

Water Management in the Letaba District, North-eastern Transvaal in the 1940s and 1950s – an Arena for Studying Emancipatory Practices at Grassroots Level?

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This paper will examine the dynamics around water management in Letaba District, north-eastern Transvaal, South Africa, in the changing political climate of the 1940s and 1950s. The paper will start out by looking at the changing policies by means of which the local administration in this rural area sought to regulate access to water. It will then seek to retrace some of the local government officials' negotiations and debates with traditional chiefs and exponents of the commercial farming sector in the area which accompanied efforts at implementing and enforcing such policies. With water being a resource vital to social elites but to all people across political, economical and racial divides, the paper will further try to identify and engage with popular practices and impulses with regard to access to water as well as popular responses to the above-mentioned governmental interventions. On the basis of these findings, the paper will close by reflecting on the promises and problems inherent in such an attempt to identify practices and discourses of emancipation at grassroots level with focus on access to a basic resource and a small unit of local government in the Transvaal in the 1940s and 1950s.