Genealogical geographies, territoriality and the politics of land and belonging in southern Zimbabwe

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For many people around Lake Mutirikwi, a modern dam in Masvingo district in southern Zimbabwe constructed in the early 1960s, fast track land reform in the 2000s offered new opportunities to make real long-standing aspirations to return to ancestral landscapes from which they had been evicted in the middle of the 20th century. They also provoked a series of fierce new disputes between chiefs and clans over boundaries and territory. To make sense of these, I explore the contested ‘genealogical geographies’ deployed by chiefs and clans in the 2000s, and what they tell us about history, historiography and changing notions of territoriality. These 'genealogical geographies' reflect how histories of 19th century Karanga expansion and particular Duma settlement in the area sedimented into place through graves, ruins and ‘sacred’ hills to constitute active and affective material landscapes of belonging. But they also reveal how older pre-colonial forms of territoriality intertwined with the more cadastral, technocratic kinds of territoriality wrought by Rhodesian rule, thereby reflecting how different past regimes of rule to do with land and authority can endure, coexist and give shape to current contests through the active materialities of landscape they constitute.