

Constructs of Authority and the Limits of Social-political Contracts

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Recent district creation in Kpandai, northern Ghana has given rise to a resurfacing of historically unresolved disputes concerning ethnic citizenship and rights to chiefship. This harks back to the colonial reforms of the 1930's. These contests are situated in the context of a practical inseparability between emerging configurations of competing public authorities, on the one hand, and the practice of state sanction of property rights, on the other. Both processes generate winners and losers and compound simple differentiations between de jure and de facto categories. The paper traces linkages between the production of authority and identity and the generation of property rights through analysis of interactions between antagonistic traditional authorities and state institutions. This demonstrates that the practices of the new assembly executive and ministry level representatives feed into the dispute, regenerate exclusive categories, and increase insecurity of tenure. The analysis contributes to recent understandings of critical decentralisation literature by showing the linkages between statute, identity production, emerging arenas of authority and the limits of informalisation processes.