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"Anti-Erosion Policies in the Mountain Areas of Lesotho: the South African Connection"

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Driver, Thackwray. "Anti-Erosion Policies in the Mountain Areas of Lesotho: the South African Connection." *Environment and History* 5, no. 1 (Feb., 1999): 1–25. doi:10.3197/096734099779568407 . Commercial agriculture in the dry interior of South Africa is heavily reliant upon irrigation water from the Orange River. Most of this vital water does not fall as rain on South African soil but as rain and snow in the mountains of Lesotho. At various times over the past century fears have been expressed over the impact of soil erosion in the mountain areas of Lesotho on South African water resources. These fears have, on occasion, been translated into political pressure on Lesotho to implement anti-erosion policies such as grazing control in the mountain areas. This paper concentrates on the first period of anti-erosion policies in the mountain areas of Lesotho in the late 1940s and early 1950s, and examines the importance of South African pressures to the adoption of these policies. During this period the issue of soil erosion became an important element in the debate about the transfer of the High Commission Territories (Lesotho, Swaziland and Botswana) to South African control and an issue that caused a great deal of concern amongst Lesotho's colonial officials. The subsequent development of an apartheid ideology changed the nature of South African demands in relation to the transfer of the High Commission Territories, and the issue of soil erosion rapidly dropped from the political agenda. The rise and fall of soil erosion as an issue of concern in this period had more to do with internal South African politics than it did with the reality of environmental conditions in the mountain areas of Lesotho. All rights reserved. © 1999 The White Horse Press

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