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## Conclusion

This study is about the interface between ecology, culture, identity and politics. It is about the impact of cultural, social and political ecology on the evolution of ethnic identity. The origin of this episode was ecological – the scab disease that was perennial in Cape sheep. The intervention of the Government in attempting to eradicate this disease that had very damaging economic consequences, revealed a variety of environmental conditions that affected stock farming in the Cape – many other diseases affected sheep, as did climatic conditions, the nature of the soil, and grazing. Culture comes into the picture because culture, in the broad sense of the word, especially among farming communities living under rough conditions (as many Afrikaner sheep farmers did) is largely shaped by the environment. It evolves over a long period and is transmitted from generation to generation. It enlightens members of such communities about the ecological conditions they live under, offering strategies which enable them to cope in their struggle for survival. It amounts to a vital body of knowledge which forms an integral part of the community's cultural baggage. The cultural output emerging from such an encounter between human beings and their environment is deeply ingrained in their individual and collective consciousness. Consequently, ecology pervades the social life of such communities. The ecology and the way people relate to it and deal with it form a vital part of their tradition. From this perspective the opponents of the Act perceived themselves as traditionalist. Tradition in that sense became a major determinant of their individual and collective identity and conduct.

Traditions in farming communities are often implicit. They become explicit objects of articulation especially when such communities face deep crises under the pressures of forces of change. The Cape Afrikaner sheep farmers in the late nineteenth century were certainly experiencing the forces of change introduced by the British throughout the century. From their particular perspective, the Act was the ultimate manifestation of these forces threatening the survival of their traditional way of life. This threat stimulated them in articulating their traditional outlooks. The outburst of articulations that accompanied the Scab Act crisis resulted from the fact that the farmers were facing not only the Government, but also fellow farmers belonging to the English-speaking community. The latter not only fully identified with the Government's initiatives; they, in fact, demanded a much more radical approach to dealing with scab. The English-speaking sheep farmers represented the very antithesis of the Cape Afrikaner sheep farmers' traditional way life. From this perspective they represented a threatening 'Other'.

The encounter with the 'Other' in such circumstances had a definite impact on the process of identity formation among the Cape Afrikaner sheep farmers involved. The

need to articulate their particular perceptions and ways of doing things rendered this process much richer and denser. For the opponents of the Act, being a Cape Afrikaner sheep farmer was not only about speaking a particular language or attending a particular church, it was about much more. It was about their particular way of perceiving the ecology and of dealing with its challenges in pursuit of sheep farming. It was also about their particular social networks that had evolved in the long encounter with the ecological conditions prevailing in the Cape and the moral values that underpinned them. Their identity, in other words, reflected the totality of their human experience. This considerably enriches our understanding of the process of ethnic formation among Cape Afrikaners, as has been dealt with mainly in Chapter One.

The particularity of most Cape Afrikaner sheep farmers is manifested most starkly when compared with the 'Other'. Whereas the former were on the receiving end of the wave of modernisation and progress that pressured them to change their traditional way of doing things, the latter were not only its adherents but also its champions and crusaders. In the first place, there was a very wide ontological gap between the opponents of the Act and its proponents. The latter were informed by the creed of progress, their knowledge of sheep farming stemming from the latest scientific discoveries and the latest *Agricultural Journal*. Even when they had to adjust to the particular conditions in the Cape, the ideal of most of them was to farm by the book.

Through the agency of the *Journal* and of the veterinary service, Afrikaner sheep farmers could avail themselves of the same knowledge. Yet, many of them rejected it to a larger or smaller degree. For them, experience rather than science was the source of appropriate and reliable knowledge. The ontological gap represented a deep cleavage between modernity and tradition. The respective attitudes to the environment in general were also very contradictory. Whereas the modernists believed in taming and mastering it, the traditionalist Afrikaners viewed it as a manifestation of nature and God, and hence it was to be treated respectfully. They had to submit and adjust to nature rather than challenge and change it. From these contradictory perspectives stemmed the opposing strategies to combat scab as an ecological adversity. Inspired by the progressive creed and the discoveries of science the English-speaking farmers advocated the total eradication of the disease. For many Afrikaner sheep farmers such an attitude was an affront to nature and to its Creator. Their goal was to adjust to ecological adversities rather than to stamp them out.

The economy was also differently perceived. Whereas most English-speaking farmers had a Darwinian understanding of economic life with the market as the ultimate arbiter, many Afrikaner sheep farmers opposing the Act viewed the economy mainly as providing support for their particular way of life, even at the expense of efficiency and profitability. The respective perceptions of the role of the state were also contradictory. Whereas the English-speaking supporters of the Act urged the Government to use all its powers in combating the disease and clearing the obstacles

on the road to economic progress, the opponents thereof strongly resented the Government's radical intervention. The above contradictory positions and dispositions were reinforced and underpinned by contradictory value systems. The supporters of the Act perceived progress through obedience to the market as the guarantor of ultimate social justice. The opponents, on the other hand, articulated a complex moral ethnicity in which the market had to submit to the requisites of social justice.

The above gaps and contradictions reflected the marked differences in the social realities of the respective camps. The English-speaking farmers' basic social unit was the nuclear family. From this perspective their radical individualism and their reliance on efficiency and on the market made perfect sense. Many Afrikaner sheep farmers' frontier individualism was mitigated by a complex social network that supported them in times of adversity and need.

Taking all this into account in understanding the process of identity formation, it is evident that for the Afrikaner sheep farmers opposing the Act, ethnic identity was culturally very dense. Yet, while the gap between traditional Afrikaner opponents and progressive English-speaking supporters of the Act was very wide, the former were not necessarily outright, uncompromising, backward-looking traditionalists. Many of them did not long for a traditional golden age from the deep past. Rather, they insisted on making their own selection from what the modern world was offering, while reserving their right to adhere to what was, in their eyes, good and useful in their tradition. For them the ultimate arbiter was experience.

All this is, as we have seen in Chapter Two, only part of the story. It is true that the Scab Act crisis heightened and deepened ethnic identity among sheep farmers opposing the Act. Yet, at the same time, the crisis also caused a serious rift within the Cape Afrikaner community, exposing some visible fissures in it. Fault lines appeared between the central leadership of the ethnic party and its periphery, and between different sectors within the community. Wheat farmers tended to stand by the sheep farmers opposing the Act, partly because many of them also raised sheep. But wine farmers adopted a hostile attitude towards the anti-Scab Act movement. A sharp division also appeared between the sheep farmers, and businessmen and professionals who played a prominent role in the Bond leadership. Worse still, from the opponents' point of view, a cleavage also became apparent within the Afrikaner sheep-farming sector. A determined minority supported the Act, manifesting similar positions and attitudes emanating from their English counterparts.

This does not have to surprise us or undermine the argument that the crisis played an important role in the ethnocultural assertion of Cape Afrikanerdom. The process of ethnic identity and consciousness formation is seldom a harmonious march of unanimity. It is about delineating the boundary around a particular group, and between it and others. The building materials for this enterprise are the ethnic language and culture, common memories and common myths. In the case of the Cape Afrikaners

these amounted to a rather low common denominator. Beyond that the process of ethnocultural identity formation was rather messy and full of disputes and internal debates and struggles. Ethnic solidarity does not eliminate internal divisions but rather transcends them. There is normally no agreement on the interests, goals, strategies and even the morality of the ethnic group. In fact, in the case under study the intra-Afrikaner debate was fiercer and more acrimonious than the one between the opponents and the English-speaking farmers.

It would have been surprising had there been unanimity among Afrikaners on an issue affecting a particular sector. Cape Afrikaners were, after all, not only Afrikaners. As the case is universally, ethnicity is normally one of few affiliations of members of an ethnic community. Cape Afrikaners were also farmers engaged in sheep, wheat, wine, ostrich etc. farming. They were farmers, businessmen, professionals, urban, rural etc. They were unilingual, bilingual, educated and uneducated. They were high or low on the socioeconomic ladder. The articulation of ethnocultural unity as a paramount value could not mask the different interests and dispositions stemming from the competing affiliations and backgrounds. In some contexts ethnic unity was uppermost while in others it was irrelevant, being ignored in pursuit of particular sub-ethnic interests. Furthermore, each group – in pursuing its particular interests and worldview – infused the broad ethnocultural discourse with its own particular experience, interests and dispositions. Thus the sheep farmers opposing the Act tried to transform their struggle into a unifying ethnic one. In doing so they expected all Cape Afrikaners to rally behind them and adopt their ontology and their version of moral ethnicity. Yet, their ontology and moral outlook reflected their particular past and contemporary experience. They insisted that their particular mixture of modernity and tradition truly reflected the essence of a supposedly common ethnic heritage. Thus they tried to make their rather conservative orientation the test of *ware* [true] Cape Afrikanerdom. In doing so they also aimed at rendering the cultural boundary between Afrikaners and English-speakers much denser and less penetrable.

In pursuing this far-reaching goal they only exposed the deep division between them and the progressives in the Afrikaner community. The Afrikaners supporting the Scab Act wanted the boundary to remain more porous, allowing them to borrow freely from the English-speaking community more than the opponents would have tolerated. They were not prepared to sacrifice their progressive creed on the altar of ethnocultural unity. In fact, they saw progress as a crucial element in the march of the Afrikaner community into the future. Progress, for them, was the true manifestation of the Cape Afrikaner ethnic assertion. The creed of progress, as we have seen, also captured the imagination of many sheep farmers. Thus supporters of the Act internalised progress and incorporated it into their perception of Afrikanerdom – they did not consider themselves lesser Afrikaners for that. On the contrary, in their self-perception they manifested the true symbiotic disposition of Cape Afrikaners. The internal struggle was so fierce because it was about the essence and soul of Afrikanerdom.

The deep gulf between different sectors and orientations resulted from the uneven impact of modernisation on the Afrikaner community. Indeed, the process of modernisation and social change among Cape Afrikaners was very complex, being determined by many factors (as is invariably the case in the transition from tradition to modernity, especially under the impact of foreign colonial agency). Cape Afrikaners were spread along the continuum between progress and conservatism. Some were engulfed by progress and its cultural and ideological ramifications. Those adhering to a radical modernist outlook were, however, a small minority. Many fiercely resisted, while others were on different points along the continuum, each striking his particular compromise between old and new. The controversy between opponents of the Act and its supporters was not between conservative ethnocultural purists and outright assimilationists. The supporters of the Act adopted the creed of progress and the dictates of science, grafting them on their young ethnocultural tree. Opponents of the Act were more critical of this implant and wished to be much more selective in adopting modernity's innovations and its sociomoral ramifications. However, as we have seen, they did not reject the latter lock, stock and barrel. They had more respect for the lessons of experience and were more apprehensive about the adverse impact of the Act on the social fabric that underpinned their way of life. Yet, since sectorial material interests and a definition of the ethnomoral essence were involved in the response of Cape Afrikaners to the challenge of modernity, the internal controversy surrounding the Scab Act was intense and acrimonious. Having said all that, it is important to underline that the boundary between the Afrikaner opponents and supporters of the Act on issues of ontology and moral ethnicity was very porous – this often made it difficult to locate individuals in a particular camp.

It is hardly surprising that the Scab Act controversy assumed a strong political salience. Seeing that colonial democracy prevailed in the Cape, it would have been surprising had the opponents of the Act not carried their cause to the political arena. Indeed, the Scab Act crisis gave rise to an amazing political movement with a very strong grass roots salience. Some of the political energy produced by the crisis was directed by the movement at the Government which initiated and implemented the Act, and against the legislature that enacted it. Yet, the thrust of the political effort of the anti-Scab Act movement was internal, the Afrikaner Bond being its main target. This was so because, as far as the Scab Act was concerned, Afrikaners and Bondsmen were heavily involved. Rhodes's Government, which fathered the Act, rested on the solid and faithful support of the Afrikaner Bond. Bondsmen were also members of subsequent governments. Among the MPs who supported the Scab Bill there were many leading Bondsmen. Strategically, the opponents had to conquer the Bond before they could hope to have an impact on the Government. Furthermore, the betrayal of their ethnic cause by the leaders of the ethnic party provoked strong animosity against the Bond leadership, making them prime targets of the anti-Scab Act agitation. Bond branches in sheep-growing areas became grass roots platforms in the struggle

against the Act, the annual party congresses witnessing fierce struggles over the true Cape Afrikaners' values and soul.

However, this conflict did not augur a process of disintegration of the Cape Afrikaner ethnocultural community or even of its representative party. In fact, the anti-Scab Act agitation unfolded at the height of Cape Afrikaners' project of self-assertion, at a time when the political power of Cape Afrikanerdom reached its zenith. The Bond won its greatest electoral victory in 1898 while this internal conflict was still raging. The intra-Afrikaner Scab Act crisis merely underlined what is very often true of other processes of ethnocultural or ethnonational identity and consciousness formation. Such processes are characterised more by division and internal strife than by unity and harmony, common ethnicity merely demarcating the boundary with others within which sharp disagreements and fierce struggles are the order of the day. However, beyond the internal conflict, and in relation with the relevant other, Cape Afrikaners shared common language, culture and traditions, and cherished memories and perceived common interests. While not preventing the eruption of a severe internal conflict, these commonalities certainly moderated its manifestations. *Volk* and flock inhabited, after all, the same Cape Afrikaner ethnic *laager*.

Finally, there is the stark contradiction between the fierce – at times verbally violent – discourse of the opponents of the Act and the essentially mute, non-violent salience of their campaign. This was a true reflection of the process of change that engulfed even the hard-line opponents of the Act. While being traditionalists imbued by the values that had emerged along the loose frontier, they were also influenced by the new political, economic, social and cultural order instituted by British colonialism. While the encounter with the British Other (as colonial rulers or as settlers) carved the ethnocultural boundary around the Cape Afrikaners and facilitated its maintenance, it also had a marked impact on the content of their ethnic identity and consciousness. Cape Afrikaners, in absorbing many elements of the Other's culture, developed an ethnocultural world view which was hybrid. Naturally, those who lived in the centres of the new culture absorbed much more of the latter. However, even the remote sheep farmers were not immune from the impact of the powerfully transmitted hegemonic culture. Beyond that, with the introduction of Responsible Government in 1872 and especially since the mid-1880s Cape Afrikaners through the Afrikaner Bond became an integral part of the colonial political system. Thus, while part of their consciousness rebelled against the unwelcome intervention by the Government, another, informed by a deeply ingrained loyalty to Empire and Queen, mitigated their response, restricting their revolt to the realm of words rather than deeds. Thus beyond being an ecological episode the Scab Act crisis sheds interesting light on the broader process of ethnic identity and consciousness formation among cultural groups affected by processes of modernisation and social change. In the case of Cape Afrikaners, *volk* and flock went hand in hand.

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