

THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE KWAMACHI PEOPLE: A FRONTIER COMMUNITY BETWEEN AMAZULU AND AMAMPONDO IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY¹

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Abstract

This article examines the establishment of the KwaMachi chieftaincy in Harding, on the south coast of KwaZulu-Natal in the early nineteenth century. This province is often associated with popular notions of *ethnic* history that see all Africans living in KwaZulu-Natal as AmaZulu. This universal outlook not only fails to acknowledge the significance of the history of pre-Shakan communities, it also does not take into consideration borderland communities whose history has been shifting in time, and who should be understood in terms of their unique history. Analysis of the processes of community building in what became KwaZulu-Natal shows that it is often difficult to categorize people along a single *ethnic* line. People of various backgrounds in the region influenced the development of their own communities as well as the definition of “Zuluness”. Locating KwaMachi within this context, I argue on the basis of archival and oral research that official and rigid distinctions are not completely dominant due to ongoing interaction through migrations, creation and shifting of colonial boundaries, and marriages and other alliances, all of which clouded and undermined *ethnic* homogenization. Such distinctions rarely have been incorporated into the subject literature. The construction of Zulu identity in the KwaZulu-Natal province was thus not a fixed practice; it underwent various processes defined by social and political dynamics emerging at different times in history.

Introduction

*Emlandweni nje, asiyazi into ebeyihlanganisa u Machi nezinto zakwaZulu, nemhlanganisa nezinto zangaphesheya emaMpondweni. UMachi ubefana ne ‘island in a way’. Kwaze ke kwafika lezinto zama homelands, uMachi became part of AmaKhosi structures. UXolo yena wayebanga kakhulu, kwase kukhethwa yena uMachi ePhalamende lakwaZulu. Buthelezi’s struggle besisebenza kakhulu ngamaKhosi.*²

¹ This study forms part of PhD dissertation research work that was completed in 2006.

² I conducted the interviews referred to in this article. My chief informants were KwaMachi community residents from 60 years of age and older. These comprised residents from all levels of the community. My choice of informants was determined mainly by their age. Many of them came from low-income families, and were semi- or non-literate with no high-profile reputation in the community. The above quotation forms part of an interview with JTN, July 2003, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa. JTN was born at KwaMachi and now lives in Margate. He holds no leadership position at KwaMachi.

In history, we have never known a thing that connects KwaMachi with either KwaZulu or Mpondoland. KwaMachi was like an island in a way. The homeland system came; Machi became part of the *AmaKhosi* structures. Xolo was contesting a lot. *Nkosi* Machi got chosen by KwaZulu Parliament to represent *AmaKhosi*. Buthelezi's struggle went smoothly through *AmaKhosi* (Dr Mangosuthu Buthelezi is president of Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), a KwaZulu-Natal based political organisation).

This quotation not only illuminates the unique and intricate history of the KwaMachi chiefdom, which is the focus of this article, but also highlights the fundamental argument of this study.³ This is a historiography paper that challenges arguments for deeper and fixed identities as the basis of most communities. Geographical boundaries should not be under-estimated because they have played a significant role in separating African territories along ethnic lines in South Africa. However, using KwaMachi as a case study, this article asserts that border zones are not places where identities are sealed, and where new ones are formed. They are localities where social spaces are reformulated, mixed and hybridised in the formation of a borderland community. To corroborate this claim, this article emphasises two unique approaches to the study of social formations. Firstly, it provides a new base line for studying African communities through the exploration of the making of "black frontier" communities in South African/KwaZulu-Natal historiography.⁴ Because of its geographical position, being a borderland chiefdom, KwaMachi attracted people of various cultural and social backgrounds. These included AmaMpondo⁵ and AmaXhosa from what became the Cape colony, Africans from Natal and Zululand, Mzimkhulu, and Basotho people from the former northern Transvaal. Such social interactions did not follow a fixed "ethnic" practice; they produced KwaMachi whose identity, language, and lifestyle in general reflected a combination of mainly Zulu, Xhosa, Mpondo and BaSotho in a frontier community. Secondly, the study uses community building as a unit of analysis.⁶ I emphasize the significance of locality, a piece of land on which ordinary people, irrespective of their backgrounds, brought their resources together to form an entity at different times in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. At KwaMachi, colonial penetration tapped into such local relations, the strength of which gave KwaMachi residents an opportunity to reject, incorporate, modify, and redefine borrowed practices in terms of their local community idioms.

This article discusses four major themes. The first locates KwaMachi on the map of KwaZulu-Natal and traces the birth of the Machi chieftaincy. The second section analyzes KwaMachi as a frontier community, highlighting the role of migration,

³ I define chiefdom in this context as a political entity in a geographical territory under the administration of *iNkosi* (the chief, plural *Amakhosi*). Machi is the name of the founder of the chiefdom. KwaMachi is the name of the chiefdom on the southern border of KwaZulu-Natal Province, in South Africa.

⁴ KwaZulu-Natal and Natal and Zululand are going to be used alternatively in this study. Natal was established as a colony in the 1840s, with the uThukela River as a colonial boundary between Natal and 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 of the province was changed to KwaZulu-Natal.

⁵ AmaMpondo/Mpondo live in Mpondoland. Mpondoland now forms part of the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa.

⁶ 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.

adjustment, interaction, and conflict in the building of a community. The third part examines the notion of a “No Man’s Land”,⁷ KwaMachi in relation to Mpondoland, and the role that Mpondoland played in the development of mixed settlements in the southern parts of KwaZulu-Natal. The fourth segment problematises KwaMachi within South African/Zulu historiography. The interrogation of these themes leads to the conclusion that, in the study of African communities, various historical factors determined the manner in which blood ties split, disappeared and reconnected in a borderland community. The development of the KwaMachi chiefdom was therefore not a well-defined scenario; it was moulded by variables that cannot be located only within twentieth century “ethnic” political symbolism.

Significance of the Study

Firstly, the south coast of KwaZulu-Natal, especially the history of African communities occupying the Port Shepstone and Harding rural areas, is under-studied in South African subject literature. The few works written on the region do not address issues related to African communities living in the territory under discussion.⁸ Nevertheless, all these works remain great contributions to the history of the region. Secondly, the colonial system in South Africa created buffer zones, annexed territories, used rivers as natural boundaries, and shifted the boundaries according to their interests. For borderland territories, the meaning of the boundaries was not always obvious, and sometimes caused dilemmas. The study of KwaMachi as a borderland community illuminates this colonial legacy which has affected South Africa to this day.⁹ Thirdly, the study of KwaMachi partly addresses the perplexity of Zulu identity that has manifested itself in recent claims to traditional political power made by certain clans within KwaZulu-Natal.¹⁰ Although the Machi leadership has not formerly made such claims, interviews with KwaMachi residents reveal the KwaMachi leadership’s attempts to defend their pre-Shakan political status. Finally, KwaMachi carries a unique status as the oldest and largest chiefdom in the district of Harding. It has managed to share land with its neighbours, mainly KwaJali in the west and the Nkumbini/Zinkumbini/Izinkumbi in the southeast, who joined KwaMachi between the 1830s and 1850s. In a country that recognises traditional

⁷ The name “No Man’s Land” will be used throughout this article for consistency. Europeans loosely defined the territory lying between the uMzimkhulu and uMthavuna Rivers in the south of the present KwaZulu as “No Man’s Land” before it (the territory) was annexed to Natal in 1866, after which the territory came to be called Alfred County.

⁸ These include W. Beinart, *The Political Economy of Pondoland, 1860-1930* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982); T. J. Stapleton, *Faku: Rulership and Colonialism in the Mpondo Kingdom c. 1780-1867* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2001); S. M. Mbhodiya, “The Incorporation of Alfred County: Aspects of Colonial Natal’s Annexation Strategy and Subsequent Consolidation on the south-western Frontier, 1850s-1880s” (Masters diss., University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 1995); and B. E. Camp, *History of the District of Alfred* (n. p: 1960), including “The diary of Theophilus Shepstone, 1865-1866”, which is an Appendix attached to this book.

⁹ The current KwaZulu-Natal/Eastern Cape boundary dispute stems from whether such places as Matatiele and Kokstad belong to KwaZulu Natal or the Eastern Cape.

¹⁰ For example, the Hlubi leadership claims that their existence predates the rise of the Zulu kingdom under King Shaka Zulu and, therefore, they deserve equal status/recognition enjoyed by the Zulu royal house.

leadership, such chiefdoms as Nkumbini with a history of appointed chieftaincy raise questions as to whether or not they should continue to exist. Since the 1970s, political tensions between KwaMachi and Nkumbini raise academic interest in this under-studied region.

Locating KwaMachi in KwaZulu-Natal: The Houses of Sabela¹¹

In South Africa, KwaMachi is a chiefdom located in the southwest of the present KwaZulu-Natal province, outside the town of Harding, within the Harding district. One of the challenges in this study is that, for the period prior to 1866, published sources are almost silent. In many documents, for example the registers of customary marriages, Africans living in the territory between the uMzimkhulu and uMthavuna Rivers are referred to by the surnames of their *AmaKhosi*, not clan or ethnic groups.¹² All this makes it difficult to develop a uniform base for analysis which could also help to find a single pre-colonial name of what became Alfred County, and later the Harding and Port Shepstone districts.

The small town of Harding is about seventy-five kilometres inland from Port Shepstone.¹³ Since the late nineteenth century, the number of people from different racial/cultural groups increased in the district. Harding is presently comprised of African chiefdoms such as KwaMachi, KwaMbotho, KwaCele, KwaJali and others on the outskirts of the town, white farmers and residents, mixed (“Coloured”) communities and Indian families. Geographically, KwaMachi forms the north to northeast segment of the uMthavuna River region, on the KwaZulu-Natal side of the river. Oral and written sources state that Xolo, Machi, and Nzimakwe sprang from a common ancestor, Sabela, whose first settlement was at Sangwana Hill, esiDunjini/esiDumbini, on the upper Thongathi River in Zululand.¹⁴ Among Sabela’s sons were Ngutshana, Ntshangase, Xolo, Ntamonde (Machi), and Nzimakwe.¹⁵ The sons dispersed and formed independent houses that later became clans in different areas of the present KwaZulu-Natal and Eastern Cape provinces. The exact period of this dispersal is not known, but it was

¹¹ See maps at the end of this article. Sabelo is an ancestor house from which Machi, Xolo, and Nzimakwe came. As the Machi house occupied the north to the northeast of the uMthavuna River, the Xolo and Nzimakwe houses occupied the south to the southeast of the river.

¹² 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.

¹³ After the territory between the uMthavuna and uMzimkhulu Rivers in the south of the present KwaZulu-Natal was annexed to Natal in the 1860s, it came to be called Alfred County, and later Port Shepstone and Harding districts. Port Shepstone was a name given to the mouth of the uMzimkhulu River. Harding has worked as a name of a town, and also of a district within which the town is located.

¹⁴ For example C. de Webb and J. Wright, eds., *The James Stuart Archives : Archives of Recorded Oral Evidence Relating to the History of Zulu and Neighbouring Peoples* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1976), 2, Testimony by Mahaya, 125-27; and author interview with Manyathi (nickname), Ngqungqumeni, KwaMachi, May 2003. Manyathi is a community resident at KwaMachi. He is also a traditional healer.

¹⁵ The names further back on the genealogy of the Machi house present difficulties. It is not easy to speculate when and how the name Machi that became a clan surname came into being among the houses of Sabela.

sometime in the eighteenth century before the KwaMachi chiefdom was established.¹⁶ One of the discussants confirmed that the Machi house was displaced by “tribal” violence and moved to Mpondoland where they “acquired a certain Mpondoness in their character as can be clearly discerned in their dialect and through practices such as *ukugcaba*”.¹⁷ *Ukugcaba* is the practice of cutting faces with the intention to make visible customary scars and this is believed to be of Mpondo origin.¹⁸ The length of their stay in Mpondoland is unknown. Traditions also state that people of Ntamonde left the Basotho and crossed the uMzimkhulu River in the north, in the area called Madonella, into Natal. The proper origin of the Sotho connection is not clear, and is open to further exploration. Nevertheless in Sabela’s days, during the war with other groups, their war praises/songs referred to them as *AbeSuthu Abanemikhala*, which means “the Sotho with headstalls”. This reference is not to the Basotho from Lesotho, but to those from the former northern Transvaal.¹⁹ The Sotho connection is common to all groups such as Mbuthuma and Mjaja who have coexisted with the Machi clan.²⁰

Some ancestral links within KwaMachi are not fixed. For example, the Machi/Mbuthuma/Mjaja connection is not clear. The interviewees could not establish a case that biologically connected the Mbuthuma people to the Machi surname. The situation has been enriched by intermarriages between the Machi and Mjaja houses who still claim that they both come from the same ancestor. One of the informants stated that some of these relations developed as ideological links referring to those clans who migrated with, or who were followers of, the Machi clan and, by extension, the Machi *Nkosi*.²¹ Mbuthuma, Msizazwe and Sincuba are examples of clans who did not have blood relations with KwaMachi leaders, but whose members developed close relations with the Machi house, and who still play a significant role in the running of the chiefdom.²² It seems that the Machi ruling house conferred membership to their royal house on some commoner families who had no biological connections with them. The chiefdom has modified itself in response to local needs and, in this case, to nourish the relationship with the Machi ruling house. As the Machi house settled in “No Man’s Land” with a small following in the late eighteenth century, the land that they occupied became *umhlaba wa Machi*, which means “the land of Machi”. As *umhlaba wa Machi* developed into a chiefdom, it came to be referred to as *KwaMachi*, which means “at Machi’s”.²³ The Machi ruling house established a traditional council that was comprised of influential members from, and who represented, all sections of the chiefdom. The distribution of land among people of various backgrounds created a material culture that

¹⁶ Interview with Isibonda L., Xhamini, KwaMachi, June 2003, Isibonda L. is one of the community officials at KwaMachi.

¹⁷ Personal correspondence with Mr Mdu M, June 2004. Mr Mdu. M was born in KwaMachi. His father comes from one of the Machi houses.

¹⁸ B. Tyrrell, *Tribal Peoples of Southern Africa* (Cape Town: Books of Africa, 1974), 166-67.

¹⁹ Discussion with Mr Mdu M, June 2004.

²⁰ Discussion with Mr Mdu M, June 2004, and interview with Mr N. Nd, Mdlazi, KwaMachi, December 2002. Mr N. Nd is a community resident.

²¹ Discussion with Mr S.S. M, Pigsaw, KwaMachi, July 2003. Mr S.S. M is the senior member of the Machi ruling house. Interview with Isibonda M., Langqengqa, KwaMachi, March and May 2003. Isibonda M. is one of the community officials at KwaMachi.

²² Interview with Mr A. M., KwaMbande, KwaMachi, May 2003. Mr A. M. is a community resident.

²³ Interview with Isibonda L., Xhamini, KwaMachi, June 2003.

saw *umhlaba ka Machi* not as an individual property, but a resource that was shared communally among people who paid allegiance to the Machi authority.²⁴

Between the 1840s and 1850s AmaJali (Jali people) crossed the uMthavuna River and entered KwaMachi under *Nkosi* Mphikwa Jali.²⁵ KwaMachi was by this time under *Nkosi* Mbonwa Machi who gave Mphikwa's people land to settle on as an independent chiefdom.²⁶ AmaJali were divided from Mbonwa's people by a small river/stream called Weza on the west of KwaMachi. Though KwaMachi and KwaJali were distinct entities, boundaries between them remained fluid. As missionary reports suggest, this boundary was "not so originally; until 1890 the dividing line was not a natural one, but an imaginary line between certain points. The tribes did not know, with the certainty that exists now, where one territory ended and the other began".²⁷ In 1849 Henry Francis Fynn, the then British resident in Mpondoland, in his correspondence with the secretary of government in Natal, talked about "a body of about 600-800 men under Umbuse [the correct spelling is Mbusi, the KwaMachi *Nkosi* who reigned roughly between the 1810s and 1850s]".²⁸ Fynn did not mention other chiefdoms. It seems that KwaMachi was the most recognisable entity in the territory. There is no telling what would have happened, had Natal not intervened to divide the land into two distinct chiefdoms.

Machi's original control over land is reflected in the history of KwaCele²⁹ and Izinkumbi/Nkumbini chiefdoms. In the 1830s, as KwaCele people (AmaCele) dispersed, Magidigidi, one of the Cele leaders, is said to have led a major portion of his people beyond the uMzimkhulu River into "No Man's Land",³⁰ settling in the area called Izingolweni, on the southeast boundary of KwaMachi.³¹ When Cele and Machi got involved in conflict,³² the Natal government settled the dispute by placing a group of people, under a certain Tom Fynn, as a wedge between the warring parties. The chiefdom came to be called IziNkumbi/Zinkumbini.³³ The Natal government cut land

²⁴ Interview with Isibonda L., Xhamini, KwaMachi, July 2003.

²⁵ The father of Hafuleni, the father of Albert, the father of Botha, the late husband of the present ruling female *Nkosi*, *Nkosikazi* Nokwanda Jali.

²⁶ Interview with KwaJali Traditional Council, KwaJali, Harding, South Africa, March 2003. AmaJali have retained their status as an independent political entity on a piece of land that is now known as KwaJali in Harding.

²⁷ Campbell Collections, Durban (KCM), G. Gilkes, *Mission Work at Ikwezi La Maci, Harding, Alfred County, Natal, 1877-1911* (Bristol: Rose and Harries, 1911), 16-18.

²⁸ Natal Archives (NAB), British Parliamentary Papers (BPP), 18: "Correspondence relating to the Settlement of Natal, 1850", letters dated 4 April 1849.

²⁹ Not closely related to the author. The original Cele clan is related to all Cele chiefdoms/people in South Africa. However, the author is not directly connected to the Cele chieftainship referred to in this study.

³⁰ KCM, MS 31439, File 12, Shepstone Papers, H. Shepstone, "List of Zulu Tribes and Their History".

³¹ Izingolweni is situated between the northeast of KwaXolo and southeast of KwaMachi. It is also situated halfway between Port Shepstone and Harding, and became Alfred County's earliest trading station in the late nineteenth century. The site also developed as a train station where labourers from Mpondoland arrived and rested overnight before proceeding to their places of employment in Port Shepstone and Durban. Also see KCM, MS 53570, File 6, Lugg Papers, C. H. Lugg, "Places of Interest in Natal and Zululand".

³² This conflict over a cow came to be known as the "Nokwentani War". The date of its occurrence cannot be confirmed. This should have been between the 1830s and 1840s.

³³ The most popular Fynn chiefdoms in the south coast of Natal were Nsimbini in Port Shepstone and Nkumbini in Harding. In the 1960s Nsimbini became part of the Mavundla chiefdom in Port Shepstone.

from both KwaCele and KwaMachi to make room for Tom Fynn's chiefdom.³⁴ Later, when the homeland system was under way, the Tribal Authority Act of the 1950s enhanced the powers of traditional leaders and shifted the administration of chiefdoms to Africans. This took power away from the Fynns, who the government had now given a different status/category as a distinct race, the Coloured race. In 1969 Nkanyezi Gigaba was appointed as a new Nkumbini "chief". His power was clearly defined as not being hereditary because, as the Bantu Administration Commissioner admitted, the Zinkumbini "tribe" had no "Tribal Authority" in Harding.³⁵ Therefore, while today they are not part of KwaMachi, the history of land occupation by KwaJali, KwaCele, and Nkumbini in Harding is connected to KwaMachi. This provides evidence of KwaMachi leadership's authority over land up to the uMthavuna River, and the established hegemony that they (KwaMachi leadership) enjoyed in the pre-colonial era in the district. The establishment of these chiefdoms imposed changes on KwaMachi, the dynamics of which shifted human boundaries and redefined allegiances and alliances in the process of community building. KwaMachi's relation to, identification with, and patterns of ownership of land altered.

Until the 1860s, when the uMthavuna River became a new boundary between Natal and Mpondoland in the south, Machi's ownership of land straddled the uMthavuna River. Today however, KwaMachi people are not that numerous in the areas outside KwaMachi. Nevertheless, to date KwaMachi has retained its social relations with Mpondoland. For example, since the pre-colonial period, the Machi's royal wives, mothers to heirs, are chosen from royal families in Mpondoland. The KwaMachi residents pay bride wealth in the form of cattle, known as *lobola*, as a tribute to the *Nkosi*.³⁶ Most if not all KwaMachi *AmaKhosi* are raised by their royal maternal families in Mpondoland, and come back to KwaMachi when they are of age to take over chieftaincy.³⁷ It seems that generally, since its (KwaMachi's) inception, community relations within KwaMachi were not static: migration, marriages and trade across divides, and later colonial settlement, introduced elements that kept this frontier community changing.

³⁴ Further details are given in N. Cele, "A Mixed Inheritance: The Fynns and Land in 'No Man's Land' in the Nineteenth century" (paper presented at the South African Historical Society, Pretoria, July 1997); S. Bramdeow, "Henry Francis Fynn and the Fynn Community in Natal, 1824-1988" (Masters diss., University of Natal, Durban, 1988); and J. Pridmore, "Keep my Seat, I'm on my Way: The Fynn Family and Traditional Leadership in Southern Natal in the 1990s: A Preliminary Investigation" (paper presented at the South African Historical Society, Pretoria, July 1997).

³⁵ For more details on this see South African National Archives (SAB), Chief Bantu Affairs Commissioner (CBAC), N1/1/3-5, letter dated December 7 1971, "Nkumbini Tribe: Installation of Chief N. Gigaba", 29 November 1971, 80. Also see SAB, CBAC, N1/1/3(12) 4, "Nkumbini Tribe, Harding", Correspondence from 17 October 1949 to-----, 20 May 1969, notes taken by F.M. Meyer, the Bantu Native Commissioner, 19 May 1969.

³⁶ In other words, residents within the chiefdom donate towards the payment of, or purchase of cows for, *lobola*. Members of the traditional council become involved in the collection of donations in their villages.

³⁷ In an interview with Isibonda L., Xhamini, KwaMachi, June 2003, he said that KwaMachi leaders are raised in Mpondoland for security purposes. This also gives them a chance to grow up in a leadership environment where they are trained in traditional leadership skills.

KwaMachi as a Borderland Community

Because of KwaMachi's geographical position, some writers and other Africans incorrectly refer to KwaMachi as a chiefdom of Mpondo origin.³⁸ This is illustrated in some of the views from KwaMachi. One of the informants stated:

*Ngangikhona e Thekwini. Ngathatha amanye amadoda awu 5, ngeza lana eNkosini, ngazobika ukuthi abantu bakwaMachi bayafa, kuthiwa kubulawa AmaMpondo. Abantu balana babebulawa kuthiwa bangamaMpondo. Yase ke i Nkosi ibika KwaZulu, ukuze lento iphele. Inkosi yakwaMachi iyona emele amanye AmaKhosi lapha kwi region.*³⁹

I was there in Durban. I took 5 other men with me back home to *iNkosi*, to report that KwaMachi people were dying there, they [AmaZulu] said they were killing AmaMpondo. People from here got killed. They were referred to as AmaMpondo. *Nkosi* Machi reported the matter to KwaZulu, that is how the thing ended. *Nkosi* Machi had been chosen to represent *AmaKhosi* here in the region.

The above quotation refers to a Mpondo-Zulu conflict of the 1980s at Malukazi, south of Durban, during which some KwaMachi people were assaulted because they were allegedly AmaMpondo.⁴⁰ As another informant said:

*No Zulu usibiza ngamaMpondo. Wawuthi uma uyoshaya ipasi, nomabhalane bengazi. Wayevele akubuke ebusweni, nalolimi siluthethayo, athi wena uyiMpondo noma umXhosa. Ulimi olu oluzwakala njengesimpondo siluthetha ngokwakhelana nawo, isimpondo siyaxixuba. Asiwona amaMpondo.*⁴¹

Even Zulus call us AmaMpondo. When you went to apply for a pass (identity document), the officers did not know either. They would look at your face and listen to the language you speak, and then say you are Mpondo or Xhosa. We speak a dialect that sounds Mpondo because we live with them, they are our neighbours. We mix isiMpondo with other dialects. We are not AmaMpondo.

Because of the mixed nature of KwaMachi, manifested in certain cultural habits that they (KwaMachi residents) borrowed from AmaMpondo, Africans who lived in the district have also been called *AmaZotsha*,⁴² *AmaBhaca*, or *AbaZansi* (southerners). The colonial

³⁸ N. J. Van Warmelo, *A Preliminary Survey of the Bantu Tribes of South Africa* (Pretoria: Government Printer, 1935); H. Bradford, *A Taste of Freedom: The ICU in the Rural South Africa, 1924-30* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 229-39, in her analysis of the spread of Industrial and Commercial Workers Union in the rural areas of Harding, also makes this assumption.

³⁹ Interview with "Sagka-D" (nickname), Ngqungqumeni, KwaMachi, May 2003. Sagka-D is a community resident. He was a dock-worker in Durban between the 1950s and 1980s.

⁴⁰ S. Marks, "Patriotism, Patriarchy and Purity: Natal and the Politics of Zulu Ethnic Consciousness", in L. Vail ed., *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa* (Los Angeles and Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), Chapter 7, makes reference to this incident.

⁴¹ Interview with Manyathi, Ngqungqumeni, KwaMachi., June 2003.

⁴² There is no proper definition for the word "Zotsha". Its use was/is derogatory, referring to occupants of the areas between the uMzimkhulu and uMthavuna Rivers who were supposedly neither AmaZulu nor AmaMpondo in a "No Man's Land". The concept "uMzansi" also follows a similar pattern of social profiling. Many informants stated that, until recently, the word "uMzansi" (southerner) was used by AmaMpondo and AmaZulu, when referring to people living in the areas in question.

system in Natal after 1866 perpetuated this mentality. Up until at least the 1960s, the identity documents of some KwaMachi residents defined them as Bhaca/Mpondo, Xhosa/Bhaca, or Mpondo/Xhosa. As one informant said, “*akekho owayekubuza ukuthi ungubani, futhi ungachazeleki. Omabhalane bebezibhalela lokho abakuthandayo*” (“no body cared to ask who you were. And no explanation was given to you. The officers determined this as they pleased”).⁴³ It was only in the 1970s that KwaMachi residents were granted identity books that defined them as Zulu, thus making them part of the KwaZulu Homeland.⁴⁴

The information provided thus far suggests that the pre-colonial KwaMachi should be defined as a frontier chiefdom. Leonard Thompson and Howard Lamar define a frontier as “a territory or zone of inter-penetration between two previously distinct societies”.⁴⁵ 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. The study of frontier communities in South Africa has focused mainly on black-white frontiers. Various scholars have published impressive works on interactions between various racial groups in South Africa.⁴⁶ 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 the “intrusive” west, between black South Africans or Native Americans and Europeans.⁴⁷ The historiography of a “black frontier”, an interaction between African groups of different cultures, is underdeveloped. Studies nevertheless suggest that there were frontier processes that occurred in pre-colonial Africa.⁴⁸

Although the history of the prior residents is uncertain, findings suggest that the uMthavuna region where Machi settled was from the beginning open to mixed settlements. Place names in Port Shepstone 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. In the nineteenth century Chief Duka Fynn (of what was then the Nkumbini chiefdom) 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.⁴⁹ *Isandlundlu*, a bush

⁴³ Interview with Sagka-D, Ngqungqumeni, KwaMachi, June 2003. This also came up during the discussion with Isibonda L., Xhamini, KwaMachi, July 2003.

⁴⁴ At one of the interviews conducted at KwaMachi, the author observed the difference between the identity document that the informant applied for in the 1970s that defined him as a Zulu person, and the previous one, dilapidated, that defined him as “Bhaca/Mpondo”.

⁴⁵ L. Thompson and H. Lamar, eds., *The Frontier in History: North America and Southern Africa Compared* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 7.

⁴⁶ For example, see M. Legassick, “The Griqua, the Sotho-Tswana, and the Missionaries, 1780-1840: The Politics of a Frontier Zone” (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1970) and the essays in R. Elphick and H. Giliomee, eds., *The Shaping of a South African Society, 1652-1840* (Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1989) and Thompson and Lamar, *The Frontier in History*.

⁴⁷ Thompson and Lamar, “Comparative Frontier Outlook”, in Thompson and Lamar, *The Frontier in History*.

⁴⁸ 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.

⁴⁹ Interview with Mr MB, Bhobhoyi, Port Shepstone, May 1998. Mr MB is a community resident in Bhobhoyi.

area in Port Edward, a small town further south from Port Shepstone, is believed to have been a scene of a massacre of AmaMpondo who lived there at the hands of Shaka Zulu's army in 1827.⁵⁰ *Isandlundu* is now within the KwaZulu-Natal province. There are African villages known as *Ganyaza* and *Mntengwane* 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. Mntengwane was the son of Ngqunqgushe, Faku's son. Legends say that Mntengwane had a kraal there and the village was named after him. The existence of Zulu and Mpondo names suggest that there were mixed settlements in the areas between the uMzimkhulu and uMthavuna Rivers. Ndamase refers to Faku's Mpondoland as "*ikhaya le zizwe*" ("home of the nations") where "maXolo, *AmaBhaca*, Adam Kok's Griquas, and others lived".⁵¹

All of these pieces of evidence suggest that KwaMachi grew as a conglomerate of cultural groups that co-existed and altered social boundaries that distinguished one group from another. The clans that comprised KwaMachi chiefdom differed in their histories, sizes, and backgrounds. But since the history of these clans is in fact extensive, only a few examples will be used for this argument. Some KwaMachi surnames are of Mpondo origin. These include Msizazwe, Sincuba, Koti, Tshalada, Ncobela, and others. AmaMbuthuma (Mbuthuma people) are one of the main groups that joined the Machi clan from the Basotho. They now constitute a large part of Ikhwezi ward,⁵² west of KwaMachi,⁵³ and in other areas of KwaMachi and Harding. AmaNgubelanga, like AmaMbuthuma, also form a large part of a ward which is called Qwebela.⁵⁴ They left Zululand and dispersed to different parts of South Africa and Swaziland. In the south some of them joined KwaMachi, where some of them use different surnames.⁵⁵

The Luthuli people are another large lineage group within KwaMachi. Having originated in Zululand, they claim that their descendents resisted incorporation by the Zulu kingdom. In their dispersal, some of them settled as a chiefdom at Mthwalume, south of Durban, in the 1820s. Others proceeded further south and settled in KwaMachi.⁵⁶ The Madiya people, also known as Ndlovu or Gatsheni,⁵⁷ left Zululand during the Shaka wars. From Zululand they went to settle in Mpondoland and later crossed the uMthavuna River into KwaMachi.⁵⁸ While in Mpondoland, such groups adopted certain Mpondo lifestyles. These included a Mpondo fighting tactic of throwing many spears at an enemy, whereas Zulu warriors used a single *umkhonto* (spear) strategy. Another form of

⁵⁰ Lugg, "Places of Interest in Natal and Zululand".

⁵¹ V. P. Ndamase, *AmaMpondo: Ibali NeNtlalo* (Lovedale: Lovedale Press, 1926), 22-27.

⁵² A ward in this context can be defined as an administrative division of power. Since KwaMachi chiefdom is huge, it has been divided into different satellite stations. In each station there is an official (*isibonda*) in charge with the enforcement of law and discipline, who also attends meetings, or consults with *Nkosi*, on behalf of his ward.

⁵³ Interview with Ikhwezi Mbuthuma residents, Khwezi, KwaMachi, August 2003.

⁵⁴ Interview with MN, Qwebela, KwaMachi, March 2003. MN is one of the KwaMachi officials.

⁵⁵ For example, within the Mthimude chiefdom there are Didiza families who are closely related to the Ngubelanga groups who live in KwaMachi. Interview with Ngubelanga group, Qwebela, KwaMachi, May 2003.

⁵⁶ Interview with Isibonda L, Xhamini, KwaMachi, July 2003.

⁵⁷ Ndlovu, Madiya, Gatsheni, and Lushaba, all belong to the same house.

⁵⁸ Interview with Councilor M and Isibonda Z, Amba, KwaMachi, March 2003. M and Z are community officials.

Mpondo identity adopted by such groups was the tradition of *ukugcaba*.⁵⁹ This tradition is multifaceted. Some KwaMachi residents adopted from AmaMpondo short cut marks. Others have adopted the *Bhaca* marks that are long and drawn vertically across the face. *Ukugcaba* is also prevalent among certain groups of AmaZulu within KwaZulu-Natal. The observation of this custom among different clan groups at KwaMachi suggests that the chiefdom was prone to heterogeneous influences. Similarly other groups who have lived in and around Harding and in Port Shepstone in the last two centuries have shared such socio-cultural interactions through the effects of migration.⁶⁰ C. H. Karlson, one of the white residents who arrived in Port Shepstone in 1906, while stereotyping them, described the KwaNzimakwe chiefdom as populated by Africans of mixed Zulu and Mpondo origins:

whose characteristic tribal marks are the vertical scars on the cheeks and very often the *tombizaans* [corrupted *amantombazane*, meaning young women], have their whole bodies scarred in this manner as they are regarded as adornments comparable with other plucked eye-brows and painted toenails. These marks identify the hunted tribes of Chaka's day when they suffered almost complete annihilation.⁶¹

The practice of crossing cultural boundaries was common among many migrating Africans when they re-established themselves on new ground in the pre-colonial era. Circumcision was abolished in Mpondoland, which might be related to some people's attachment to Zulu.⁶² In other words, some people who have lived in Mpondoland claim Zulu origin. Zulu people do not practice circumcision. Jeff Peires mentions this in his study of the Xhosa people of South Africa. For example, he observes that some groups of Mpondo origin stopped scarifying their faces and adopted circumcision "on their arrival in Xhosaland in the nineteenth century". Other groups of Khokhoi or Sotho origin, when subjugated by the Xhosa, took to red ochre (they smeared it on their faces).⁶³ Some of these customs, for example red ochre, and various forms of face scarifying, are found within KwaMachi.⁶⁴ Surnames such as Mjaja, Mhlamvu, Ndlovu, Jali, Mancini (different from Machi), Mzizi, and others have existed to the present in Mpondoland.⁶⁵ One of the informants stated that "these people are related to those who live in KwaMachi, but because they live in Mpondoland, they are now referred to as AmaMpondo".⁶⁶ Being a borderland chiefdom, KwaMachi has maintained flexible linguistic and cultural affiliations. The colonial and apartheid systems did not change the basic social organization of the chiefdom. KwaMachi continued to exist as "an island" between mainly Zululand and Mpondoland, as the quotation in the introduction suggests.

⁵⁹ In an interview with Manyathi, Ngqungqumeni, KwaMachi, May 2003, Manyathi stated that in some cases Shaka realised that these were his people, and he would call them AmaMpondo or *amavaka* (cowards).

⁶⁰ KCM, File 51, D. M. Malcolm, "The Malcolm Papers", 11 June 1911.

⁶¹ NAB, Accession Number 1495, C. H. Karlson, "Our Reserve" in *History of the South Coast of Natal*.

⁶² Personal correspondence with William Beinart, 2005.

⁶³ J. Peires, *The House of Phalo: A History of the Xhosa People in the Days of their Independence* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982), 18-19.

⁶⁴ Interview with MT, Pitsgah, KwaMachi, April 2003. MT is a grandson to Reverend L. Tshalada, one of the Ethiopianists at KwaMachi in the early twentieth century.

⁶⁵ Stapleton, *Faku*, makes references to some of these groups in his study.

⁶⁶ Interview with Isibonda M, Langqengqa, KwaMachi, May 2003.

Borderlands are not only marked in territory, but also in language, names, marks on the body, and other codes for social exclusion and inclusion. KwaMachi thus demonstrates a complex social formation accompanying migration and resettlement, characteristic of a frontier community. With the growing colonial interest in the territory in the 1850s, the Cape and Natal colonial governments attached a new name, and meaning, to these pre-colonial mixed settlements: “No Man’s Land”, discussed below.

KwaMachi in “No Man’s Land”

Before 1866 Natal’s southern border with Mpondoland was the uMzimkhulu River.⁶⁷ In earlier studies of Natal “No Man’s Land” surfaced as a Treaty State by agreement between the Cape colonial authorities and Faku, the king of Mpondoland, in the 1840s.⁶⁸ The perceived Boer presence in the interior, following the Great Trek of the 1830s, posed a threat and facilitated a political relationship between Faku and the British Cape government known as the Maitland Treaty of 1844.⁶⁹ Faku’s control of hinterland areas between the uMzimkhulu and uMthatha Rivers was reasserted, with a bonus piece of land added further north at the base of the Drakensberg Mountains. The uMzimkhulu River was reinforced as a boundary of the Mpondo state on the east. It remained a Mpondoland/Natal border until the 1860s when Natal expanded southwards, imposing the uMthavuna River as a new boundary.

The name “No Man’s Land” raises the whole question of how colonial maps were “manufactured”, and for what purposes. The Cape and Natal colonial governments defined the territory between the uMzimkhulu and uMthavuna Rivers as a place that “belonged to nobody”, e.g. forming no part of these “civilized” British states, and therefore without law and order. In 1966, D. H. 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.⁷⁰

The mentality of disorder in a “No Man’s Land” remained unquestioned in official documents and, between the 1850s and 1860s, justified Natal’s expansion into the

⁶⁷ In 1866, the uMthavuna River, further south from the uMzimkhulu River, became a new Natal’s southern boundary. The uMthavuna River has remained a boundary between KwaZulu-Natal and Eastern Cape provinces to the present.

⁶⁸ See for example, A. T. Bryant, *Olden Times in Zululand and Natal: Containing earlier Political History of the East-Nguni Clans* (London: Longmans, 1929). Also see W. D. Hammond-Tooke, *The Bantu Speaking Peoples of Southern Africa* (London: Routledge, 1974).

⁶⁹ W. Beinart, “Production and the Material Basis of Chieftainship: Pondoland c.1830-80”, in S. Marks and A. Atmore, eds., *Economy and Society in the pre colonial South Africa* (London: Harlow, 1980), 130-31, and G. Callaway, *Pioneers in Pondoland* (Alice: Lovedale Press, 1938), 68. The “Great Trek” was when white settlers of Dutch descent left the Cape colony, crossed the Drakensberg Mountains, and settled between the Zulu Kingdom and Port Natal, and in many areas in the interior of South Africa.

⁷⁰ D. H. Reader, *Zulu Tribe in Transition* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1966), 7-8.

territory. For Africans living within KwaMachi however, especially the Machi leadership, the notion of a “No Man’s Land” would not have a negative meaning. For example, the Machi ruling house and their adherents claim that they were the first group to establish a stable chiefdom between the uMthavuna and uMzimkhulu Rivers.⁷¹ The idea of occupying a vast space that was almost “empty” with a few fluid groups that occupied it reinforces a sense of a “No Man’s Land”. The KwaMachi leadership 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. As the study shows, “No Man’s Land” was never a “No Man’s Land”, Africans occupied it. More importantly, the notion of a “No Man’s Land” reinforces the status of KwaMachi as a borderland community in between states whose residents came from different sources.

Problematising KwaMachi in South African/Zulu Historiography

Throughout the colonial period in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, colonial era historians such as James Stuart and C. H. Lugg labelled Africans living within the boundaries of both Zululand and Natal as “Zulus” and thus forming the “Zulu tribe”⁷² and “Zulu social life”.⁷³ Related to this invention of identity was/is a tradition that the military conquest by Shaka Zulu, the founder of the Zulu kingdom, covered areas beyond the uMthavuna River. According to these accounts, KwaMachi became one of the groups inhabiting the territory between the uMzimkhulu and uMzimvubu Rivers that became “AmaZulu by conquest”.⁷⁴ In the twentieth century African leaders in the province exploited this notion to mobilize a broad Zulu identity.⁷⁵

As Norman Etherington argues, the focus around Shaka’s image clouded a possibility that there were powerful “kingdoms” other than the Zulu.⁷⁶ Studies by Wright and Hamilton maintain that before 1840 in Natal and Zululand, while identities were propagated in the Zulu kingdom, Zulu was not the only one. Identities within many groups were constructed on the basis of specific descent links rather than in “ethnic”

⁷¹ And indeed the history of other chiefdoms in the district of Harding, mainly KwaCele, KwaMbotho, KwaJali, Nkumbini, Dlamini and others suggests that these occupied the region between the 1820s and 1850s. This was long after the establishment of the KwaMachi chiefdom, whose history dates back to the late eighteenth century.

⁷² The term tribe was defined by James Stuart as a political unit made up of groups of people occupying a particular stretch of country and owing their allegiance to a “chief” who was independent of others. In the 1950s the South African government, under the homeland system, strengthened the powers of the “Tribal Authorities”. The criteria of political independence and the possession of a definite territory were seen by Stuart and other colonial writers as basic to the definition of what was called a “tribe” in Southern Africa.

⁷³ KCM, Stuart Papers, File 2, James Stuart, “Lectures and Notes on the Zulus: European Civilization from the Uncivilized Zulu’s Point of View”, 5 March 1924; and KCM, Lugg Papers, MS 54775, File 1, C. H. Lugg, “The Zulu Social System Analysed”, 1-3.

⁷⁴ Interview with Mr. MM, Pietermaritzburg, July 2003. Mr MM is among the officials working closely with His Majesty, King Zwelithini Zulu. Mr. MM is known as “an official Zulu historian” of the Zulu royal house and a praise singer. Mr MM argued that the present KwaZulu-Natal province in South Africa is only a fraction of the entire Zulu world that cut across provincial and national boundaries of Southern Africa.

⁷⁵ Discussion with Mr. MM, Durban, July 2003.

⁷⁶ N. Etherington, *The Great Treks: The Transformation of the Southern African Society, 1815-1854* (London, Longman, 2001).

terms.⁷⁷ The establishment of the Zulu kingdom,⁷⁸ and its eventual incorporation of many polities in the region in the 1820s, did not bring about complete political unity. Persistent opposition and pressure from factions within certain chiefdoms that Zulu rulers had subordinated reflected a lack of political unity throughout the 1820s and 1830s. This provided a narrow ground for a common Zulu identity among people who nevertheless recognized Zulu overlordship.⁷⁹ Some local groups remained intact and retained some degree of autonomy.⁸⁰

There is evidence that Africans had lived as entities in the areas between the uMthavuna and uMzimkhulu Rivers before the era of Shaka Zulu. Such people could not have called themselves AmaZulu before their encounter with Shaka Zulu because, prior to that time, Zulu referred only to a clan name. KwaMachi's position in all this is interesting. Records depicting the history of the Zulu entities in Natal and Zululand rarely mention KwaMachi.⁸¹ S. J. Maphala points out that, when analyzing the role of Africans in the Anglo-Boer War of 1899 (also known as the South African War), the African people of Harding remain silent.⁸² In the African-run newspapers in Natal, mainly *Ilanga Lase Natal*, KwaMachi rarely appears, and the chiefdom (KwaMachi) begins to appear in the *Ilanga Lase Natal* newspaper only in the 1930s. KwaMachi occasionally surfaces in E. B. Camp's work as one of the groups that crossed the uMthavuna River into Mpondoland in the 1820s when Shaka entered "No Man's Land", and returned to resettle on their lands after Shaka's return to Zululand,⁸³ thus escaping what some settler writers defined as "Shaka's irrational destruction".⁸⁴ Some of these groups settled permanently in Mpondoland. There is no evidence that Shaka established any political posts in the areas between the uMzimkhulu and uMthavuna Rivers. One of the key informants made a comment that

⁷⁷ J. Wright and C. Hamilton, "Ethnicity and Political Change before 1840", in R. Morrell, eds., *Political Economy and Identities in KwaZulu Natal* (Durban: University of Natal Press, 1996), 15-32.

⁷⁸ The course of which generated debates in Southern African scholarship in the 1980s by such scholars as N. Etherington, "Putting the Mfecane Controversy into Historical Context", J. Wright, "Beyond the Zulu Explosion: Comment on the Current Debate", E. Eldredge, "Sources of Conflict in Southern Africa c.1800-1830, The Mfecane Reconsidered", C. Hamilton, "The Character of Chaka: A Reconsideration of the Making of Shaka as Mfecane Motor", and others in C. Hamilton, ed., *The Mfecane Aftermath: Reconstructive Debates in Southern Africa* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1995).

⁷⁹ Wright and Hamilton, "Ethnicity and Political Change before 1840", 26. Also see J. Wright, "Political Transformations in Natal in the late Eighteenth and early Nineteenth Centuries" (paper presented to the Colloquium on the Mfecane Aftermath, University of the Witwatersrand, September 1991).

⁷⁹ Webb and Wright, *The James Stuart Archives*, 3: Evidence by Melaphi, 73 and 92.

⁸⁰ KCM, Nicholls Papers, MS 3304 (b), File 2, C. Nicholls, "The Zulu System of Government" in *Report of the Native Affairs Commission for the years between 1934 and 1940*, 1-4.

⁸¹ For example, KCM, 98/69/17/4, "Fynn Family Papers". Henry Francis Fynn gives a history of certain chiefdoms in the south coast of Natal. He does not mention KwaMachi. Also see NAB, Secretary for Native Affairs (SNA), "Native Tribes" from "Enclosure Number 1 Territory, Governor Scott's Dispatch, 26 February 1864; KCM 97/8/18 News Cuttings, TSS; A. T. Bryant, "Articles on the Zulu Tribes" and "Zulu Tribal History Competition", *Izindaba Zabantu*, 1911 and 1912.

⁸² S. J. Maphalala, "Role of Africans in the Zulu War" (Master's diss., University of Zululand, 1978).

⁸³ Camp, *History of the District of Alfred*, 2-4.

⁸⁴ J. Wright, "The Dynamics of Power and Conflict: The Phongolo-Mzimkhulu region in the Late Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries: A Critical Reconstruction" (PhD diss., University of Witwatersrand, 1990), 278. This oral history was also related to Camp in the early 1960s, in *History of the District of Alfred*.

*bonke oJolwayo aba bebezenzela nje apha. Bezenzela umathanda. Bewungasebenzi umthetho ka Zulu apha, bebesitla iinkomo. Ube necadlala, utliwe isibaya sonke.*⁸⁵

People like *Nkosi* Jolwayo did what they pleased here, they abused their constituency. Zulu Law did not operate here, they took our cattle from us. You would have a minor criminal offense, and he would take all your cattle.

Another informant disagreed with this statement, arguing that:

*Abantu be Lembe bonke labaya, kodwa bebenganakekekile ngoba kukude kulezizindawo, nezinto zokuhamba bezingekho.*⁸⁶

All those people [meaning KwaMachi], belong to *iLembe* [Shaka Zulu]. But they have been neglected because KwaMachi is far from Zululand, and there was no means of transportation.

In these two opposing views, the former reinforces the notion of KwaMachi as an independent pre-Shakan and pre-colonial community. The latter emphasizes Shaka Zulu, and the Zulu royal house, as a unifying political power in the region. For borderland entities such as KwaMachi, the premise upon which the latter's broad Zulu identity was founded is problematic. Before 1879, African leaders representing various districts periodically attended *izimbizo* (national councils) in Zululand to discuss matters of national significance. KwaMachi was not part of this tradition. Until the 1960s, KwaMachi leaders did not enjoy a tradition of visiting *Khethomthandayo*, a Zulu royal palace where African traditional leaders in Natal and Zululand had their appointments officially recognised.⁸⁷ In a land dispute that involved KwaMachi and the neighbouring chiefdoms of Zinkumbini (Mthimude), and KwaCele in the 1970s, Chief Gigaba of Zinkumbini stated that "they [Machi and their followers] were Pondos and would not tender homage to the Paramount Chief of the Zulu".⁸⁸ All this information supports William Beinart and Timothy Stapleton's conclusions that the area where KwaMachi is located never came under direct Zulu overlordship.⁸⁹

Oral history from KwaMachi provides narratives that present a more complex picture of KwaMachi's past. In a discussion with two interviewees, one of them said "*asiwona amaZulu apha, asiwona futhi amaMpondo, singuMachi*" ("we are not AmaZulu here, we are not AmaMpondo either, we are Machi"). The second one said "*lento yobuZulu iqine kakuhle apha ngeexesha ze separate development ngeminyaka yo 1970*" ("this idea of being Zulu here became strong with an ideology of separate development in the 1970s").⁹⁰ The former testimony discards the notion of Zulu as an overriding force within KwaMachi. According to the latter, Zulu identity was a later twentieth century

⁸⁵ Discussion with Mr BM, Elim, KwaMachi, June 2003. MB is a community resident.

⁸⁶ Interview with Mr MM, Pietermaritzburg, July 2003.

⁸⁷ Interview with Mr MM, Pietermaritzburg, July 2003.

⁸⁸ SAB, Bantu Administration and Development (BAD), File Number N1/1/3 (12)/4, IV: Correspondence from 3/12/71-23/1/76, "Chief/Kaptein Nkanyenzi Gigaba: Nkumbini", Minutes of the meetings held on September 4 and 19 1970, 36 and 37.

⁸⁹ Stapleton, *Faku*, and Beinart, *The Political Economy of Pondoland*.

⁹⁰ Discussion with Mr S.S. M, Piggah, KwaMachi, March 2003.

phenomenon prompted by certain political needs.⁹¹ The movements of the 1960s and 1970s were perpetuated by political needs of the time,⁹² and were not necessarily linked to the Zulu past. As another informant said:

*Mntam, thina singuZulu ngoku. Sesihlangene, siyinto nye. SingabakaButhelezi. Esethathe uzimele-geqe, uMathanzima wafika apha, ethi ulande ihhawu nenkomo. Wathi uyasifuna, singabakhe, ethi umhlaba wase Mampondweni ugcina ngomlambo uMzimkhulu, umda. Samxelela ukuba hhayi thina singabakaShenge, uMntwana wakwaPhindangene, uMnumzane Gatsha Mangosuthu Buthelezi. Makahambe ayoziifuna kwenye indawo ezizinto azifunayo.*⁹³

My child, we are Zulu now. We are united. We are one thing. We belong with Buthelezi [Dr Gatsha Buthelezi of IFP]]. After accepting independence, Mathanzima [probably in the 1970s, minister of the former Transkei homeland] came here, saying he had come to receive a shield and a cow.⁹⁴ He said he wanted us, that we were his people. He said Mpondoland [where Transkei was], ended with the uMzimkhulu River, the border. We told him that, no, we belong to Shenge now, the child of Phindangene, Mr Gatsha Buthelezi. That he must go and get what he is looking for [the shield and the cow] somewhere.

The growing influence of the IFP in the rural areas of KwaZulu-Natal in the 1970s saw *Nkosi* Sigidi Sidwell Machi, referred to as *Nkosi* Machi in the above quotation, becoming chair of a council that represented the south coast *AmaKhosi* in the KwaZulu Legislative Assembly. This was a political position that was related to his active membership in the IFP, the chairmanship that he held until his death in 2006. The manipulation and politicisation of Zulu identity between the 1970s and 1990s determined that people who felt politically inclined to its course would identify with institutions that claimed advocacy for Zulu interests. This transition in KwaZulu-Natal provided a politicised sense of belonging among the old generation of KwaMachi people, including those who might otherwise have not had a Zulu origin. The notion of “*singuZulu ngoku*” (“we are Zulu now”), and the accompanying political security within the IFP that the KwaMachi leadership has enjoyed in recent years, has left little or no room for KwaMachi leadership to claim back their pre Shakan political status in the region.⁹⁵

⁹¹ Discussion with Mr S.S. M, Pisgah, KwaMachi, March 2003.

⁹² Mainly the strengthening of “Tribal Authorities” in African territories, and the establishment of a Homeland System.

⁹³ Interview with Council M and Isibonda Z., Amba, KwaMachi, May 2003.

⁹⁴ Receiving a shield and a cow from KwaMachi leadership/residents or other chiefdoms in Harding would have signalled acceptance or acknowledgement of Mathanzima’s leadership in the district of Harding. With the independent Homeland System in place in South Africa in the 1970s, Mathanzima was on a campaign to expand and stretch his territory, Transkei, to cover areas up to the uMzimkhulu River.

⁹⁵ Interview with S.S.M, KwaMachi, March 2003. Bearing in mind though that, although the Machi leadership did not send their claim to the Nhlapo Commission, a new sense of political identity is slowly developing at KwaMachi. Education and urban influences in many rural areas are producing a new breed of young people who support the ANC (the African National Congress), the ruling party in South Africa. KwaMachi is prone to these political influences. One wonders what the future political implications of this will be for the KwaMachi chiefdom.

Such clan groups as Luthuli, Madiya, Mphofu, Memela, whose origin is Zululand, still feel attached to Zululand because they are:

*isizukulwane sokhokho bethu ababaleka kaZulu, bebaleka izimpi zika Shaka. Babaleka ke baze bazofika apha Kwa Machi. Bafikela ko Mbusi no Mbonwa apha. Ngokomlando wethu singuZulu.*⁹⁶

Descendants of migrant groups who left Zululand during the Shaka wars of the 1820s. They ran away until they reached KwaMachi. Here they found Mbusi and Mbonwa [KwaMachi leaders]. According to our history, we are Zulu.

Another interesting comment from an informant was:

*Noba ngabe sikuphi na singuZulu, futhi ke mntam siyohleze singuZulu. Ndazalwa apha KwaMachi, kwaMemela. NguZulu ke owo. Ndendela kwaMkhize, kwaKhabazela kaMavovo. NgoZulu bonke abo. Sudidwa yilento siyithethayo. Ngoku sakhelene namaMpondo, singathini ke mntam ukungathethi njengawo? Olulimi siluncele kuwo ngokwakhelala. Kodwa nje singuZulu.*⁹⁷

No matter where we are, we are Zulu, and my child we will always be. I was born here at KwaMachi, into a Memela family that is Zulu. I got married into a Mkhize family, the Khabazela of Mavovo. Those are all Zulu people. Do not be confused by what we speak. AmaMpondo are our neighbours, so how can we not speak like them? We speak their language because they are our neighbours. Otherwise we are Zulu).

One of the key points raised by the above quotations is that language is not always a determinant of one's identity. The adoption of the Mpondo dialect by people of Zulu origin reflected the power that the local environment had over people of various social backgrounds living there. It also suggests that people adopted local cultural and linguistic influences that helped them to blend into a local community. It is also interesting to see the positive role that ordinary people, on the ground, play in staking out their claims, constructing, reconstructing and debating their own history. The residents are free to claim their origins, space, landscape and material possession irrespective of their backgrounds as Sotho, Zulu, or Mpondo.⁹⁸ These contesting images within KwaMachi do not only demonstrate the intricate history of KwaMachi, they also illuminate diversity within the chiefdom, and the role of various political expressions and histories in manipulating KwaMachi people's conceptualisation of events within nationalist politics. In conclusion, it seems that community building within KwaMachi operated under a wide range of relations, determined by locally specific elements to form a community that was not necessarily kin based. The development and adoption of Zulu identity was a history in itself, a changing history informed by events before it.

⁹⁶ Interview with Isibonda L., Xhamini, KwaMachi, July 2003.

⁹⁷ Discussion with Mrs M, Harding town, June 2003.

⁹⁸ D. W. Cohen, *The Combing of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994) gives a good analysis of the relationship between "power", "knowledge", "memory", and "forgetting".

KwaMachi and Mpondoland

Although the history of the original inhabitants of what became KwaMachi has not been confirmed by oral sources, written sources recognise Mpondoland as an established African political institution beyond the uMzimkhulu River before the rise of the Zulu kingdom. Studies by William Beinart and Timothy Stapleton show that the Mpondo kingdom was established centuries before Machi settled.⁹⁹ In 1859, May and Davis argued that AmaMpondo lived to the east of the AmaXhosa, and that Mpondoland country began at the uMzimkhulu River and ended at the uThukela River.¹⁰⁰ John Wright points out, that following the “devastation of Natal” in the 1810s and 1820s, groups that migrated southwards and crossed the uMzimkhulu River found themselves entering a territory of the larger and more powerful Mpondo paramountcy.¹⁰¹ William Beinart states that “although pre colonial African polities did not have rigid boundaries, the Mpondo kingdom extended to the uMzimkhulu River to the northeast and the uMthatha River to the southwest”.¹⁰² It is possible, as Beinart argues, that if the 1844 treaty boundaries had continued to be recognised by the Cape and Natal, “the area called Mpondoland may have been bigger than it is today”. The Machi clan therefore established a chiefdom in the “Mpondo state that was not in any sense under the Zulu even in the 1820s”.¹⁰³ It is likely that many people who occupied what became KwaMachi were AmaMpondo. For centuries the Xhosa groups from the Cape Colony had also been moving eastwards, occupying the areas up to the uMzimkhulu River.¹⁰⁴ Therefore, when the Machi, Nzimakwe, and Xolo houses entered the so-called “No Man’s Land”, they “submitted themselves under the protection of the Mpondo countries”.¹⁰⁵ They occupied the north to south region of the uMthavuna River. The Machi house established their chiefdom which expanded towards, and covered, the north and north east of the uMthavuna River.¹⁰⁶

Although the traditions differ to some degree, Basotho, Natal, and Mpondoland origins are common between them. The general difficulty among many of my oral informants was that of establishing a connection between Natal, Mpondoland, and Basotho. There is a lack of clear periodisation and patterns that migrations followed between these three points of contact, before the Machi house settled permanently in the present Harding. Nevertheless, what comes out clearly is that Machi was from one of the houses of Sabela, some of which migrated to Mpondoland, “refusing to allow that they

⁹⁹ Beinart, *The Political Economy of Pondoland*; Stapleton, *Faku*.

¹⁰⁰ J. W. Colenso, *Izindatyana Zabantu Kanye Nezindaba zase Natal*, May and Davis, Natal, 1859.

¹⁰¹ Wright, “Political Transformations in the Thukela-Mzimkhulu”, 179.

¹⁰² Beinart, *The Political Economy of Pondoland*, 11

¹⁰³ Personal correspondence with William Beinart, 2005.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with TN, Lamontville, Durban, April 2003.

¹⁰⁵ Webb and Wright, *The Stuart Archive*, 2: 111-13, Mahaya ka Nongqabana’s Testimony.

¹⁰⁶ After annexation of “No Man’s Land” to Natal in 1866, KwaMachi became location 2. KwaJali location 1 on the west of KwaMachi. For further details on KwaXolo and KwaNzimakwe chiefdoms in the south of the uMthavuna River, see *Port Shepstone District Record Book* (unpublished) “Historical Data”, compiled by the Bantu Affairs Commissioners, covering the material up to the 1960s, housed in Port Shepstone Magistrate Court, 47-70.

are anything but Pondos”.¹⁰⁷ Although the evidence is scattered, it seems that people who eventually formed the KwaMachi chiefdom followed a triangular pattern of migration between Natal, the former Transvaal, and Mpondoland, before they finally settled in Harding.

Conclusion

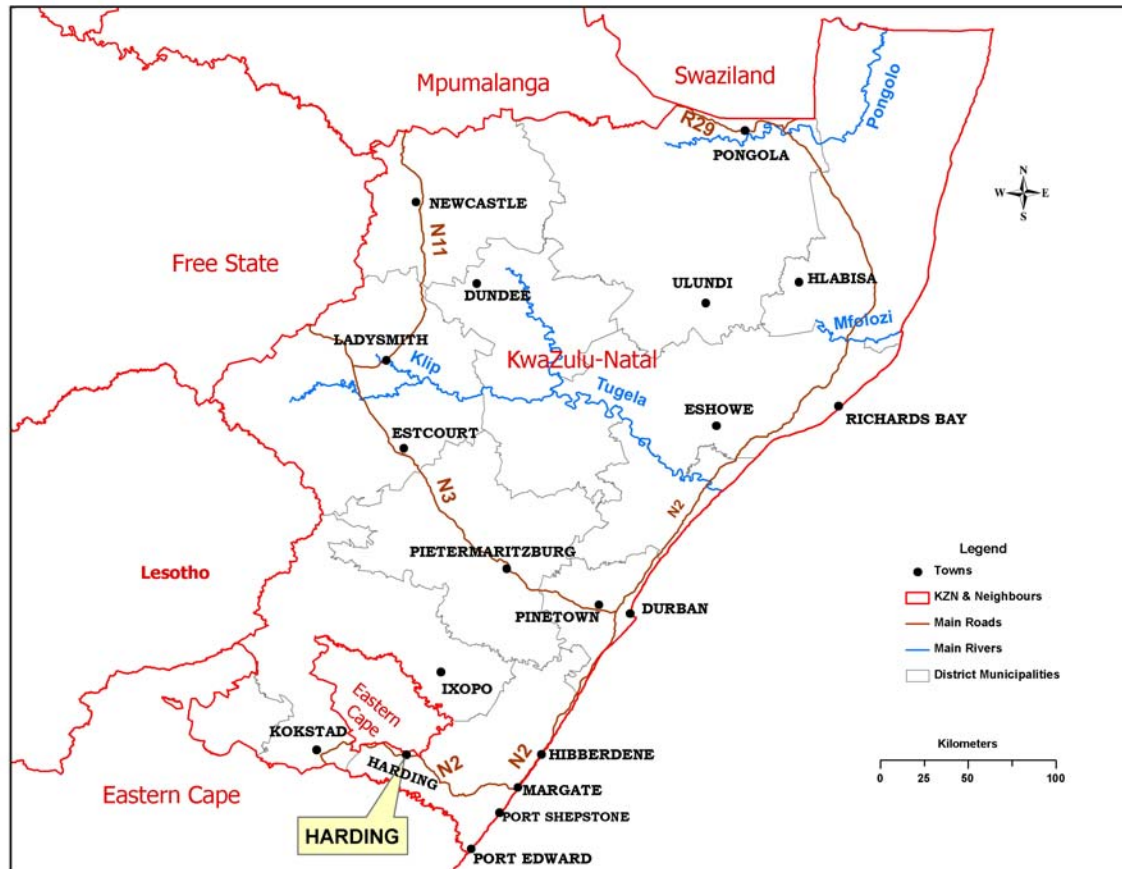
KwaMachi thus demonstrates a complex social formation accompanying migration and resettlement, which are characteristics of a frontier community. Being a borderland chiefdom, KwaMachi has maintained flexible linguistic and cultural affiliations. The colonial and apartheid systems did not change the basic social organization of the chiefdom. KwaMachi continued to exist as “an island” between mainly Zululand and Mpondoland, as the quotation in the introduction suggests. Borderlands are not only marked in territory, but also in language, names, marks on the body, and other codes for social exclusion and inclusion. Commonality among people of diverse backgrounds was defined by KwaMachi people’s notion of belonging to a Machi clan that claimed power and resources. This is key to community building historical writing analysis in Africa, the Americas, Asia and elsewhere. One may borrow Jeff Lesser’s point, in his studies of Brazilian society, that cultural interactions can see the rise of fluid cultures, the elements of which are negotiated and subsequently shared by residents.¹⁰⁸ KwaMachi community building was a multifaceted struggle in which bonds of patronage were negotiated in a broad range of social interactions. These would be local creations, born out of changes in social relations and political structures.¹⁰⁹ With all these influences, entities forged coherence to validate incorporation into KwaMachi. The linguistic or cultural combination arising out of these interactions does not always have a name and should therefore not be defined within a single *ethnic* paradigm. Well into the twentieth century, 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.

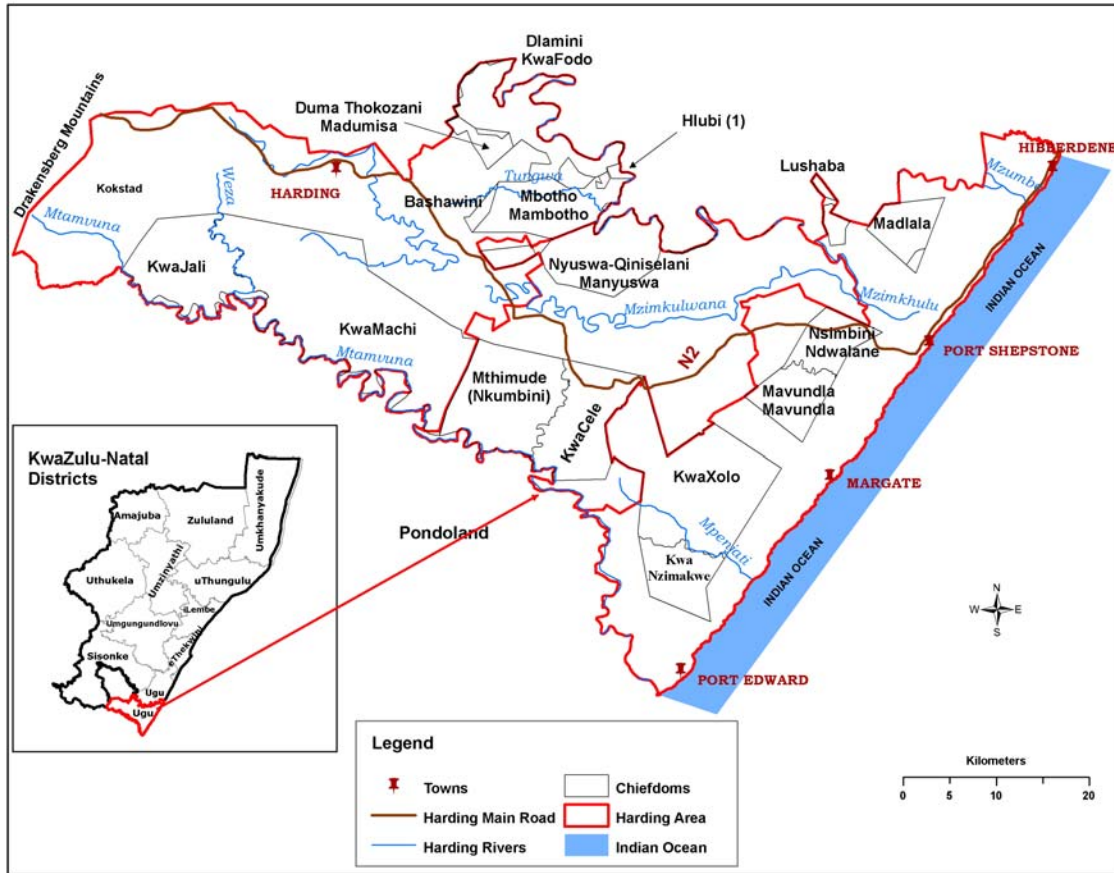
¹⁰⁷ Discussion with Mdu M., June 2004, and Webb and Wright, *Stuart Archives*, Volume 2, 126, Mahaya’s Testimony, and Mmemi ka Nguluzane’s Testimony. J. Wright “Political Transformations in the Thukela-Mzimkhulu Region in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries”, in Hamilton, ed., *The Mfecane Aftermath*, 164-70, gives further examples of such migrant groups.

¹⁰⁸ J. Lesser, *Negotiating National Identity in Brazil: Immigrants, Minorities, and the Struggle for Ethnicity in Brazil* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999). Also see D. L. Schoenbrun, *A Green Place, A Good Place: Agrarian Change, Gender, and Social Identity in the Great Lakes region to the Fifteenth Century* (Oxford: James Currey, 1998).

¹⁰⁹ J. Comaroff, *Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance: The Culture and History of a South African People* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

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