CHAPTER 5

Merrivale Farm during and after Fast-Track Land Reform, 2000–2010

When we are talking about land in Zimbabwe, we are not talking about the types of farms one sees in Britain, or for that matter most of Europe today. The average size of a family owned farm in Britain is 65 hectares; in France, it is 35 hectares. Even in the US, the land of the giant farms, the size is between 200 and 250 hectares. In Zimbabwe, the average size is 3,000 hectares! There are farms of 15,000, even 20,000.

Shire 2003:12

Introduction

This chapter provides an analysis of the land-acquisition process at Merrivale Farm during the mayhem (jambanja) phase of the FTLRP. The events surrounding the new era for Zimbabwe's agricultural sector are dealt with here at a micro-level. Marongwe (2008:5) notes that “most research work on FTLRP is at the macro-level and is largely deficient of what occurs on the ground.” Thus, for instance, Moyo and Sukume (2004), Masiiwa (2004), and many other researchers based in the developed world have written on the FTLRP but have not meaningfully unpacked it at a micro-level. Scoones et al. (2010) have attempted to demystify some of the widely held myths about post-2000 land reform in Zimbabwe. The Land and Livelihoods Research Programme has been involved in fieldwork in Masvingo Province for almost a decade. Scoones et al. note that there is no single story of land reform in Zimbabwe: the story is mixed—by region, by type of scheme, and by settler. The descriptions given here reflect how politics usurped the role of law and how the uniformed forces and war veterans felt they had been victorious because they had annexed land from the white farmers in the area. Moyo and Yeros (2009) have pointed out

---

1 This term reflects that fact that fast-track land reform was characterised by disorder, chaos, violence and loosely coordinated efforts by the actors involved in the exercise to redistribute the land.

2 A research programme coordinated by Ian Scoones from the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, Brighton, the Institute for Poverty, Land, and Agrarian Studies, University of the Western Cape, and the Centre for Applied Social Sciences in Zimbabwe. The researchers focus on livelihoods after land reform in Zimbabwe, South Africa, and Namibia, examining the different land reform contexts.
that the only way forward for effective land redistribution in Africa is “for social movements themselves to take the initiative, but not by contesting the control of the state apparatus.” They have called for (Moyo and Yeros 2009:15):

...a retreat from dogmatic party politics and a return to grassroots political work with the objective of building durable and democratic structures in the countryside, especially cooperatives, to build alliances with urban workers, and to begin, once again, to change the correlation of forces. For us, it seemed self-defeating to stand up to the state apparatus on a neo colonial platform or without adequate progressive alliances. For our detractors, however, the platform of the opposition was not neocolonial; it was progressive. This, in turn, has been among the most disheartening aspects of our colleagues’ work: their failure to integrate the external factor and penetration of Zimbabwean politics.

This perspective has been further supported by Sadomba (2008) in a study that used participant-observation to examine the land-acquisition process in Mazowe District, where he finds that war veterans played a crucial role in mobilising the population to repossess their land.

In Masvingo Province, 1.2 million hectares of land have been redistributed to around 20,000 households. Chaumba et al. (2003) and Marongwe (2002, 2008) attempted, albeit in limited fashion, to capture some of the FTLRP dynamics at local level. In this study, I expand the understanding of these dynamics by examining the role of women at the Muzhanjire base in Mwenezi to demonstrate women's participation in the birth of contemporary Merrivale. It is my intention through this study to close an existing lacuna in the literature addressing women's roles.

I elucidate the gazetting of Merrivale as an A1 farm and how land was acquired by the participating actors. The events surrounding the present settlers’ move onto the land at Merrivale are also explained. I documented the households on the farm, the land area per family, crops grown, marketing facilities, and the socio-political organisation of the new settlements, building on my need to discover how the social and political governance at Merrivale influences how women manoeuver to access land today.

**Land Acquisition at Merrivale in 2000**

In 2000, there were unprecedented attacks on white commercial farmers by the then government of Zimbabwe, war veterans, ordinary rural and urban