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Construction of the 'Sellout' Identity during Zimbabwe's war of liberation: A Case Study of the Dandawa Community of Hurungwe district, c1975-1980

Ivan Marowa*

Abstract

Cette étude s'intéresse à l'expression orale des recherches menées dans les chefferies Dandawa afin de comprendre quelles sont les effets de la guerre de libération sur cette communauté. Un aspect qui a été souligné au cours de mon travail sur le terrain est celle de capitulards, une identité qui est devenue si fréquente au cours de l'ensemble de la période de la lutte de libération au Zimbabwe. Ce document examine donc comment cette identité a été construite pendant la guerre du Zimbabwe de la libération affectueusement connu sous le nom de la Deuxième Chimurenga. Il fait valoir que l'identité capitulard a été créée par la société pour répondre aux besoins de l'époque. A ce jour cette identité est devenue fortement politique utilisée contre ceux accusés d'être des ennemis de l'Etat. Cette étude fait valoir que, dans le Zimbabwe, l'identité capitulard prend racine sous la colonisation, en particulier vers le milieu des années 1970. Il affirme en outre qu' à l'indépendance, cette identité loin de disparaître, sera ravivée avec l'émergence du Mouvement pour le changement démocratique (MDC).

There are clear instances where identities have been created by others and bestowed upon some people. Quick examples include that of the coloureds in former British colonies or the mesticos/mulattoes in former Portuguese colonies. This is the similar situation in which the sellout identity has emerged, developed and has become accepted in the Zimbabwean society

* History Department, University of Zimbabwe.

today. The history of the issue of sellout is not anything new to the vocabulary of Zimbabwean language dialects but the difference is in the weight and significance that has become attached to the word. The term sellout(s) pronounced mutengesesi (sing.) or vatengesesi (plural) in Shona dialects has a general understanding attached to it. Generally, it means one whose business concerns disclosing plans, strategies or ideas not necessarily to the enemy but to an opposite camp. In the historical existence of the Zimbabwean societies, instances where their plans or ideas were made known to the opposite camp are numerous. However, as already highlighted such cases were not frequent and their intensity was minimal. The scenario changed with the arrival and establishment of colonialism in Zimbabwe. At a time when Black Zimbabweans were brought together under the banner of nationalism with the zeal of fighting colonialism for Independence, also saw the social creation of a concrete sellout identity. The existence of this identity since then has culminated in the evolution of the sellout culture. In Zimbabwe the sellout identity exists where there is an up surge of nationalism. The two, that is, nationalism and sellouts, exist side by side and are evident where there is a common denominator particularly in the face of presumed threat to nationhood and sovereignty.

Defining Sellouts/Vatengesesi in Dandawa

To use the word sellout as a way of othering other people is quite easy, but to define the term is quite difficult. The term is not stable in its use depending on who is using it and where they want it applied. The definition of a sellout is like a chameleon that changes colour in relation to the surrounding environment. During the liberation struggle, sellouts existed at three different levels and occurred from different angles. The levels from which sellouts existed concerned rendering support either to the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (Zanla), the Zimbabwe People's revolutionary Army (Zipra) or to the Rhodesian Front (R.F.) or its auxiliary forces, the Pfumo reVanhu (P.R.V.). The angles had to do with who applied the concept, that is, the Zanla could use it against Zipra, P.R.V. and the R.F. while the Zipra could use it against Zanla, P.R.V. and the R.F. and the R.F. and the P.R.V. used it against the nationalist parties. For this paper, the sellout identity will be limited to those parties involved in the liberation struggle in Dandawa, that is, the general povo, the Zipra and the P.R.V. to examine how the identity was defined crafted and understood in the area.

This paper is just part of an agenda to discuss this identity but not whole in its conclusions since it is using examples based on a single community though that is juxtaposed to generalized ideas from around Zimbabwe. What is true and acceptable is the idea raised by Marowa that the existence of the liberation struggle in any community in Zimbabwe was synonymous with the presence of

sellouts.¹ The idea of sellout has been a topical issue in discussions about the interaction between the guerrillas and the communities in which they operated. This part is not meant to define the word 'sellout' itself but to stipulate or identify the person classified as a sellout and how that identification came about. The categorisation of people as sellouts has never been one of self-realisation or self-given.

Manungo has highlighted and tried to discuss the idea of sellouts in his study of the peasants of Chiweshe and the liberation war. He points out that during the war of liberation there were a few people who dissented from the (objectives of) war of liberation but instead threw their support to the Rhodesian government². It was these people whom Manungo classifies as sellouts/vatengesi. Manungo's definition is correct in as far as it remains a nationalist interpretation of Zimbabwe's liberation war, out of that context, his definition leaves out a number of issues. It fails to consider that society is not homogeneous but is made up of different classes of people who convey reactions and believe in different ideologies. Moreover, Manungo does not problematise the he calls, 'the people who dissented' as this would sound as if there was no option with everything being universally accepted. The question to Manungo would be, 'which people was he talking about?', considering that sellouts existed at different levels and from different angles. It further seems his people are homogeneous and acting in unison without analysing factors that create the sellout identity. Where would one place people like Ndabaningi Sithole by 1979 or those who defected from either Zipra to Zanla or Zanla to Zipra?

The people in areas where the war was fought reacted variously to different activities that happened during the liberation struggle. In Katerere, David Maxwell notes that there were conflicting peasant agendas based on ethnicity, social stratification, gender and generation³. The Katerere people responded differently to the arrival of Zanla politicisation. Some supported it to square their differences with their enemies while others remained aloof. A huge mitigating factor to Zanla mobilisation arose from the fact that the

¹ I. Marowa, 'Landscape and memory: Understanding rural heritage of the Second Chimurenga in the Dandawa area of Hurungwe district, c1975-1980.', M.A. thesis, History Department, University of Zimbabwe, 2006, p56

² K.D. Manungo, 'Role peasants played in Zimbabwe war of liberation with special emphasis on Chiweshe district,' PhD Thesis, Department of History, Ohio University, 1991, p179

³ D.J. Maxwell 'Local politics and the war of liberation in North-east Zimbabwe' in Journal of Southern African Studies, Vol.19, No.3, 1993, p363, A similar point is emphasised in D. Maxwell, Christians and chiefs in Zimbabwe: A social history of the Hwesa people c1870s-1990s, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1999, pp119-120

people in Manicaland already belonged to other nationalist parties like ZAPU and UANC. Maxwell gives an example of the spirit mediums and claims that

It would be wrong to give the impression that all Katerere mediums willingly offered the Zanla comrades their powers to bestow religious legitimacy upon them. Some mediums only reluctantly offered support to the comrades whilst others were unable or unwilling to transform their cults into radical wartime movements.⁴

In Katerere the people's response was determined by several factors such as the geographical location, the social base, personal inclinations and so on. Maxwell makes it apparent that the Katerere area had experienced little state repression and the response was therefore not wholesome but mixed.⁵ The Zanla comrades had to work extra hard to win the sympathy and hearts of the people and in most cases it was within such situations that people would be labelled sell-outs for not rendering their support to a nationalist party.

As the Zipra entered Dandawa the major things they demanded from the people were their support in the struggle through giving them food, clothes, blankets and wanted the people to zip their mouths or risk their wrath. The idea of supporting guerrillas found no problem with most Dandawa inhabitants but the way Zipra demanded that support culminated in the creation of depressions and gulfs with the people. Initially it seems the people responded positively cooking food for the guerrillas and giving them clothes and blankets because they had understood their mission. The Zipra guerrillas are quoted to have said that 'we have come to free you to go back to the farms. We are not being given money for this and we stay in the bush during rain periods.'⁶ This explanation became a cause for concern for the people and everybody seemed to have sympathised with the guerrillas. However with the passage of time the exercise of supporting the guerrillas became a hurting one especially when victimisation and the label of selling out began to be employed.

⁴ D.J. Maxwell 'Local politics and war of liberation' p376

⁵ D. Maxwell, *Christians and Chiefs in Zimbabwe*, p38-Maxwell here expresses the marginality of the North-east related to its continued inaccessibility. It was not until the 1950s that roads and bridges were properly constructed. On the first page he makes it clear that the area remained untouched by mission christianity until 1951.

⁶ Interview with Murangani Katsekera Nyamahwe village, Badze, 2 February 2006.

Defining a sellout is rather cumbersome because it has everything to do with the ideology of the definer and above all it is simply a matter of othering others. The idea of sellouts was not one of self-realisation but a categorisation bestowed upon an individual by others just as people were named 'river people' or 'mountain people' by others. The people concerned never offered any effort in their categorisation hence the question is, did the people call themselves sellouts or believe to be what people called them? Or it has come as a forced self-actualisation of the identification they acquired through perceptions raised about them. Dandawa is one case study where sellouts were identified, tortured and killed.

Sellouts in the Dandawa context

The sellout identity developed differently in the different socio-geographical regions of Zimbabwe. Here, I centre on the Dandawa area of Hurungwe district to understand how the sellout identity was developed and analyse how people reacted to such categorisation. Dandawa became a theatre of the liberation war around 1976. Three warring parties operated in the area and these were the Rhodesian Security Forces (R.S.F.), Pfumo reVanhu (P.R.V.) and the Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA). Out of the three, real confrontation and fighting took place between the P.R.V. and the Zipra forces and it was between these two that a tag of war over branding the Dandawa people as sellouts can be understood.

In Dandawa, the definition of an individual as a sellout followed certain trends. One way used to categorise people as sellouts, had to do with the employment of person in the Rhodesian government departments. According to Pedi Guvheya, people in Dandawa were being harassed and killed because they had children who had joined the P.R.V.⁷ The recruitment of the people's children or relatives into the P.R.V. made them to be labelled sellouts. Guvheya's parents at one point found themselves in the sellout bracket because their son, Pedi, was a member of the P.R.V. They evaded being killed by the guerrillas by a whisker as a result of the news that were spread that Pedi Guvheya had been killed in Zvipani area. Soon after the cease-fire Guvheya's parents were astonished to see their alleged dead son returning home. This was the same bracket of sellouts that culminated in the killing and burning of ten members of the Marecha family which will be discussed later. In this case, people were branded sellouts not by their own act but by the act of their children or relatives. Truly speaking were these

⁷Interview with Pedi Guvheya, Chagadama village, Rengwe, 3 February 2006

people sellouts? This is why I have argued initially that defining a sellout is difficult because it depends upon the person applying the concept.

Another case where a sellout was found is that of one Kapungu who had both legs burnt by the Zipra guerrillas using hot bricks because his two wives had gone to the white settler's farms to look for tobacco⁸. The wives' going to the farms was seen as an issue of selling out because they were maintaining an interaction with the people's enemy and Kapungu was tortured for that act. Fortunately Kapungu was taken by the P.R.V. to their Chidamoyo base for treatment. These are some of the cases where sellouts were identified and tortured or victimised by being mistakenly defined as a consequence of certain trends that were set by the Zipra guerrillas. Even in a case where the P.R.V. asked for help from the people, the people could not withhold rendering that support but once the Zipra knew about it, the person(s) would be defined as sellouts. One example of this sort involved Voster Machacha who was killed for offering a wheelbarrow to the P.R.V. to use to ferry their injured to their camp after a skirmish occurred between the Zipra guerrillas and the P.R.V. Voster's assistance to the P.R.V. made him to be defined as a sellout because he helped the enemy. He was labelled a sellout for rendering that service to the enemy and was killed. According to Jameson Matiirira the P.R.V. were also labelled sellouts because they supported the Rhodesian government⁹. The idea of the P.R.V. being sellouts was being thrown on to them but they believed, even to this day, that they were not sellouts. The P.R.V. believed that the Zipra were forcing the people to do the Zipra's will without their consent and they never saw that as bad.

The Musukwe river also played a major role in the categorisation of people as sellouts after it had been declared a borderland. There are people who are remembered to have lost their lives during the liberation struggle as a result of Musukwe. Sarikosi Matiirira, a relative to Jameson Matiirira, was caught up in this Musukwe issue and was killed by the Zipra guerrillas¹⁰. Sarikosi Matiirira lived near the banks of Musukwe river and one day he went to Rengwe Township selling tobacco. Unfortunately guerrillas were at the township drinking beer and when they knew that he lived near Musukwe, he was branded a sellout because they thought he was a Selous Scout sent by the P.R.V. The Zipra guerrillas asked him,

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ Interview with Jameson Matiirira, Chidamoyo Township, 2 February 2006

¹⁰ *ibid.*

Kamhembwe kana kachitambira kwakateewa waya kanenge Kachida kuita sei? (When a buck finds itself loitering recklessly in trapped territory, what would be the outcome?)

Sarikosi's reply was, 'kanenge kachida kubatiwa' (it will be dicing with its death)¹¹

Sarikosi was told that 'you are a mutengesi' and they gunned him in the head and he died. This is one case in which the borderland resulted in a person being branded a sellout and killed. Staying near Musukwe did not necessarily mean Sarikosi was a 'mutengesi' as was thought by the Zipra guerrillas. According to Jameson Matiirira, the Zipra guerrillas killed more people in Dandawa as sellouts because of the Musukwe border but this emanated from their misunderstanding of the people¹². The river became a monster to the Dandawa people's lives because of the tag it got associated with and because the people were defenseless. Another victim of the Musukwe borderland was Zondasi Makamera who was shot dead by the Zipra guerrillas after crossing Musukwe river going to see relatives across the river¹³. Zondasi had a brother named Daniel Mudzongachiso who was a P.R.V. and it could be probable that he was going to see his brother. Or he could have been under guerrilla surveillance for sometime because he is said to have been oftenly crossing Musukwe river. As Zondasi was crossing the river, the Zipra guerrillas spotted him and they fired from their concealed position and killed him. His relatives back home heard of his death but to this day they know not where his grave is. This is another way Musukwe can be read to understand the liberation struggle in Dandawa apart from being simply a borderland or defining a frontier.

However, the issue of sellouts was never restricted to crossing the Musukwe river alone, but it came in different packages. If one refused to cook food for the Zipra guerrillas, the person would be categorised as a sellout. According to Murangani Katsekera, a sellout also included those people who supplied false information about others to the Zipra guerrillas¹⁴. For example, if Zipra guerrillas suspected foul play or hear any rumour, they would inquire from the whole village about the person under suspicion. In that process if one

¹¹ Interview with Pedi Guvheya

¹² Interview with Jameson Matiirira

¹³ Interviews with: Sarah Siyaya, Chagadama village, Rengwe, 31 January 2006; Siveria Washanyika, Mudzongachiso village, Fuleche, 1 February 2006

¹⁴ Interview with Murangani Katsekera

person gave information opposite to the rest of the village, that person would be seen as harbouring bad intentions and would be categorised as a sellout and would be punished. The P.R.V. also employed the idea of sellouts but at a small scale when compared to the Zipras. For the P.R.V., sellouts referred to those who were cooking for the Zipra guerrillas whom they called the people's in-laws (Vakuwasha vavo).

In Dandawa, oral research failed to give concrete examples of persons who went to the P.R.V. with the intention of divulging information concerning the Zipra guerrillas. Those who got caught up in the crossfire of sellouts, have the people's understanding that they were not sellouts, the likes of Sithole, Mupositori Josiah, Zondasi, Mhenduru's father, Sarikosi, Voster and many others. During that time some Dandawa inhabitants began leaving the area as a result of the Zipra treatment. It seems that emotions worked more during the liberation struggle than the highly acclaimed idea that the people were the sea (water) in which the fish (guerrillas) should swim. The emotions of staying in the bush, missing their beloved ones whom they also thought were being harassed and at times going for days without good food and necessary clothing and blankets could have caused the guerrillas to be so bitter. According to Gann and Henriksen when the guerrillas set out on their struggle, they had no theory of violence but were anxious to draw popular support from the African society¹⁵. However, that belief never materialised as it was proven wrong in the actual conduct of the war.

It was the reality on the ground which made the guerrillas to adopt more violent methods and to identify some people as sellouts. Gann and Henriksen further point out that the African society far from being united in the struggle, was fragmented¹⁶. The guerrillas therefore found themselves in face of a complicated puzzle where they had to cope with black opposition as well as white opposition. Such a scenario produced the emotions and sort of violence that characterised particularly the late 1970s because it was necessary to accomplish the objectives of taking to the bush without fail. This was also the same period the idea of sellouts gained momentum. The pro-Rhodesians on the other hand saw those who dissented to the guerrillas as sellouts and such persons were offered the same treatment of torture and death. The people had no option but to dance according to the tune of the time and to the one they thought cushioned their life against the forces of death, torture and

¹⁵ L.H. Gann and T.H. Henriksen, *The struggle for Zimbabwe: Battle in the bush*, Praeger Publishers, New York, 1981, p90

¹⁶ *ibid.*

violence. The issue of sellouts is a complicated puzzle on its own for it depends on which side of analysis one is coming from.

Musukwe as a border could no longer allow relatives either side to visit each other. A simple bath or fishing in Musukwe became a dangerous exercise as one could be mistaken for the wrong intentions and could end up in dire trouble with the Zipra guerrillas. The idea was also used the P.R.V. on people who were coming from across the river. Those individuals they suspected to have been sent by the guerrillas to gather information about their plans were also taken to task. In this context the war made Musukwe appear a monster to the Dandawa people just as it did during its flooding times. During its flooding time, crossing the river meant risking being carried away and drowned by the floodwaters. At the time of the liberation war, crossing the river meant risking one's life if labelled a sellout, which was punishable in most cases, by death. Those labelled sellouts were not good neighbors with no reason to survive hence they were tortured/killed to warn others of the dangers of crossing the border. In Dandawa sellouts were identified and defined through the Musukwe river in its capacity as a borderland. Musukwe river thus became a dangerous landscape to the Dandawa community. The definition attached to Musukwe river left bad expressions on the faces of the interviewees, a sign that tell how cruel the time was to the Dandawa inhabitants.

The Marecha Incident

It is quite interesting to note that all events that are icons in Dandawa heritage of the Second Chimurenga took place in 1979. The Marecha incident is one other occurrence that carries a black history for the Dandawa chieftaincy. Marecha was a family that was found in the Chirengwa area of Rengwe. The Marecha massacre is not clear but what is known is that the Marecha incident occurred after the Chapanduka incident. The Marecha incident happened after Leonard had left for Karoi following the Chapanduka incident¹⁷. The two occurred in succession with a slightest break. According to Tamari the Marecha incident occurred when harvesting time was by the corner around beginning of April and they were the ones who harvested the Marecha fields following a directive from the Zipra

¹⁷Interview with Leonard Chioma, Mushoshoma village, Rengwe, 31 January 2006

guerrillas¹⁸. This seems correct because the Musukwe battle, which was a brainchild of the Marecha killings, occurred in April 1979.

The incident came about as a result of a letter which had been written by Medios Marecha, a P.R.V. soldier. Pedi Guvheya, a colleague to Medios highlighted that, it was Medios who caused the family members to be murdered¹⁹. The letter that Medios wrote was sent by bus and left at Rengwe Township, where Stanley Tambaoga intercepted it and handed it to Zipra comrades.²⁰ The Zipra guerrillas opened the letter and read its contents, which are believed to have been reading as follows,

Magandanga ari kukunetsai here ikoko? Musatya henyu nokuti tiri kuuya ikoko kuzovagadzirisa, chii chavanoita ava vanhu vemusango, vachapera kurawa nemasoja. (Are the guerrillas troubling you there in Rengwe? Do not be afraid because we will be coming there for the guerrillas. What can bush people do, we will teach them a lesson)²¹

However, some people like Tamari believe the Marecha incident was caused by an act of selling out by some of the Marecha family members who wrote a letter informing Medios of people and villages cooking and looking after the Zipras²². However, most inhabitants have pointed to the letter from Medios as the source of the Marecha massacres.

After the Zipra guerrilla had read the letter, they got furious and went to Marecha homestead. When the guerrillas arrived at Marecha homestead, they killed the members of the family. Tamari argues that the guerrillas before carrying out their task, they asked the family members that 'wanzi wafirei? (what are you dying for?) and were to answer saying, 'hutengesi' (selling out)²³. This question was asked each member of the family before being killed. It was framed in a way to clear the blame of the massacres on the guerrillas but to have it bestowed upon the Marecha family's agenda of selling out. The letter resulted in 9 members of the Marecha family being killed and only 3 children of between 4-8 years escaped. After the massacres, the dead bodies were then put inside one of the houses and were burnt to ashes. It was this incident which resulted in the already discussed battle between the Zipra and P.R.V. at Musukwe. It was the P.R.V. who came and buried the ashes of the burnt bodies in one grave.

¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁹ Interview with Pedi Guvheya

²⁰ Interview with Jameson Matiirira

²¹ Interview with Sarah Siyaya

²² Interview with Tamari Karenga, Glen Norah A, Harare, 28 December 2005

²³ *ibid.*

The Marecha incident is another hurting heritage for the Dandawa inhabitants. The space where the massacres and burning of the family members occurred is now a 'dongo.' The dongo of Marecha tells and exhibits evidence of the brutality, which the Zipra guerrillas did at times. The Zipra guerrillas' treatment of the Marecha family is a ripple effect from the Chapanduka military contact where the Zipra were attacked unexpectedly and incurred heavy losses. There is no way one can give a historical interpretation to the Musukwe battle without making reference to the Marecha killings and the dongo itself. The dongo of Marecha is one space that exhibits evidence of one grave where nine dead human bodies were buried in the form of ashes. The dongo is also space that exhibits the complication in understanding the identification of sellouts by the guerrillas in Dandawa. There is no evidence that Marecha family members had clandestinely supplied information to the P.R.V or their son Medios. The Marecha family suffered because of their son who had joined the P.R.V., a wrong side.

Conclusion

This paper has tried to follow how events unfolded in Dandawa area outlining the various ways the identity of sell-outs was constructed. The major point that has been made concerns the realisation that the landscape is a socialised concept in an African setting as it plays a significant role in human history. The river landscape has proved here that although it can be used beneficially by the society, it is also a menace when employed wrongly. In Dandawa, the Musukwe river landscape became a measure of an identity during the liberation struggle used by both warring parties and the general populace found themselves in a tight position. The river was used in constructing a sell-out identity which people found difficult to evade as they had relatives or business to take care of across the river. Apart from the river there were also other ways the sell-out identity was constructed like working for the enemy or having a relative who was helping the enemy. The definition of the enemy was never one way but both parties referred to the other as an enemy hence the people were always labelled sell-outs from either side.