places of Interest in Natal and Zululand”.

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names suggest that there were mixed settlements of people of Zulu and Mpondo origins in the areas between the uMzimkulu and uMthavuna Rivers. Ndamase refers to Faku’s Mpondoland as ikhaya le zize (home of the nations) where ‘AmaXolo, AmaBhaca, Adam Kok’s Griquas, and others lived’. Community building was therefore a multifaceted struggle in which bonds of patronage were negotiated in a broad range of social interactions. Such borderland entities as KwaMachi, that have for centuries housed people of various backgrounds, should be seen as grounds for interaction between people of varying backgrounds. Adaptation and continuity of different multicultural images, and their implication for community building should be explored. These themes are illustrated in some of the views from KwaMachi. One of my informants stated that “in history, we have never known a thing that connects KwaMachi with either KwaZulu or Mpondoland. KwaMachi was like an island in a way”. Being a borderland chiefdom, KwaMachi has maintained flexible linguistic and cultural affiliations. For example, KwaMachi people would be regarded as AmaMpondo because of a dialect that they speak, and also because of certain cultural elements that they borrowed from AmaMpondo (people from Mpondoland), their neighbors. The interaction of different speech communities resulted in the invention of new words. These are local creations, born out of changes in social relations and political structures. With all these influences, entities forged coherence to validate incorporation into KwaMachi. KwaMachi thus demonstrates a complex social formation accompanying migration and resettlement, characteristic of a frontier community. Such elements are present in the history of many other entities in KwaZulu-Natal and elsewhere.

The colonial and apartheid systems did not change the basic social organization of the chiefdom. They tapped into such local relations, the strength of which gave Africans an opportunity to reject, incorporate, modify, and redefine borrowed practices in terms of their local idioms. The KwaMachi chiefdom continued to exist as “an island” between mainly Zululand and Mpondoland, as the quotation suggests. KwaMachi has continued to accommodate people to the present through, for examples, marriages. Therefore, a new base line for studying African communities should be explored: the exploration of “black frontier” communities in South African historiography.

Conclusion

The study of the African Diaspora suggests that social formations are characterized by specific elements in each community. Not a single unit of analysis should be used to analyze social formations among people of African origin living inside and outside Africa. The colonial administration created artificial groupings that, while local in origin, were nevertheless complex to conform to a single collective. Generally regional differences within KwaZulu Natal and elsewhere, for example Brazil, created what might be called “black ethnic heterogeneity” or, to borrow E. Lewis’s words, “living and working in a world of overlapping

Izindaba Zabantu newspapers, 1911 and 1912, TSS, Posted into Notebook, and KCM 31439, Shepstone Papers, File 12, “List of Zulu Tribes and Their History”.


58 In Watkins- Owens, I, Blood Relations: Caribbean Immigrants and the Harlem Community, 1900-1930, Watkins-Owens emphasizes the black cultural milieu emanating from a complex interaction of African Americans and African Caribbean communities in the Harlem during the first decades of the twentieth century. These groups came together to form a new community characterized by cultural controversies and sometimes conflicts. The divergence of cultures challenged old interpretations of race for white Americans and native-born blacks.

53 Ndamase VP, AmaMpondo: Ibali NeNtlalo, Lovedale, 1930s, pp 22-27.

54 Interview with J Ngesi, July 2003, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa. Mr Ngesi was born in KwaMachi.


56 KCM, A. T. Bryant Collections, “Articles on the Zulu Tribes”, Volume I, News Cuttings from
Communities are products of their own histories. Discourses of identity are developed and changed through shifting historical time. Conclusions should be drawn from experiences, actions and views of ordinary people themselves and those of their predecessors. Homogenization of national or cultural identity does not operate in every human settlement. In some cases identities are negotiated and refashioned, depending on the conditions on the ground.

Map 1: Showing KwaZulu-Natal Province

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59 Lewis, E, “To Turn on a Pivot: Writing African Americans into a History of Overlapping Diasporas”, in Clark Hine and McLeod (eds), Crossing Boundaries, pp. 3-32.

Map 2: KwaMachi and other chiefdoms in the district of Harding

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