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YOUTH AND SOCIAL NAVIGATION IN ZIMBABWE'S INFORMAL ECONOMY: 'DON'T END UP ON THE WRONG SIDE'

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ABSTRACT

This article draws on qualitative case study research in Murewa, a rural district town in Zimbabwe, to extend the use of the concept of 'social navigation' from conflict-affected settings to repressive regime contexts. Through the concept of 'the everyday', it analyses how youth experience political violence and repression, and the tactics they use to access paid work and secure self-employment. The findings show that youth accept existing forms of political violence and repression as normal, and that the historical construction of politicized youth matters for how they understand their room for manoeuvre within it. Since partisan actors control many of the economic opportunities, social navigation is about the need to assess the political affiliation of actors that offer any economic opportunity, and the potential implications of being associated with a particular 'side' in the political landscape. Contrary to dominant discourses that portray youth as violent, this study shows that many will avoid relationships through which they risk being mobilized into violence.

WITH 'OPERATION RESTORE LEGACY', THE ZIMBABWEAN military ended 37 years of rule by President Robert Mugabe in November 2017 – an action internationally regarded as a 'soft coup'.[1] Young Zimbabweans have grown up with state repression and cycles of election violence,

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1. Frank Chikowore and Austin Davis, 'Zimbabweans stunned, uncertain after military's 'soft coup' of Mugabe', *The Washington Times*, 15 November 2017, <www.washingtontimes.com/news/2017/nov/15/robert-mugabes-fall-to-soft-coup-stuns-zimbabwe> (16 November 2017); David Pilling, 'Why African rulers are watching Zimbabwe's 'soft coup'', *Financial Times*, 27 November 2017, <www.ft.com/content/607c2f80-d29e-11e7-a303-9060cb1e5f44> (29 November 2019).

especially since 2000 when the ruling party, the Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), was challenged by a new opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC).[2] In Zimbabwe, 69.8 percent of the population is younger than 30.[3] Like other repressive regimes, the Zimbabwean state has often targeted youth, seeing them as potential new cadre or as opposition.[4] Zimbabwean youth have also had to respond to economic adversity as the economy rapidly deteriorated after 2000, resulting in increasing levels of unemployment,[5] especially among youth.[6]

This article uses Henrik Vigh's concept of 'social navigation' to explain how youth in Zimbabwe experience their political context, and how they make decisions about livelihood opportunities in everyday life.[7] The concept of social navigation is used to explain how young people actively respond to dynamic conflict-affected settings,[8] and shows how everyday life continues in the absence of stability and functioning state institutions.[9] In a repressive regime like Zimbabwe, the state has strong control over the public sphere and access to economic resources, including jobs and livelihood opportunities.[10] This begs the question of how young people navigate a repressive regime environment, and partisan politics specifically. The article presents findings from qualitative case study research

2. Masipula Sithole, 'Fighting authoritarianism in Zimbabwe', *Journal of Democracy* 12, 1 (2001), pp. 160–169; JoAnn McGregor, 'The politics of disruption: War veterans and the local state in Zimbabwe', *African Affairs* 101, 402 (2002), pp. 9–37; JoAnn McGregor, 'Surveillance and the city: Patronage, power-sharing and the politics of urban control in Zimbabwe', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 39, 4 (2013), pp. 783–805; Lloyd Sachikonye, *When a state turns on its citizens: 60 years of institutionalised violence in Zimbabwe* (Weaver Press, Auckland Park, South Africa, 2011).
3. ZimStat, 'Census 2012. National report' (Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency, Harare, Zimbabwe, 2012).
4. Adrienne Le Bas, *From protest to parties: Party-building and democratization in Africa* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2013).
5. Lloyd Sachikonye, *Zimbabwe's lost decade: Politics, development & society* (Weaver Press, Harare, Zimbabwe, 2011).
6. Amin Kamete, 'Planning versus youth: Stamping out spatial unruliness in Harare', *Geoforum* 39 (2008), pp. 1721–1733; Jeremy L. Jones, "Nothing is straight in Zimbabwe": The rise of the kukiya-kiya economy 2000–2008', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 36, 2 (2010), pp. 285–299.
7. Henrik Vigh, *Navigating terrains of war: Youth and soldiering in Guinea-Bissau* (Berghahn Books, Oxford, 2006); Henrik Vigh, 'Motion squared: A second look at the concept of social navigation', *Anthropological Theory* 9, 4 (2009), pp. 419–438.
8. Maya M. Christensen and Mats Utas, 'Mercenaries of democracy: The 'Politricks' of remobilized combatants in the 2007 general elections, Sierra Leone', *African Affairs* 107, 429 (2008), pp. 515–539; Myriam Denov, 'Social navigation and power in post-conflict Sierra Leone: Reflections from a former child soldier turned bike rider', in Alpaslan Özerdem and Sukanya Podder (eds), *Child soldiers: From recruitment to reintegration* (Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2011), pp. 191–211; Luisa Enria, 'Love and betrayal: The political economy of youth violence in post-war Sierra Leone', *Journal of Modern Africa Studies* 54, 4 (2015), pp. 637–660; Mats Utas, *African conflicts and informal power: Big men and networks* (Zed Books, London, 2012).
9. Vigh, *Navigating terrains of war*.
10. McGregor, 'Surveillance and the city'.

conducted between 2013 and 2016 when, at the national level, the struggle over the succession of President Mugabe intensified, and factionalism occurred within both ZANU-PF and the opposition.[11] It is against this background that the article analyses young people's everyday experiences of political violence and repression, and the tactics they use to access and secure economic opportunities.

The findings show how, for youth, social navigation is about the assessment of economic opportunities and constraints, in conjunction with the assessment of the partisan actors that informally control these opportunities. Youth constantly calculate the potential implications of being associated with a particular 'side' along the fault lines that mark the political landscape, which became more complex due to factionalism. The study finds that many youth are reluctant to access opportunities through partisan actors, knowing how these actors have mobilized youth to participate in electoral violence in the past. Zimbabwean youth have embodied the historical construction of 'politicized youth', which influences their perception that their room for manoeuvre is narrow, thus prompting many to deploy tactics to avoid risk, and mobilization into violence. The article thus contributes to a broader literature on youth politics and conflict in Africa. A dominant narrative is that disenfranchised youth, and especially unemployed young males, pose a threat to a country's stability.[12] This study confirms that many youth respond to adversity in largely non-violent ways,[13] and the concepts of 'the everyday' and 'social navigation' are crucial for understanding how. It extends the concept of social navigation by emphasizing the influence of *memories* of violence from the past, in addition to Vigh's emphasis on the anticipated future.[14] Finally, the article also adds to existing literatures on youth and politics in Zimbabwe. While factionalism has been discussed at the level of political elites,[15] this article shows the repercussions for youth on the ground in ways which have been hitherto unexamined.

The first section shows how young people have been essential to politics in Zimbabwe, and how this has contributed to 'youth' being seen as a politicized social category. The article then reviews existing scholarship on the concepts of 'the everyday' and 'social navigation'. After a description

11. Adrienne LeBas, 'Briefing on current Zimbabwe socio-political relations' (Report, Centre for Strategic Intelligence Research, National Intelligence University, Bethesda, March 2016).
12. Richard Cincotta, 'How democracies grow up: Countries with too many young people may not have a fighting chance at freedom', *Foreign Policy* March/April, 165 (2008), pp. 80–82; Henrik Urdal, 'A clash of generations? Youth bulges and political violence', *International Studies Quarterly* 50, 3 (2006), pp. 607–629.
13. Mark Sommers, *The outcast majority: War, development, and youth in Africa* (University of Georgia Press, Athens, Georgia, 2015).
14. Vigh, *Navigating terrains of war*; Vigh, 'Motion squared'.
15. LeBas, 'Briefing on current Zimbabwe socio-political relations'.

of the case study site, Murewa, and the research methodology, the article demonstrates how young people's everyday experiences of repression and surveillance are underpinned by a notion of politicized youth in Zimbabwe. It shows how partisan politics pervades the local economy in Murewa, and how this has been further complicated by party factionalism. The final section demonstrates how youth navigate economic opportunities in this deeply politicized environment.

Politicized youth in Zimbabwe

In Zimbabwe, 'youth' are viewed as a category of people that mobilizes, or can be mobilized, for political interests. The association between youth and political mobilization is a clear indication that 'youth' is not simply defined by age, even though the official government definition says a youth is anyone between the ages of 10 and 30.[16] Deborah Durham argues that youth is a relational term and part of relationships of power, which draws attention to the political and pragmatic processes through which some make claims of being a youth, or try to designate others as youth.[17] Durham's conceptualization of youth is helpful for understanding youth in Zimbabwe, as different political parties have directly appealed to and mobilized youth, and constructed narratives about youth that served political agendas.

Failed public policies and the multiple political and economic crises have resulted in a lack of opportunities for African youth.[18] Many youth live in a prolonged period of 'waithood'.[19] For Zimbabwe, it is argued that the promises of independence remain unfulfilled for the country's large youth population because of the state of the economy.[20] In many countries, such youth disenfranchisement has led to protests against governments, as youth see corruption and bad governance as major causes for the opportunities they are lacking.[21] A now dominant narrative on youth in Africa portrays them as 'trouble makers' and has focused on the risks of large 'youth

16. Government of Zimbabwe, 'Zimbabwe national youth policy' (Ministry of Youth Development, Gender and Employment Creation, Harare, 30 September 2000).
17. Deborah Durham, 'Disappearing youth: Youth as social shifter in Botswana', *American Ethnologist* 31, 4 (2004), pp. 589–605.
18. Alcinda Honwana, *The time of youth: Work, social change, and politics in Africa* (Lynn Rienner, Boulder, 2012).
19. Honwana, *The time of youth*; Alcinda Honwana, '"Waithood", transitions, and social change', in Dick Foeken, Ton Dietz, Leo Haan and Linda Johnson (eds), *Development and equity: An interdisciplinary exploration by ten scholars from Africa, Asia and Latin America* (Brill, Leiden, 2014), pp. 28–40.
20. Amin Kamete, '"At the bottom of the social heap": A youth underclass in inner-city Harare?', *Journal of Youth Studies* 9, 1 (2006), pp. 67–89; Rekopantswe Mate, 'Youth lyrics, street language and the politics of age: Contextualising the youth question in the Third Chimurenga in Zimbabwe', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 38, 1 (2012), pp. 107–127.
21. Honwana refers specifically to food riots and protests in urban Mozambique and Senegal, and the Tunisian uprisings, in Honwana, '"Waithood", transitions, and social change'.

bulges' and the security risks of large numbers of unemployed youth.[22] However, the majority of youth remain peaceful. Many pursue pathways for self-actualization without participating in violence,[23] and actively encourage each other not to participate in violence even when it surrounds them.[24] The remainder of this section discusses how 'youth', as a label, has become associated with political mobilization in Zimbabwe.

In Zimbabwe youth have historically been an important force for political mobilization, during colonial rule and afterwards.[25] Later, youth were pivotal to the liberation war. The Shona word *vakomana* (boys) became the synonym for those fighting in the guerrilla forces (despite many of the fighters being female) and many others acted as guerrilla collaborators.[26] Norma Kriger showed that many youth were persuaded to join the struggle out of frustration with social structures that they considered oppressive, and not for purely ideological reasons.[27] Immediately after independence, many youth were supportive of the new government, but from 1987 onwards students started to protest against the government over student welfare and government corruption scandals.[28] Protests continued in the early 1990s related to increased government control over universities, as well as student housing and welfare. Students joined civic organizations and trade unions to oppose the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme that was adopted in 1991.[29]

Students and youth groups also took part in the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA) in 1999; a coalition of civic organizations and the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) formed in 1999 to debate constitutional reforms. It was out of this coalition that the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) emerged under the leadership of Morgan Tsvangirai. In 2000, the government lost the referendum on the draft Constitution due to the mobilization by the NCA, and in subsequent elections the MDC gained a significant share of the votes.[30] ZANU-PF started

22. Jan Abbink, 'Being young in Africa: The politics of despair and renewal', in Jon Abbink and Ineke van Kessel (eds), *Vanguard or vandals? Youth politics and conflict in Africa* (Brill, Leiden, 2005), pp. 1–36; Cincotta, 'How democracies grow up'; Urdal, 'A clash of generations?'
23. Sommers, *The outcast majority*.
24. Jana Krause, 'Non-violence and civilian agency in communal war: Evidence from Jos, Nigeria', *African Affairs* 116, 463 (2017), pp. 261–283.
25. Sarah Dorman, *Understanding Zimbabwe: From liberation to authoritarianism* (Hurst, London, 2016), p. 19; Dan Hodgkinson, 'The #hardcore" student activist: The Zimbabwe National Students Union (ZINASU), state violence, and frustrated masculinity, 2000–2008', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 39, 4 (2013), pp. 863–883.
26. Norma Kriger, *Zimbabwe's guerrilla war: Peasant voices* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1991).
27. Kriger, *Zimbabwe's guerrilla war*.
28. Dorman, *Understanding Zimbabwe*, p. 100; Hodgkinson, 'The "hardcore" student activist'.
29. Dorman, *Understanding Zimbabwe*; Hodgkinson, 'The "hardcore" student activist'.
30. Masipula Sithole, 'Fighting authoritarianism in Zimbabwe', *Journal of Democracy* 12, 1 (2001), pp. 160–169.

to clamp down on the opposition and civil society, and targeted youth as part of this response. Government officials and ZANU-PF labelled youth as "born-frees" – born after independence – a term mostly derogatively used to express that younger generations could not 'appreciate the privilege of being "born-free"*'.[31] Student protests were portrayed as a betrayal of both the ruling party and the liberation war.[32]

Aware that grievances over lack of educational and job opportunities among youth had generated support for the MDC, the government established the Ministry of Youth and Development and Employment Creation in 2000. The National Youth Service (NYS) programme was created in 2000, which was meant to teach vocational skills and instil the spirit of the liberation struggle, in order to raise 'good Zimbabweans'.[33] The NYS programme was transformed into a large-scale paramilitary training programme and trained approximately 80,000 youth between 2001 and 2007, when NYS was suspended.[34]

ZANU-PF had consistently used youth in violence against those challenging the government,[35] including during *Gukurahundi*,[36] a military operation in the Matabeleland region between 1980 and 1987 launched to quell resistance against ZANU-PF.[37] The violent deployment of youth became more visible after 2000. Youth militias, including many NYS graduates, were at the forefront of the violent land occupations and invasions in the early 2000s. Alongside war veterans,[38] NYS graduates and other party youth have been deeply involved in election violence.[39] In urban localities certain gangs participate in surveillance and claim affiliation to ZANU-PF to protect their extortion activities.[40] Youth have also

31. Mate, 'Youth lyrics'.
32. Hodgkinson, 'The "hardcore" student activist'.
33. Terence Ranger, 'Nationalist historiography, patriotic history and the history of the nation: The struggle over the past in Zimbabwe', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 30, 2 (2004), pp. 215–234.
34. European Country of Origin Information Network, <www.ecoi.net/local_link/202776/307706_en.html> (20 March 2017).
35. Norma Kriger, *Guerrilla veterans in post-war Zimbabwe: Symbolic and violent politics, 1980–1987* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003).
36. Jocelyn Alexander, 'Dissident perspectives on Zimbabwe's post-independence war', *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 68, 2 (1998), pp. 151–182; CCJP, 'Breaking the silence: Building true peace. A report on the disturbances in Matabeleland and Midlands, 1980–1988' (Report, Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe/Legal Resources Foundation, February 1997).
37. Patrick Dzimiri, 'The responsibility to protect and the youth: A case study of the youth activism in Zimbabwe', *Anthropologist* 17, 2 (2014), pp. 441–454.
38. War veterans are the people who participated in the liberation war, which became loyal cadre to ZANU-PF after large payments were made in 1997. See McGregor, 'The politics of disruption'.
39. Sachikonye, *When a state turns on its citizens*; Sachikonye, *Zimbabwe's lost decade.*
40. Tariro Mutongwizo, 'Chipangano governance: Enablers and effects of violent extraction in Zimbabwe', *Africa Peace and Conflict Journal* 7, 1 (2014), pp. 29–40; McGregor, 'Surveillance and the city', p. 795.

played a significant role in opposition politics, as mentioned above, and organized MDC youth have sometimes been as violent as ZANU-PF affiliated youth.[41]

Alongside concerns over the huge support for the MDC in urban areas,[42] the government was confronted with high levels of youth unemployment.[43] By 2005, two out of five urban residents were involved in the informal economy.[44] Large numbers of youth got involved in informal work, but were viewed as idle and criminal.[45] The state increasingly clamped down on informal traders through periodic clean-up campaigns and evictions, sometimes accompanied with violence.[46] Such efforts have been met with persistent resistance and subversive actions by the youth.[47] In recent years, youth vendors have been driving new forms of urban protests, frustrated over government malpractice and corruption that sustains youth unemployment.[48]

At the time of research, between 2013 and 2016, factionalism within political parties made the headlines. Within ZANU-PF factions, severe competition between Vice-President Joyce Mujuru and Emmerson Mnangagwa, then secretary for legal affairs in the party, culminated in the run-up to the party conference in December 2014. In the fierce battle between the Mujuru and Mnangagwa factions a metaphor was used: *Zvipfukuto* (weevils) and *Gamatox*, derived from a pest and pesticide, with the Mnangagwa faction representing the 'weevils' who threatened the party from within, and the Mujuru faction as the remedy, *Gamatox*.[49] Mujuru was eventually forced to resign and registered the Zimbabwe

41. Hodgkinson, 'The "hardcore" student activist'; Sam Wilkins, 'Ndira's wake: Politics, memory and mobility among the youth of Mabvuku-Tafara, Harare', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 39, 4 (2013), pp. 885–901.
42. Amin Kamete, 'Cold-hearted, negligent and spineless? Planning, planners and the (r) ejection of "filth" in urban Zimbabwe', *International Planning Studies* 12, 2 (2007), pp. 153–171.
43. Kamete, 'Cold-hearted, negligent and spineless?'; Amin Kamete, 'Defending illicit livelihoods: Youth resistance in Harere's contested spaces', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 34, 1 (2010), pp. 55–75.
44. IMF, 'Staff report for the 2005 Article IV consultation' (IMF, Washington, DC, 2005).
45. Kamete, 'At the bottom of the social heap'; Kamete, 'Defending illicit livelihoods'.
46. Amin Kamete, 'Planning versus youth: Stamping out spatial unruliness in Harare', *Geoforum* 39, 5 (2008), pp. 1721–1733; Anna Kajimola Tibaijuka, 'Report of the fact-finding mission to Zimbabwe to assess the scope and impact of Operation Murambatsvina by the UN Special Envoy on Human Settlements Issues in Zimbabwe' (United Nations, New York, July 2005).
47. Kamete, 'Defending illicit livelihoods'; Amin Kamete, 'Not exactly like the phoenix—but rising all the same: Reconstructing displaced livelihoods in post-cleanup Harare', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 30, 2 (2012), pp. 243–261.
48. Simbarashe Gukurume, '#ThisFlag and #ThisGown cyber protests in Zimbabwe: Reclaiming political space', *African Journalism Studies* 38, 2 (2017), pp. 49–70.
49. Mediel Hove, 'The necessity of security sector reform in Zimbabwe', *Politikon* 44, 3 (2017), pp. 425–445; Oliver Nyambi, 'Of weevils and gamatox: Titles, names and nicknames in ZANU-PF succession politics', *African Identities* 14, 1 (2016), pp. 59–73.

People First party. The MDC had already split into two factions in 2005, when disaffected MDC members formed MDC-Ncube, leaving behind MDC-Tsvangirai (MDC-T). In 2014 a group broke away from MDC-T to form MDC-Renewal, and in September 2015 MDC-N and MDC-Renewal joined forces in the People's Democratic Party (PDP), led by Tendai Biti. Meanwhile, a group of younger generation politicians within ZANU-PF emerged as the G40 group, aligned to Grace Mugabe.[50] Soon after the soft coup in November 2017, Emmerson Mnangagwa took over the presidency and leadership of ZANU-PF, and party leadership purged top officials linked to G40.[51] ZANU-PF won the national elections in July 2018 and Mnangagwa won the Presidential elections with 50.8 percent of the votes. While factionalism at the level of political elites has been discussed,[52] there has been little attention to the manifestation of factionalism at the local level.

The historical construction of youth as 'politicized youth' has shaped the ways in which both society and political actors view and deal with youth. The literature on Zimbabwe has focused mainly on mobilized youth, but this article will show that the meaning of politicized youth also affects those people who are not mobilized. It shapes their understandings of their own political subjectivity within a repressive and sometimes violent environment. The next section employs the concept of 'social navigation' to explain how youth behave in this context.

The dual navigation of economic opportunities and violent politics

The born-free generation has grown up within challenging political and economic conditions. Known as the 'Zimbabwe crisis',[53] the period between 2000 and 2008 refers to the decade of political upheaval and a crisis in the legitimacy of ZANU-PF, in combination with stark economic decline: industries, the agricultural sector and other major sectors were stifled, and the country experienced cash shortages, increasing inflation, and an erosion of social service provision. The situation culminated in hyperinflation and the crash of the Zimbabwe currency in 2008. However,

50. LeBas, 'Briefing on current Zimbabwe socio-political relations'.
51. Jairos Saunyama, 'ZANU-PF purges more G40 members', *Newsday*, 21 February 2018, <www.newsday.co.zw/2018/02/zanu-pf-purges-g40-members> (18 March 2018).
52. *Ibid.*; Nyambi, 'Of weevils and gamatox'.
53. Amanda Hammer, JoAnn McGregor, and Loren Landau, 'Introduction. Displacing Zimbabwe: Crisis and construction in Southern Africa', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 36, 2 (2010), pp. 263–283; Brian Raftopoulos and Ian Phimister, 'Zimbabwe now: The political economy of crisis and coercion', *Historical Materialism* 12, 4 (2004), pp. 355–382; Sachikonye, *Zimbabwe's lost decade.*

numerous scholars have shown how everyday life continued and people developed a range of creative strategies to cope.[54] This section outlines the wider debate on crisis and agency, before focusing on youth in Zimbabwe.

For African countries affected by violent conflict, 'crisis' refers to periods of extreme violence and instability. It is often assumed that such violent conflict results in chaos – a vacuum of authority and a disintegration of social institutions and other forms of social life.[55] However, rather than seeing a crisis as a major *event* or *episode*, others have argued that if a crisis becomes *chronic*, it becomes the anticipated reality for most people.[56] People will 'normalize' certain forms of violence as something that is part of their environment, and the background against which everyday life continues to be produced.[57] In the midst of uncertainty, people are constantly trying to maximize opportunities.[58] The concept of 'the everyday' refers to social and cultural acts and processes that people consider normal part of life, and draws attention to the ways in which people seek to influence, reorganize and appropriate the structures that affect their lives.[59] Although social institutions *are* constantly being disintegrated during prolonged periods of crisis, a focus on the everyday shows how these institutions are also being rebuilt, as are different configurations of power, which may offer new opportunities for addressing everyday concerns.[60]

People living in highly unstable environments need to continuously assess the ongoing changes and shifts in their context, and this underpins their everyday social practice.[61] To depict this behaviour, Vigh introduced the concept of 'social navigation', which he defines as the process whereby

54. Tapiwa Chagonda, 'Teachers' and bank workers' responses to Zimbabwe's crisis: Uneven effects, different strategies', *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 30, 1 (2012), pp. 83–97; Simbarashe Gukurume, 'Livelihood resilience in a hyperinflationary environment: Experiences of people engaging in money-burning (kubhena mari) transactions in Harare, Zimbabwe', *Social Dynamics* 41, 2 (2015), pp. 219–234; Shannon Morreira, 'Living with uncertainty: Disappearing modernities and polluted urbanity in post-2000 Harare, Zimbabwe', *Social Dynamics* 36, 2 (2010), pp. 352–365.
55. Robert Rotberg, 'The failure and collapse of nation-states: Breakdown, prevention, and repair', in Robert Rotberg (ed.) *When states fail: Causes and consequences* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 2004), pp. 1–45; Vigh, *Navigating terrains of war*, p. 160, citing Jürgen Habermas, *Legitimation crisis* (Polity Press, Cambridge, 1992), p. 3; Ira William Zartman, *Collapsed states: The disintegration and restoration of legitimate authority* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, CO, 1995).
56. Vigh, *Navigating terrains of war*.
57. Veena Das, *Life and words: Violence and the descent into the ordinary* (University of California Press, Berkeley, CA, 2007); Stephen Lubkemann, *Culture in chaos: An anthropology of the social condition in war* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL, 2007); Vigh, *Navigating terrains of war*.
58. Vigh, 'Motion squared'.
59. Michel de Certeau, *The practice of everyday life* (California University Press, Berkeley, CA, 1988), p. 14.
60. Lubkemann, *Culture in chaos*; Vigh, *Navigating terrains of war*, p. 160.
61. Vigh, *Navigating terrains of war*.

'agents seek to draw and actualize their life trajectories … in a shifting and volatile social environment'.[62] Importantly, it captures both people's current assessment of their social environment, *and* the anticipated future: when taking decisions they assess how configurations of power might develop, and how they might maximize the returns of their efforts.[63] Referring to Michel de Certeau, Alcinda Honwana argues that youth living in conflict settings often need to resort to 'tactics' that respond to immediate needs rather than 'strategies' aimed at achieving long-term goals,[64] but Vigh reminds us that future developments are part of youth's calculations.

Various studies have highlighted the importance of social relationships and networks for navigating uncertain settings.[65] AbdouMaliq Simone's work on African cities show how the ability of urban Africans to circulate across space and different relationships is essential to sustaining a living.[66] His studies in Kinshasa and Johannesburg show how people try to insert themselves into networks, based on a careful assessment of the entry points and of other participants in the network and their different needs. This 'piecing together'[67] of relationships helps circulate goods and maximize gains, while for youth it is also about progressing socially and constructing youth identities.[68]

Others have highlighted how youth build relationships with powerful figures to enhance their prospects or escape a life they did not want; militia leaders or prominent 'big men'.[69] When entering patrimonial relationships with 'big men' some youth feel they need to engage in acts of violence to signal their loyalty to the patron.[70] In South African townships, youth continuously reposition and align themselves with politicians and local power brokers, and therefore Hannah Dawson speaks of

62. *Ibid.* p. 4.
63. *Ibid.*; Vigh, 'Motion squared'.
64. de Certeau, *The practice of everyday life*; Alcinda Honwana, 'Innocent and guilty: Child soldiers as interstitial and tactical agents', in Honwana and de Boeck (eds), *Makers and breakers*, pp. 31–52.
65. AbdouMaliq Simone, 'People as infrastructure: Intersecting fragments in Johannesburg', *Public Culture* 16, 3 (2004), pp. 407–429; AbdouMaliq Simone, 'The social infrastructures of city life in contemporary Africa' (Discussion Paper 51, Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, Upssala, 2010), p. 123.
66. Simone, 'People as infrastructure'; AbdouMaliq Simone, 'Deals with imaginaries and perspectives: Reworking urban economies in Kinshasa', *Social Dynamics* 37, 1 (2011), pp. 111–124.
67. Simone, 'Deals with imaginaries', pp. 118.
68. Divine Fuh, 'The prestige economy: Veteran clubs and youngmen's competition in Bamenda, Cameroon', *Urban Forum* 23, 4 (2012) pp. 501–526; AbdouMaliq Simone, 'Urban circulation and the everyday politics of African urban youth: The case of Douala, Cameroon', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 29, 3 (2005), pp. 516–532; Dorte Thorsen, 'Weaving in and out of employment and self-employment: Young rural migrants in the informal economy of Ouagadougou', *International Development Policy Review* 35, 2 (2013), pp. 203–218.
69. Mats Utas, 'West-African warscapes. Victimcy, girlfriending, soldiering: Tactic agency in a young woman's social navigation of the Liberian war zone', *Anthropological Quarterly* 78, 2 (2005), pp. 403–430; Vigh, *Navigating terrains of war.*
70. Enria, 'Love and betrayal'.

'political navigation'.[71] This makes social navigation highly precarious: youth put themselves in very vulnerable positions with few guarantees.[72]

For the Zimbabwe context, the literature during the crisis decade demonstrates a continuation of everyday life.[73] Jeremy Jones discusses the Shona phrase *kukiya-kiya*, which encompasses the creative and sometimes illegal tactics to get by and, he argues, became the 'real' economy.[74] Also referring to de Certeau's notion of 'tactic',[75] Jones emphasizes tactics for short-term needs. However, Jones' analysis does not address how partisan agents control economic opportunities,[76] while it has been acknowledged that ZANU-PF agents threaten opposition supporters with their exclusion from economic resources.[77] ZANU-PF agents are also involved in regulating informal trade and vending.[78] It is thus likely that youth need to assess and navigate the risks associated with, for instance, accessing work opportunities through party agents.

Case study and research methodology

The study was carried out in Murewa, a rural district town in Mashonaland East province. It is considered a ZANU-PF stronghold, while tensions between ZANU-PF and MDC supporters increased over the last decade. Murewa was affected by the 2008 election violence, when people were forced to attend rallies at 'bases' run by war veterans and party affiliates, and some were subjected to torture.[79] A prominent MDC politician, Shepherd Jani, was abducted from Murewa and murdered before the 2008 presidential run-off.[80] The study was carried out over repeated visits between October 2013 and July 2014, and November 2015 to February 2016. Murewa was selected because of existing partnership relations with a

71. Hannah Dawson, 'Youth politics: Waiting and envy in a South African informal settlement', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 40, 4 (2014), pp. 861–882.
72. Timothy Raeymaekers, 'Not going home: Displaced youth after war', *Forced Migration Review* 36 (November 2010), pp. 21–22; Claudia Seymour, 'Zero in the court of nine to one: Patronage and tactical weakness in coping with violence', *Children's Geographies* 12, 3 (2014), pp. 268–280; Utas, 'West-African warscapes'.
73. Morreira, 'Living with uncertainty'.
74. Jones, 'Nothing is straight in Zimbabwe'.
75. *Ibid*, p. 293.
76. Chagonda, 'Teachers* and bank workers' responses to Zimbabwe's crisis'. Chagonda states that Jones leaves out the level of politics.
77. McGregor, 'The politics of disruption'; McGregor, 'Surveillance and the city'; Godfrey Maringira and Simbarashe Gukurume, 'Youth patronage: Violence, intimidation and political mobilisation in Zimbabwe' (Working Paper, Africa Peace Building Network, 2018).
78. Amin Kamete, 'Governing enclaves of informality: Unscrambling the logic of the camp in urban Zimbabwe', *Geoforum* 81 (2017), pp. 81–86.
79. McGregor, 'Surveillance and the city'. ZANU-PF members, party youth, youth militias and war veterans ran 'bases' in many locations that were used as torture camps.
80. *Amnesty International*, 'Zimbabwe: Sharp crackdown on political opponents', 4 June 2008, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/press-releases/2008/06/zimbabwe-sharp-crackdown-political-opponents-20080604/> (8 August 2014).

local community-based organization (CBO), which enabled safe access to participants. Its proximity to Harare was useful for organizing all interviews and discussions in a private venue in order to avoid surveillance. As a small town, it was suitable for the study as the linkages between political actors and the local economy could be easily identified.

The research team comprised of three Zimbabwean researchers from the Research and Advocacy Unit, a civil society organization in Harare, and the author, a UK-based researcher. All researchers are adult professionals and have experience with youth-focused research in Zimbabwe. In this context, researchers who come from the city can easily be perceived as government informants, or as urbanites who support the opposition. At the start of a research activity, researchers spent time creating a comfortable atmosphere and agreed on ground rules for focus groups about respect, and confidentiality. Utmost attention was given to the formulation of questions and ways of probing, in order for participants not to feel judged about their (potential) political affiliation.

The team first carried out 24 focus group discussions (FGDs), 12 with young women and 12 with young men, selected in collaboration with the CBO facilitator through snow-ball sampling, in order to organize separate groups of unemployed and (self)employed participants who were peers and friends in order to safeguard a confidential setting. We organized separate groups for male and female participants, for different parts of the town centre. Involving equal numbers of women and men allowed the team to explore how experiences are gendered during data analysis. Through the partnership with the local CBO, it was also possible to organize separate FGDs for youth supporting ZANU-PF and those supporting other parties. In the FGDs the team used a range of participatory and visual methods to map youth experiences of their political environment, and used structured discussions about how youth went about finding work. Secondly, the team conducted individual interviews with youth in the age group 18 to 30 (18 male respondents, 18 female respondents), using stratified sampling to include equal numbers of unemployed and (self)employed youth from different parts of Murewa centre. In the same way, 10 male and 10 female respondents were selected for life history interviews, which focused on how they had taken decisions about economic opportunities. Using these different methods enabled the triangulation of data. Zimbabwean researchers spent a few days hanging out with self-employed youth to engage in informal conversations.

Everyday experiences of repression and politics

Zimbabwean scholarship has largely focused on the politically active and organized youth,[81] but has paid less attention to others. This section

81. Dzimiri, 'The responsibility to protect and the youth'; Wilkins, 'Ndira's wake'.

shows that youth who were not activists could also be considered to be 'politicized' due to the way they were viewed, approached and, sometimes, targeted by partisan actors. It also shows their awareness of risk in the area, and how they avoid it.

When discussing what it was like being young, participants would list the nicknames used to label youth, such as idle, stubborn and thieves, underscoring the lack of an intergenerational understanding. Most strongly, they felt that the nickname 'born-frees' was effectively used to delegitimize the opinion of youth because they did not fight in the liberation war. All participants who were asked what it means to be a 'youth' agreed that adults used the label 'youth' with reference to the *likelihood* of becoming involved in opposition politics.[82] A young woman said that 'They [the elders] don't consider their [the youth's] opinion because they assume all the youth are members of the MDC'.[83] Overall, youth were highly dissatisfied with the dire economic situation, and disgruntled with empty promises by the government concerning youth funds.[84] When discussing the term 'born-free' two women commented: 'There is nothing like born-free, we are fighting an economic war!'[85] Repeatedly, youth would refer to 'they' as the people in the government and incumbent party who belong to the generation that was part of the liberation struggle, who had let the youth down and filled their own pockets.

All young men and women described political violence as something seasonal: it intensified in the run up to national elections and then peaked, after which normal life resumed. This was a period of 'heightened navigation'.[86] Yet it became clear that forms of violence persisted during what they described as the 'normal' periods in between elections. Particularly, there was a permanent sense of being under surveillance, and the intimidation of (suspected) opposition supporters never really stopped, but changed from overt intimidation to more subtle, yet detrimental forms of exclusion. Participants of 22 FGDs identified the headmen (*sabhuku*), youth ward officers, active party youth, NYS graduates and war veterans as the main actors involved in intimidation and surveillance. Participants also referred to the presence of state security actors and potential central intelligence officers (CIOs) in their communities, who monitored any form of political activity.

Most research participants were old enough to have consciously experienced and witnessed the election violence of 2008, including at the

82. Focus group discussion (FGD), women, 14 October 2013; FGD, men, 11 October 2013.
83. Interview, young woman, Murewa, 12 October 2013.
84. FGD, men, Murewa, 24 November 2015.
85. FGD, women, Murewa, 26 August 2014.
86. Vigh, 'Motion squared', p. 430.

ZANU-PF base. During the campaigns and elections in 2013, physical violence had been minimal, and youth had only experienced intimidation and forced participation in rallies organized by ZANU-PF agents. They said that ZANU-PF affiliated actors sent out 'reminders' of the 2008 violence to 'keep them in line' (i.e. vote ZANU-PF) by referring to 'giving people short sleeves', which implied the cutting off of hands and arms, as they said had happened in 2008.[87] Early in 2014, youth identified the exclusion from access to economic resources, or threat thereof, as a major strategy used to deter people from supporting the opposition and to harass (suspected) opposition supporters. During distributions, headmen, with the help of NYS graduates and war veterans, identified what they referred to as 'errant families', who were subsequently excluded from receiving farm inputs and food aid.[88]

Given the dominance of ZANU-PF in this area, and how youth were easily regarded as opposition, certain behaviours were considered risky. For boys and young men in particular, it was difficult to get together socially, as this might be interpreted as a political gathering. In public conversations, youth avoided topics such as government performance, criticism of President Mugabe and ZANU-PF. The expression 'even the walls have eyes and ears' frequently emerged in group discussions,[89] suggesting that even the home is a state-captured space. One young man said that a year after the 2013 elections:

> In Murewa, they don't allow other parties. If you comment you might end up dead. You can't comment even [when] at the shops because you might become a victim. So even when we make comments we makes sure we are talking to someone of the same political standing. We avoid commenting or discussing political issues that affect us as youths.[90]

Five interviewees talked about the challenge of living in the proximity of former perpetrators and having to find a mode of coexistence.[91] Participants stated they could not completely ignore or avoid the other. A minimum level of social interaction was maintained in the exchange of 'pleasantries': 'We just greet each other', or *'zino irema'*, Shona for 'you just smile even if you don't like them'.[92]

87. FGD, men, Murewa, 24 November 2015. There is no documented evidence of this kind of maiming, but the threat of it was referred to several times.
88. Interview, 33 year-old self-employed male, Murewa, 27 June 2016; FGD, young women, Murewa, 3 February 2016.
89. FGD, women, Murewa, 12 October 2013; FGD, men, Murewa, 12 October 2013; FGD, women, Murewa, 14 October 2013.
90. FGD, women, Murewa, 3 March 2016.
91. FGD, women, Murewa, 24 November 2015.
92. Interview, young woman, Murewa, 13 December 2013; Interview, young woman, Murewa, 27 January 2016.

Since the headmen in most wards would know or guess people's political affiliation, the majority of participants felt it was safer to show loyalty to ZANU-PF. One woman said:

> It is unacceptable to say you are not a party member, when they do not see you at meetings, you have to strategize and justify the reasons for your absence.[93]

Many youth also complied with ZANU-PF's informal rules and obtained a membership card and attended political meetings, primarily to avoid any potential harm. Like Simone's notion of 'performative compliance',[94] they disguised their opinions, as this woman illustrated:

> My father is in the MDC and I am married into a family that supports ZANU-PF, so I attend ZANU-PF rallies. I don't feel safe because I stay among ZANU-PF members. I am forced to dance according to their tune, which I don't like. I campaigned for ZANU-PF. I joined them out of fear for intimidation.[95]

Another woman explained how she experienced ZANU-PF's dominance, saying: '*Mwana wekwaminini anotoita zvinorehwa nemwana wekwamaiguru*'. This translates as: 'The younger sister's child does whatever she's told to do by the older sister's child, however frivolous or abusive the demands of the child of her mother's elder sister may be'.[96] The analogy draws a parallel between social hierarchies in kinship relations and those that exist in politics, with youth being integrated into both. The phrase explains that a child needs to listen to his/her cousin if that cousin's mother (the aunt of the child) is the older sibling of the child's own mother, even if the cousin is younger in age. The older sister, or aunt, represents ZANU-PF, and thus if her child (youth) tells others to support ZANU-PF, younger cousins will need to abide.

Obviously, youth who genuinely supported ZANU-PF, and openly declared it, had different perspectives. They spoke about the president as 'father of the nation', whereas opposition supporters were seen as the 'sell-outs' of the country.[97] One young man endorsed the intimidation of opposition supporters in 2013, saying that ZANU-PF agents 'support their fathers [political leaders] against the enemy [the opposition] since the country was at war'.[98] Further, some had benefited from their support to the ruling party, for instance in the form of loans to start a small business.[99]

93. FGD, women, Murewa, 3 February 2016.
94. Simone, 'Urban circulation'.
95. FGD, women, Murewa, 26 August 2014.
96. FGD, women, Murewa, 26 August 2014.
97. FGD, women, Murewa, 30 August 2014.
98. FGD, men, Murewa, 10 October 2013.
99. FGD, women, Murewa, 3 February 2016.

It became clear that youth had internalized forms of surveillance and intimidation as something that was part of everyday life, as the context in which they carried on with everyday matters.[100] Youth were very conscious of the different party-affiliated actors, were aware that they are easily thought of as opposition supporters, and have witnessed or experienced the consequences of being labelled as such. These dynamics were also clearly visible when looking at the local economy.

Politics of the local economy

What was striking about a small district town like Murewa was that many economic opportunities were controlled by party-affiliated actors. This section shows how youth assessed the political actors linked to economic opportunities, and how this required youth to navigate. It stresses the importance of memories of past violence in shaping young people's assessment of the present, thus developing Vigh's insights on how the present and future are linked through navigation.[101]

Most people in and around Murewa lived off farming, and opportunities for paid work were scarce. There were only a few large farms where some youth occasionally found 'piece jobs' (*maricho*, temporary/seasonal work). Larger businesses and companies have shut down over the last decade.[102] Murewa centre has a market and a range of shops and bars. There were opportunities to work as hairdressers and builders, and young women could work as maids or occasional gardening and sewing. Many young men and women were trying to access opportunities, which was important for their self-esteem,[103] as this young man explained: 'I do not want to wait for my parents to do everything for me. You cannot be like a broiler which is fed and does nothing else.'[104] For young women, church activities were a major social activity and therefore they wanted to be able to contribute to church groups to increase their standing.

A small number of public sector jobs existed at the council, the health clinic, and the schools. Twenty-eight interviewees, from all political affiliations, emphasized that especially for public sector jobs, one had to be a ZANU-PF member, preferably an active member, and with connections

100. Lubkemann, *Culture in chaos*; Vigh, *Navigating terrains of war*.
101. Vigh, *Navigating terrains of war*.
102. FGD, men, Murewa, 4 February 2016.
103. Interview, young man, Murewa, 27 January 2015; Interview, young man, 27 January 2015; Interview, young woman, Murewa, 27 January 2016.
104. A broiler is a chick that is being fed and raised for the purpose of meat production. FGD, men, Murewa, 23 November 2015.

to people in the council.[105] For the majority of other jobs in the centre, in shops and businesses, one needed to be a ZANU-PF supporter, because of party patronage. 'Most businesses are born out of politics' said one builder, who added that the majority were supported by ZANU-PF.[106]

Youth were able to explain the political backgrounds of all people with sizable businesses or farms, some of whom were prominent politicians. Daniel Garwe was a former ZANU-PF activists who lost the ZANU-PF primary elections and then ran as an independent candidate during the parliamentary elections, but lost again. To reward the youth who campaigned for him, and openly stating that ZANU-PF would no longer help them, he employed youth in his construction firm in Harare, and in his wife's local firm.[107] ZANU-PF parliamentarian for Murewa, Ladislus Ndoro, employed youth at his tobacco farm. Finally, Simbaneuta Mudarikwa used to be the ZANU-PF secretary of finance for Mashonaland East, but was ousted from the party in November 2014. He owned a number of businesses. Young people's views of Mudarikwa were shaped by allegations that he was centrally involved in instigating and coordinating the 2008 election violence.[108] The well-known politician Tendai Biti (MDC-T's Minister of Finance 2009–2013, a PDP leader) employed many youth when he constructed his farm in Murewa. A woman who participated in the construction work claimed that Biti had said he wanted to help youth regardless of their political affiliation, while she also held that it was his strategy to build support for the new party.[109]

When ZANU-PF organized local party meetings, shops and markets had to close and the staff had to attend. Anyone who did not attend risked being 'singled out' or 'labelled' as opposition supporters.[110] Shopkeepers interviewed reported the longstanding practice of blacklisting businesspeople who were (suspected) opposition supporters, and the local ZANU-PF leadership instructed people to boycott them.[111] A young male traders who supported ZANU-PF said: 'We just have to attend meetings and rallies so that we are on the safe side. We all do our businesses with ZANU-PF in mind, because if we display any form of rebellion, we will get in trouble'.[112] This quote signals how politics pervade the local economy and that youth assess partisan actors to inform their actions.

105. Interview, young woman, Murewa, 27 January 2016; Interview, 33 year-old self-employed male, Murewa, 27 June 2016; FGD, men, Murewa, 4 February 2016; Interview, young woman, Murewa, 26 January 2016.
106. Interview, young man, Murewa, 27 January 2016.
107. FGD, men, Murewa, 4 February 2016.
108. *Ibid.*
109. Informal conversation, female shop owner, Murewa, 28 January 2016.
110. Informal conversations, female vendor, Murewa, 5 February 2016; Informal conversations, self-employed man, Murewa, 5 February 2016; FGD, young women, Murewa, 24 November 2015; FGD, women, Murewa, 24 November 2015.
111. FGD, men, Murewa, 4 February 2016.
112. FGD, men, Murewa, 3 February 2016.

From 2013, however, ZANU-PF and opposition factionalism became visible in Murewa. Youth reported that people belonging to Biti's PDP had given youth money and promised to set up businesses, and some youth had joined what some referred to as this 'new MDC'.[113] According to study participants, ZANU-PF suspected that the presence of Tendai Biti harnessed support for PDP among especially the youth. This man said: 'The headman thinks that we are using our money or help other youths from the community to mobilize youths to take part in MDC'.[114] A shop owner, who is a distant relative of Biti, was harassed so much that she had to close her shop and leave Murewa for some time in 2013.[115]

According to ten interviewees interviewed in 2015, ZANU-PF agents seemed more concerned about Joyce Mujuru gaining support in Murewa than the PDP.[116] Mujuru's late husband General Solomon Mujuru, a powerful army chief, was from Mashonaland East province, and she herself had earned liberation war credentials.[117] They felt that, unlike the MDC, she might persuade rural populations to support her. Some of the ZANU-PF supporting traders noted that now, if you did not attend rallies, you would be labelled *Gamatox*, and excluded from farming inputs by headmen.[118] A young man illustrated how risky he felt the situation had become:

> Two weeks ago a shop was burnt because he [owner] had joined a new political party called People First, led by Mujuru. They wrote at the [shop] door that 'pasi negamatokisi' [down with *Gamatox*]. Murewa is not a clean area; it has got *ngozi* [bad spirits].[119] People in Murewa were killed [in 2008] and some had their hands cut off; the long sleeves and short sleeves. There was a man who was taken away from the Murewa centre. His name is [Shepherd] Jani [MDC politician]. After three days the man was found dead.[120]

He elaborated how, since Mujuru formed her party, ZANU-PF agents wanted to send out a clear message to others. The way this young man related the tensions between 'weevils' and '*Gamatox*' to the 2008 election violence is therefore important. It reflected his assessment of how risky it was to end up on 'the wrong side' (a phrase many participants used), and how experiences from historical memory shaped young people's current

113. FGD, women, Murewa, 12 October 2013; FGD, men, Murewa, 10 October 2013.
114. Interview, young man, Murewa, 5 February 2016.
115. Informal conversation, female shop owner, Murewa, 28 January 2016.
116. Informal conversation, female vendor, Murewa, 5 February 2016; FGD, women, Murewa, 3 February 2016.
117. LeBas, 'Briefing on current Zimbabwe socio-political relations'.
118. FGD, men, Murewa, 4 February 2016.
119. *Ngozi* refers to bad spirits of the dead, who haunt other people, especially murderers.
120. FGD, men, Murewa, 4 February 2016. The incident was reported: *The Zimbabwe Daily*, 'Mujuru's People First taste ZANU-PF violence,' 28 January 2016, <https://www.thezimbabwedaily.com/news/49210-mujurus-people-first-tastes-zanu-pf-violence.html> (21 April 2017).

assessments of the political landscape. A young male vendor provided another example of the implications of factionalism:

> I have a true story from a friend of mine whom I helped. He had a barber shop and people were banned from getting into his barber shop. There was a label [note stuck on the door] which says 'If anyone get into this barber shop his/her head will be cut off when the time comes'. My friend had a position in the new MDC.[121]

Here, the phrase 'when the time comes' signalled the next elections, thus those involved in intimidation actively invoked memories of past election violence as a strategy to instil fear, similar to the reference to 'short sleeves'.

The language youth used to describe their situation clearly communicated the repressive environment: partisan actors might support people with the right 'credentials', while they 'blacklist' businessmen and 'single out' the 'rebels', 'sell-outs' and 'errant families'. By late 2015, party factionalism complicated the political landscape and prompted increased surveillance by ZANU-PF. Findings in this section already suggested how youth need to navigate this context, and the next section elaborates the range of tactics youth used for social navigation.

Social navigation: resisting, avoiding, or staying on good terms?

In Zimbabwe, fault lines in the political landscape have been deep and, as shown, there were clear risks and implications for people who became associated with the 'wrong side'. Social navigation in this context was about how to avoid being labelled a 'rebel', or calculating the risks and opportunities of resistance or compliance. The vast majority of youth in Murewa, including those supporting ZANU-PF, opted for risk avoidance strategies. Importantly, this was also about mitigating the risk of being mobilized into violence by party agents. Young men felt they were more likely to be targeted by partisan actors looking to mobilize youth, but the findings show that young women were just as cautious.

Many self-employed youth who needed to protect their businesses tried to appear as neutral as possible to avoid harassment and secure a clientele, as this vendor explained:

> I am not a member of any political party. I taught myself not to be involved in politics because if people know which party you support those supporting the other party will not buy from you. […] At the market we do not want people to know which party we support. I will never wear party regalia.[122]

121. FGD, men, Murewa, 4 February 2016.
122. *Ibid.*

They even spoke of trying to avoid being the object of political rumour. About 80 percent of employed and self-employed participants expressed that it was common for people to start spreading rumours about your connections to the opposition out of sheer jealousy if your business did well.[123]

The few self-employed youth who chose to resist having to comply with ZANU-PF mainly used tactics of passive resistance: not showing up for rallies and meetings, and making up excuses. They boycotted shops and farms that were run by people they knew as active ZANU-PF members.

One shop owner explained how he felt he was 'marked' – seen locally as an opposition supporter – although he claimed not to support any party.[124] He refused to close his shop and attend ZANU-PF meetings. As a result, he claimed that ZANU-PF has instructed residents not to buy from him. Another participant, the owner of a small but successful enterprise, described resisting ZANU-PF's dominance by avoiding any form of dependency on the party. He deliberately tried to sustain a network of buyers and suppliers that were independent from the party through the church, while avoiding any rumour about his political ideas.[125] This underscored the importance of sustaining certain social relationships, while avoiding others, when navigating.

Job seekers needed to perform compliance as they may need *sabhuku* or youth ward officers, or other intermediaries, to access future work opportunities, for instance to obtain reference letters, and were asked to prove that they genuinely support ZANU-PF.[126]

> I should have a letter from the councillor, headman or chairman if I want to look for a job. If the chairman or councillor does not like you he will not give you the letter he can just say come back another day. He can even say he is busy or even tell you that you are troublesome and he cannot help you. If there has been a rumour that you support MDC, he will not help you at all.[127]

When approaching potential employers or mediators, they also assessed the potential effects of these individuals' political affiliation on how they might be viewed in the community. Yet some youth chose to pretend to be a supporter of the party of the potential employer, and as a ZANU-PF supporter when approaching the *sabhuku*. This expression in Shona, *'Famba uchiendawo kurikuenda mhepo, inokutora'*, was used several times by young men and women, meaning 'When you move, follow the

123. Interview, woman, Murewa, 27 January 2016; Interview, 33 year-old self-employed man, Murewa, 27 June 2016; FGD, women, Murewa, 24 November 2015; FGD, men, Murewa, 3 February 2016.
124. Interview, self-employed man, Murewa, 24 January 2016; FGD, women, Murewa, 24 November 2015.
125. Interview, 33 year-old self-employed man, Murewa, 27 June 2016.
126. FGD, men, Murewa, 3 February 2016.
127. FGD, men, Murewa, 4 February 2016.

direction of the wind lest you are blown away', referring to the act of pretending. In 2015, male youth in particular recounted 'party swapping' and trying to develop relationships to employers linked to the different opposition parties in order to 'go with the wind'. Party swapping, however, was considered highly risky business for ZANU-PF supporters now siding with Mujuru.

A minority of self-employed youth openly supported MDC-T, MDC-Renewal or (later) PDP. One of the vendors commented: 'I have learnt one thing – once you are in, you cannot go back'.[128] In order to keep their businesses thriving, they needed to rely on each other for support and clientele, since they were boycotted by ZANU-PF supporters. One self-employed man explained he and his mates approached MDC-Renewal for equipment for their businesses. In return, he became actively involved in the party:

> I need to be aware of politics to keep my business running. There are certain rules I need to stick to: being active and attending most of the meetings so that you are familiar and known in the party. It will be easier to ask for help if you are an active member. Many of my customers are into politics and we support the same party, MDC-Renewal. […] I got involved with them, because many do the same kind of work. When it comes to politicians from the ruling party, we are water and oil. Our party is still new, our leaders said they do not have much to offer at the moment, but they help us link up with job opportunities.[129]

Consequently, he was paid a visit by unknown men, whom he believed were ZANU-PF members, and received warning letters saying *'uchatsvira mumba'* ('you will burn in your house') and *'uchashayika'* ('you will disappear forever', meaning die). To cope, he started spending the night elsewhere. Another MDC-Renewal supporter stated that although he supported the party, he did not accept any offers from its local leadership to assist with his poultry business. He alluded to avoiding the potential mobilization into violence, when saying:

> If that happens [accepting support] what will tie me to these politicians is that they will start using me to their advantage. … I have never heard of a politician that just goes without expecting something.[130]

The fourteen ZANU-PF supporters who participated in our study said they were on good terms with local ZANU-PF actors, and could ask them for jobs and submit proposals for youth funds.[131] Even ZANU-PF supporters often did not feel safe in the current political climate, however. Those who had previously been able to make up excuses for not attending party meetings, now described making sure they attended every meeting

128. FGD, men, Murewa, 4 February 2016.
129. Interview, young man, Murewa, 27 January 2016.
130. Interview, young man, Murewa, 27 January 2015.
131. FGD, women, Murewa, 3 February 2016.

to avoid being labelled as supporters of Mujuru. Overall, it seemed a sense of disillusionment prevailed among ZANU-PF youth:

> I joined the ZANU-PF party in 2008. The promises which were made motivated us to join. Personally, I joined the party because I hoped to acquire funds to start my own project. It was all talk without any action. I was the youth secretary for a very long time. We were promised a lot of things but nothing is fulfilled for us youths, while we fulfilled our duty to support the party.[132]

Some of the relatively active ZANU-PF members felt that they were being overlooked. They were aware that the party leadership distributed benefits and resources to the inner circle and their relatives. As this woman indicated: 'The problem is that only a fraction of the party members benefit whilst the rest within the party are side-lined. You should at least see the benefit of your sweat'.[133] However, all fourteen ZANU-PF supporters indicated that they preferred 'a backseat', as joining the inner-circle would inevitably increase the risk of being called upon when things got 'messy' (during elections).[134] Thus, even youth affiliated to political parties were navigating: they assessed the trade-offs between short-term material gains and the longer term risk of being drawn into potentially violent politics. Whilst they had entered a relationship with the party, they tried to avoid getting too close.

Conclusion

In Zimbabwe, politicians and officials aligned with the ruling party have significant control over the public sphere and economic resources. This distinguishes repressive states from the various (post)conflict settings for which the concept of 'social navigation' has been developed and used. Although the situation is not as bad as between 2000 and 2008, conditions in Muwera reflect a chronic crisis as youth experience sustained repression and surveillance and economic adversity. As this study has shown, factionalism created new uncertainties for youth and created a state of 'heightened navigation' that reminded youth of the violent elections in the past.[135] By articulating the imbrication of political and economic life due to the significant control of the state, and the political fault lines this created, the study has advanced thinking about social navigation for repressive regime settings.

Social navigation in this context entails assessing the potential implications of accessing work or self-employment through actors linked to

132. FGD, men, Murewa, 3 February 2016.
133. FGD, women, Murewa, 14 November 2015.
134. *Ibid.*; FGD, men, Murewa, 3 February 2016.
135. Vigh, 'Motion squared', p. 430.

political parties, especially whether one might be perceived to be on the 'wrong side'. This adds to Jones' rich study on the *kukiya-kiya* economy as well as Kamete's studies on the informal economy in Zimbabwe, by emphasizing the need to manoeuvre partisan actors.[136] By highlighting how memories of violence in the past shaped young people's assessment of the current situation, the study contends that navigation does not only link the present to the anticipated future,[137] but also connects to the past. While sustaining social relationships to powerful actors constitutes one form of social navigation known in (post)conflict settings,[138] this study showed that many youth carefully avoided getting too close to party agents or avoid relationships to partisan actors altogether. They thus refused opportunities contrary to popular beliefs about violent, opportunistic youth.[139] The manipulation of economic opportunities by political actors – and the patronage relationships they seek to establish – played a major role in mobilizing youth into violence, more than unemployment per se, but many youth did try to avoid this capture.[140] As elsewhere, organizational delineations of parties mattered strongly for how youth were mobilized or targeted, while ideology over what constitutes patriotism also mattered.[141] The findings underscore the need to understand how youth who live in violent contexts respond to violence mobilization, which requires a shift in focus away from the conventional emphasis in research on youth who are mobilized in violent groups.[142]

Through the concept of 'the everyday', this study showed that social navigation by youth in Murewa was informed by their embodied knowledge of 'politicized youth'. This in itself was a product of the regime's strategies for consolidating its power; the ways in which it has contributed to constructions of youth as violent as well as 'born-frees' and 'sell-outs'.

136. Jones, 'Nothing is straight in Zimbabwe'; Kamete, 'Defending illicit livelihoods'; Kamete, 'Not exactly like the phoenix'.
137. Vigh, *Navigating terrains of war*.
138. Dawson, 'Youth politics'; Enria, 'Love and betrayal'; Simone, 'Deals with imaginaries and perspectives'; Utas, 'West-African warscapes'.
139. Jairo Munive, 'The army of 'unemployed' young people', *Young* 18, 3 (2010), pp. 321–338; Sommers, *The outcast majority*.
140. Enria, 'Love and betrayal'; Munive, 'The army of "unemployed" young people'; Charles Ukeje and Akin Iwilade, 'A farewell to innocence? African youth and violence in the twenty-first century', *International Journal of Conflict and Violence* 6, 2 (2012), pp. 339–351.
141. Anne Heffernan, 'Blurred lines and ideological divisions in South African youth politics', *African Affairs* 115, 46 (2016), pp. 664–687.
142. David Anderson, 'Vigilantes, violence, and the politics of order in Kenya,' *African Affairs* 101 (2002), pp. 531–555; Anneli Botha, 'Political socialization and terrorist radicalization among individuals who joined al-Shabaab in Kenya', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 37, 11 (2014), pp. 895–919; Jeffrey Checkel 'Socialization and violence: Introduction and framework', *Journal of Peace Research* 54, 5 (2017), pp. 592–605; Dzimiri, 'The responsibility to protect'; Krause, 'Non-violence and civilian agency'; Kristof Titeca, 'The "Masai" and miraa: Public authority, vigilance and criminality in a Ugandan border town', *Journal of Modern African Studies* 47, 2 (2009), pp 291–317.

As in other countries in southern Africa, youth were accused of lacking the sense of political engagement that adult generations have, and their political acts are deemed unruly instead of critiques on governance.[143] In countries where ruling parties have roots in social or armed struggle, like in South Africa, Uganda, Mozambique, and Ethiopia, younger generations have no direct experience with the history of anti-apartheid struggle or armed conflict. Like the youth in these other counties, Zimbabwean youth have grown frustrated with a regime that makes claims on authority because of its liberation history, while failing to deliver services, and educational and employment opportunities.[144] Youth have started to challenge the meaning of 'born-free', but while forms of protest have emerged in urban centres in recent years, youth have not engaged to the same extent in massprotests or riots as their 'peers' elsewhere.[145] At least for now, the repressive environment and memories of violence have prompted many of them, especially outside of urban centres, to opt for mainly non-confrontational tactics, avoiding the likelihood of violence through navigation.

143. Dawson, 'Youth politics'; Honwana, *The time of youth*; Sharlene Swartz, James Hamilton Harding and Ariane De Lannoy, 'Ikasi style and the quiet violence of dreams: A critique of youth belonging in post-Apartheid South Africa', *Comparative Education* 48, 1 (2012), pp. 27–40.
144. Mirjam de Bruijn and Jonna Both, 'Youth between state and rebel (dis)orders: Contesting legitimacy from below in Sub-Sahara Africa', *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 28, 4-5 (2017), pp. 779–798; Kriger, *Zimbabwe's guerrilla war*; Mate, 'Youth lyrics'; Danielle Resnick, 'Protesting for a better tomorrow? Youth mobilization in Africa', in Danielle Resnick and James Thurlow (eds) *African youth and the persistence of marginalization: Employment, politics, and prospects for change* (Routledge, London, 2015), pp. 47–64.
145. Gukurume, '#ThisFlag and #ThisGown'; Resnick, 'Protesting for a better tomorrow?'; Adam Branch and Zachariah Mampilly, *Africa uprising: Popular protest and political change* (Zed Books, London, 2015).