

The Monopolization of Access to a Critical Natural Resource: The Case of Water in South Africa

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ABSTRACT South Africa is undergoing a vigorous social transformation at present. One aspect that this transformation is designed to redress is the imbalances that resulted from Apartheid. Through a process of resource capture, the political elite of the past half-century monopolized access to water which is a critical natural resource in arid regions. This paper identifies the constraints within which arid states function. It focuses specifically on the role that indigenous knowledge plays in maintaining a culture of drought tolerance. Evidence is offered that suggests where settler intrusion was limited, indigenous knowledge survived and enabled a vibrant culture of drought tolerance to flourish. Conversely, where settler intrusion was higher, there is a corresponding lack of a culture of drought tolerance. The explanation for this is the fact that settlers originated from the wet North, and the knowledge that they brought with them was largely inappropriate for long-term survival in arid conditions. New water legislation may allow indigenous knowledge to again find its rightful place in society.