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“Spaces of authority: moving in and out of spaces of incarceration in Giyani”

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated and analysed practices of criminal justice in South Africa. Specifically, the study tried to understand how people use their experiences in awaiting trial prison to negotiate and recreate the existing structures of authority and power. The study focused particularly on a notorious gang well known in Giyani called the K-9, and how the power struggle of the gang fits into the broader landscape of power and authority in Giyani. In so doing, the study identified three different forms of authority namely authority in the homeland, the role of gift giving in creating authority in prison, and authority that comes with belonging to a prison gang. The study through ethnographic research method and semi-structured interviews thus revealed that the focus of the gang is the co-production of domination and dignity in a space where men have little room in which to manoeuvre. An important contribution of the paper is that it looks at gangs not from a city perspective like most literature on gangs have, but from a rural perspective and in this regard presents exceptional accounts.