



PROJECT MUSE®

War in Worcester:

Pamela Reynolds

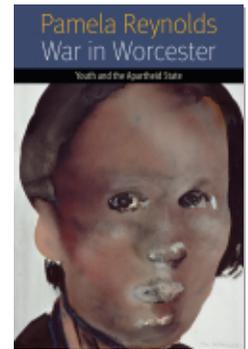
Published by Fordham University Press

Reynolds, Pamela.

War in Worcester: Youth and the Apartheid State .

Fordham University Press, 2012.

Project MUSE.muse.jhu.edu/book/20478.



➔ For additional information about this book

<https://muse.jhu.edu/book/20478>

Introduction

i cannot think of tears, lonely geographies
and the third world, without the urge to cry or to sit down

— MXOLISI NYEZWA

Boyhood in Worcester

The book is about youth fighting for freedom and a state's retaliation. It is about the young not consenting to the kind of adulthood on offer under a particular political dispensation. It is about the character of revolt under conditions of tight surveillance. It is about negative forms of governance of children and about the violence of the state. It is about government-sanctioned cruelty. It is about the labor of youth in the work of war and about their reach for ethics despite experiences of pain and betrayal. It is, in part, about the attempts by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (henceforth, the Commission or the TRC) to document the past and its shortcomings in recording the role of the young and in securing a fair dispensation for them. Finally, it is a description of the relationships between young men of Zwelethemba, a suburb of Worcester, who were brought together as local leaders during the struggle, who led the fight together, and

who, in retrospect, examined it microscopically once it had ended. It represents an anthropology that takes on the intimacies of warfare.

John M. Coetzee's book *Boyhood: Scenes from Provincial Life* (1997) is taken to be autobiographical and is set in the small, rural town of Worcester, in which Coetzee spent much of his childhood and in which my ethnography was situated. He says of the town: "But perhaps Worcester is a purgatory one must pass through. Perhaps Worcester is where people are sent to be tested" (1997, 34).

Worcester lies in a dip in the mountains where the Hex River Valley leads into the valley carved out by the Breede River, some 110 kilometers north of Cape Town. It falls in the region called the Boland ("the land above"), which is made up of a series of fertile valleys behind the Hottentot-Hollandse Mountains, which separate the valleys from the sandy isthmus, colloquially called "The Flats," that stretches across to the mountain range that includes Table Mountain, around the base of which the city of Cape Town took root. The Boland is a beautiful area where wine is produced and fruit, including table grapes, grown. Worcester is a center for farmers and the municipal administration of four towns. The region had, prior to the election of a democratic government in 1994, been demarcated as a "Coloured labour preference" area, which made it difficult for Africans to live and work there, because preference was given to people designated "Coloured" in terms of employment and other rights, including the right to live in urban areas.¹ Most jobs available to Africans in the Boland were on farms.

A Double-Edged Study

I set out to do an ethnographic study of the TRC as an institution. My focus was on learning more about the part the young had played in securing the end of oppression. Having worked on a separate study in 1991 and 1992 with young political activists, both men and women, who had recently been released from prison, where some had been incarcerated for many years for their engagement in the antiapartheid struggle,² I sought to discover from the Commission's deliberations more about young activists' commitment over time, their political consciousness, their development, their ethics, their actions, and the consequences of their involvement. I was interested

in the character of urban conflict and the relationships between commanders and foot soldiers (or leaders and protesters), and whether those ties held up over time and whether they were forged around rhetoric, contact, action, accountability, or responsibility. I was interested in a particular layer of leadership among the young—those recognized within communities as local leaders. I anticipated that the Commission would document the activities of those who, while still at school, had begun to protest against their oppressors and who, through processes of self-selection and induction, had become leaders. It soon became clear that the Commission was structured in a way that precluded it from gathering information systematically, which could have led to that kind of analysis of the recent past. That the Commission's focus was split by the binary notion of perpetrator or victim, leading to the award of amnesty or reparations, determined its pursuit and its methods. The emphasis for "victims" was on the descriptions of violations. The young who fought inside the country were classified in accord with the Geneva Conventions and Protocols as "civilians," not "warriors," and therefore the platform they were given related to victimization and not to resistance or revolt. There is, Emmanuel Levinas says, no "transparency possible in method" (1996, 33). I take from this the suggestion that an approach to ethnographic fieldwork cannot be made completely explicit or justified as to why certain ways of proceeding were chosen. My ambition in this ethnography was to account for the fullness of some young men's experiences in standing against the apartheid state to the extent that that is possible and that I am able to achieve it within the loose confines of the discipline of anthropology. I sought to depict their fight as they described it in retrospect. The question is, of course: what is description? Is it a chronicle or a product of reflection? Under what circumstances, in what place, across what span of time, and before whom is it made? The conversations on which this writing draws are different from those recorded at the Commission's hearings and from those within the African National Congress (ANC) now: there are many ways of talking about the past. Any description of major conflicts has an elliptical relationship to what actually happened. Veena Das says that the most compelling moments for her in ethnography have occurred when she found someone responding to events that put his or her entire life into question. She is fascinated by the process of seeing, particularly in scenes of forgetfulness, how one is drawn into an examination of one's life. She ob-

serves that “there is something resistant to thought when we try to imagine the condition of being wounded . . . something else than rational argument is called for in the face of this condition—not simply emotion or empathy but ‘wakefulness to one’s life’” (spoken at a Sawyer Seminar 2010, University of Cape Town). In Zwelethemba, the scene was a request to remember. The invitation to remember in conjunction with others was an invitation to each of the men to examine his life. In the process of our meetings, the men seemed to be engaged in a retrieval of the condition of being wounded, so that a certain balance of reason and emotion could be achieved in the service of remembering. Mxolisi Nyezwa (2000, 87) writes in his poem “i won’t forget” the following lines:

at night I won’t forget to remember
 . . .
 i won’t forget that we were men on this earth
 with numbed emotions,
 nabbing at shadows
 hidden from sight.

It was, in part, to avoid becoming an “ethnographer of victimization” (Said 2006, 139) in the process of attending a slew of the Human Rights Violation hearings (HRV hearings—not to be confused with the Human Rights Committee, an independent nongovernmental institute) that I resolved to add a parallel ethnographic project to the study of the TRC. After the first few months of acting like a peripatetic groupie of the Commission, it became clear to me that its deliberations were not plumbing the experiences of young activists and that there was more to be learned through a different kind of ethnographic exploration. Theodor Adorno said, “Social analysis can learn incomparably more from individual experience . . . while conversely the large historical categories . . . are no longer above suspicion of fraud” (1974, 17). Edward Said uses this quote to observe that the force of protest lies in the performance of unreconciled individuals’ critical thinking (2006, 15). He values Adorno’s notion of tension in what he, Said, calls “irreconcilabilities” (2006, xv). Reconciliation is not necessarily what we need, he felt, for its worth depends on how it is pursued (2006, xvii). I attended almost every Human Rights Violation Committee Hearing in the Western and Northern Cape and heard extraordinary accounts from young people

who had fought for change in the small towns. The Boland Hearing was held from June 24 to 26, 1996, in Worcester, and it was while listening to the testimonies of the young that I decided to work in Zwelethemba (“place of hope”), the municipal area to which, in 1952, Africans had been forcibly relocated by the Worcester Council (see appendix 1 on Worcester). Thereafter, I studied both the TRC and the community of black African activists in Zwelethemba: the former a multisited project and the latter firmly situated in a single community. Fiona Ross worked with young women activists in Zwelethemba and I with the young men. On the basis of our joint work tracing the process of the TRC’s deliberations, especially the HRV hearings, we had become aware of differences in the accounts given by women and men. According to our notes, more women than men were giving testimony in public, and they were frequently testifying on behalf of fathers, brothers, husbands, or sons, and, sometimes, they did not talk about their own experiences even when they had been activists themselves (see Ross 2001). This may have influenced our decision for one of us to work with young women and the other with young men. However, I recall that Fiona quickly had made important contact with women, and our division of labor began then (see her wonderful book, *Bearing Witness: Women and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa*, 2003). We continued to work alongside each other and share our thoughts.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission

The establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was an extraordinary experiment, part of a twentieth-century rash of similar attempts to end conflict. It contributed to the documentation of the depth and breadth of terror and destruction under apartheid. The TRC of South Africa originated in the agreement on amnesty reached in 1993 between representatives of the South African government, political parties, and some liberation organizations. The proposal for the Commission drew on work done by similar commissions established elsewhere, especially in South American countries. It was established in 1994 under the auspices of a democratically elected government led by President Nelson Mandela. In 1996, it described its creation as follows:

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission has been established by an Act of Parliament; *The Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act, number 34*. It was passed into law on 27th July, 1995. The preamble of the Act states that,

. . . it is deemed necessary to establish the truth in relation to past events as well as the motives for and circumstances in which gross violations of human rights have occurred and to make the findings known in order to prevent a repetition of such events in the future.

(Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act, number 34 of 1995, 2)

In addition, the Act states that the aim of the Commission will be reconciliation based on “a need for understanding but not for vengeance, a need for reparation but not retaliation, a need for *ubuntu* but not for victimization” (ibid.). Finally, the Act makes provision for the granting of amnesty “in respect of acts, omissions and offences associated with political objectives committed in the course of the conflicts of the past” (ibid.). The full announcement is given in appendix 2, and it is followed in appendix 3 by a description of the Boland Hearing at which the people from Worcester gave testimony.

The Act’s preamble recognizes apartheid as having comprised more than one form of violence and imagines a future founded on peaceful coexistence, human rights, and democracy. To achieve its aim to “promote national unity and reconciliation in a spirit of understanding which transcends the conflicts and divisions of the past,” the Act created three committees: one on amnesty, one on human rights violations, and one on reparation and rehabilitation. It also provided for an investigative unit, a research unit, and a limited witness protection program, and it granted the Commission considerable powers, including rights of search, seizure, and subpoena.

A vast amount of the documentation of the past under apartheid was systematically erased, between 1990 and 1994, from social memory when the state engaged in the large-scale destruction of its memory resources. Verne Harris, who was from 1988 to 1994 an archivist with the State Archive Service, called the destruction “a purge on social memory in South Africa” (1999, 14). In his opinion, the Commission successfully depicted (with significant assistance from him) the broader processes of records destruction, and it provided evidence that suggests that the obliteration of swathes of official documentary memory, particularly around the inner workings of the

apartheid state's security apparatus, has had a considerable and lasting impact on social memory. He continues,

Moreover, the apparent complete destruction of records confiscated from individuals and organizations over many years by the Security Police has removed from our heritage arguably the country's richest accumulation of records documenting the struggles against apartheid. The overall work of the TRC suffered substantially as a result. . . . As the TRC itself indicated, "the destruction of state documentation probably did more to undermine the investigative work of the Commission than did any other single factor." For the most part the big picture, the fundamental shape and pattern of process, was as clear as any interrogation of the past can be clear. *But so often the details, the nuances, the texture, the activities and experiences of individuals, was absent.*

(1999, 14; *emphasis mine*)

It is toward this absence that this book gestures.

A major concern of the Commission was with "gross violations of human rights," which are defined in the Act as killing, torture, abduction, and/or severe ill treatment, or the conspiracy or attempt to commit such acts.³ The period of apartheid rule that was under examination fell between the years 1960 and 1994. The Human Rights Violation Committee (HRVC) took 21,298 statements concerning 37,859 violations (sometimes the figure is given as 37,672) from people who had experienced harm that fitted the definition, and 10 percent of those who made statements were heard at public hearings held between April 1996 and June 1997 (*Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report* 1998, 1:166; hereafter, the *Report*). One of the seventy-six public hearings was conducted from June 24 to 26, 1996, in Worcester, at which three of the young men from Zwelethemba with whom I worked gave testimony (see appendix 4, on the Commission's findings on violence in the Western Cape). It was on the basis of the statements collected by the HRVC that testifiers were declared to be "victims" and thus deserving of reparations. The Commission received 7,115 applications for amnesty. Amnesty was granted to a relatively small number of applicants: 1,167, with a further 145 granted partial amnesty (see Sanders 2007, 216n3; Sarkin 2004, 108–148). The Commission declared that more than 19,050 persons were found, on the basis of their statements, to be victims of gross violations of human rights, and more than 2,975 victims emerged from the am-

nesty process (*Report*, foreword to volume 7). Interim reparations, totaling about R42 million, were distributed to some sixteen thousand victims, with payments ranging from R1,400 to R4,200. There was slow delivery of full reparations, and the amount did not meet the Commission's recommendations. The "recognized" victims were allocated a lump sum of compensatory money—R30,000 (in 2003 about US\$3,900; Thompson 2003). The Commission published its *Report* in seven volumes, five of which were presented in October 1998 to President Nelson Mandela and the sixth and seventh on March 21, 2003, when the chairman, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, delivered them to President Thabo Mbeki, marking the formal end of the Commission's work.⁴ A wide variety of books have been written on the Commission, and I shall attempt no coverage of it except as it relates to the question of documenting the role of the young (a selection of writings on the Commission and the situation of South Africa under apartheid is given in this note).⁵

I acknowledge the fascination that many people have for truth commissions, including South Africa's. I am cognizant of reminders to me by readers of early drafts of the book that the very institution of the Commission represents the success of those who fought to end apartheid and that both its establishment and its procedures exist as beacons for people mired in states of oppression in various parts of the world. The critique I give of the Commission refers specifically to my search for documentation and recording of the role of the young.

Neither the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act nor the Commission recognized young fighters inside the country as formal, legitimate combatants for the purposes of the HRV hearings. The Act categorized them as "victims," and it was as "victims" that they were heard by the Commission's Human Rights Committee and awarded victim status, giving them the right to claim reparations. In terms of pensions and formal recognition, the ANC only recognized those who could prove that they had been members of the organization and active within it for five or more years. (The government's Special Pensions Bill of 1996 took, according to Villa-Vicencio and Verwoerd [2000, 248–249] a "step of 'rewarding' or recompensing those who fought for freedom . . . but one that excluded thousands of people who may not have been formal members of a liberation movement or who were excluded by the stipulations of the bill, for example that a re-

applicant had to be 35 or older in 1996.”) That bill has, since the end of this project, been altered.⁶ Neither the ANC nor any other liberation organization had been able to keep records of membership during the conflict—the nature of the struggle precluded that—and possession of evidence of membership or of literature relating to a banned organization could, and often did, result in imprisonment. It was difficult for many activists, especially young activists, to prove that they had fought on behalf of liberation as members of one of those organizations. The Act established and, thereafter, the Commission drew on the binary notion of victim and perpetrator. Those seen to have been soldiers in formal armies or who were members of the armed forces of a “party to the conflict” (see the Commission’s definition in chapter 5) were not included in the Commission’s deliberations, although this was not rigidly adhered to. Special hearings were held on conscription within South Africa to the South African Defence Force (SADF)⁷ and on abuses in liberation organization camps. The question of the recognition of young fighters touched on here is closely examined in chapter 5. Disgruntlement was stirred by the fact that amnesty, when granted to an applicant who testified before the Amnesty Committee, took immediate effect, whereas an applicant to the HRVC had to wait for over a year before he or she was granted or refused the status of a victim and some years before he or she was awarded final reparations.

War Was Being Waged

The definition of war is at issue because it determines who is recognized as a legitimate fighter. In South Africa and in other conflicts, many an individual fought in relation to his or her understanding that he or she was a member of a liberation organization (one that he or she had formally joined) with a structure that attempted to coordinate efforts to achieve specified ends.⁸ The understanding affected the person’s sense of participating in the pursuit of a larger cause, one for which there was little point in fighting in isolation or even with a small, local group. The nature of the fight was amorphous, one might say organic, in its origins, growth, and spread. It was multipronged, and it is difficult to designate which efforts contributed significantly to the final achievement of its goal. Command was dispersed, secrecy vital, and ac-

tion channeled through cells that purposefully obscured identities and tasks. On the one hand, it was not possible or even desirable to track membership, but, on the other hand, the loyalty and labor of individuals was donated in the name of organizations to which they saw themselves as belonging. A conundrum?

It is to be regretted, I believe, that an efficient, broadly based effort was not instituted to record, once the fight was over, the names of those who were recognized in communities and liberation structures as having been engaged in political activities within the country. Membership lists have been, after 1994, compiled, but they are incomplete, and, not surprisingly, they have left out many who contributed significantly to the fight, and the consequences in terms of lack of acknowledgment or support (whether monetary, access to education or skills training, or job opportunities) distresses many. In 1996, I made enquiries from the liberation organizations about their membership and was told by each of them that they had no comprehensive lists and very little information on those who fought inside the country. The executive of one organization invited me to write their history. I regret not having been able, at that time, to contribute to the task.

The ANC and its armed wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK),⁹ in a Declaration at the Headquarters of the International Committee of the Red Cross, November 28, 1980, referred to the fact that the international community had legally denounced apartheid as a crime against humanity, which led to an International Convention for the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid. The Declaration interprets this as a recognition that a “war [was being] waged by this nefarious system against the vast majority of its population” (Asmal, Chidester, and Lubisi 2005, 65). It continues:

The state of war, which exists in South Africa, is a war of national liberation, for self-determination on the basis of the Freedom Charter,¹⁰ of whose adoption we are celebrating the 25th anniversary this year [1980]. It is, as Article 1 of Protocol 1 of 1977 recognises, an armed conflict in which peoples are fighting against colonial domination and alien occupation and against racist regimes in the exercise of their right of self-determination.

(ibid.)

With regard to the experiences of those who stood against the state inside South Africa, people argued as to whether they were engaged in a war, a

struggle, a conflict, or even a fight for liberation. Recently, the term “asymmetric war” is being widely used to describe certain forms of internal eruptions. Later in this book, I discuss the various terms that were used, but here I want to note that it was seen as a war by the liberation organizations.

Once the conflict had been declared to be a war, liberation organizations could draw on the Geneva Conventions and the additional Protocol 1 and humanitarian international law. The Declaration called on the South African regime to stop treating the combatants of the liberation organizations as common criminals and to stop executing them, imposing savage sentences of imprisonment on them, or torturing and generally poorly treating them contrary to international law (Asmal et al. 2005, 66). The South African government did not desist. It was important to call the conflict a war to secure international condemnation of the regime, to gain support in imposing sanctions on it, and to fund efforts toward liberation. It mattered, too, for the drive to ensure prisoner-of-war status for combatants. The South African government did not formally grant that it was a war but rather characterized the conflict as the result of sustained terrorist activities. The Commission had an international orientation, and its pronouncements had performative effects, as did the ANC declaration on war.

Nigel Penn calls the colonization of the northern frontier zone, in which Worcester now lies, a zone of warfare. He identifies the initial clashes as “the first Khoikhoi-Dutch war (1659–1660)” followed by “the second Khoikhoi-Dutch war (1673–1677)” (2005, 32). His book details “the magnitude and ferocity of Khoikhoi and San resistance” that continued into the eighteenth century (2005, 60). There followed, he says, nearly two centuries of violence. That period includes the violence recorded in this book.

The Work of War

The South African government gave the young who joined the struggle inside the country no quarter; indeed, they targeted them. In this book, I write about children and youth identified by the apartheid system as “African,” although those who joined the fight and who fell under other categories defined according to set notions of racial difference were met with the same wrath (see note 1). The government’s security forces meted out cruel treat-

ment to them, incarcerated even the very young under dreadful conditions, and used torture frequently and over long periods of time.¹¹ Many of the local leaders among the young were imprisoned again and again and ill treated even before any formal charges or court appearances were made. All of this is well known. Many organizations were careful and courageous in keeping track of abuses and in caring for those harmed (for example, the Black Sash, the Human Rights Committee of South Africa, the Detainees' Parents' Support Committee, the Legal Resources Organization, the Black Lawyers Association, the Catholic Welfare and Development Organization, and the Centre for Applied Legal Studies),¹² many lawyers represented the young in court, and many people took great risks in protecting the young. The men gratefully acknowledged the support of three people in particular—Di Bishop (a member of the Black Sash), Leslie London (a physician), and Dumisa Buhle Ntsebeza (a human rights lawyer and former head of the Commission's investigative unit). The activists with whom I worked acknowledged people of all races in Worcester and other towns in the Boland who had given them aid and support. The Commission's work has added to the record, and so has the research being done within the former liberation organizations and in institutions such as the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation, and the Khulumani Support Group (see note 12). The writings of people who were closely involved as well as those of academics continue to contribute to the documentation of the past (see a selected list of references in note 5).

However, little is known about the efforts the young made to sustain the momentum of the fight or about the stretches of time during which many were active; what they endured on an everyday basis; the nature of the battlefield; how much they depended on relationships with families, peers, and community members; how their commitment was tried; what the stakes were of success and failure; and what was achieved in terms of growth and what paid in terms of harm. These matters are examined in the chapters that follow.

There is a strong genealogy to the revolt by the young against apartheid. The ANC was founded in 1912, and its Youth League was formed in 1944—its manifesto was issued that year under the impetus of Nelson Mandela, O. R. Tambo, Walter Sisulu, and others (Asmal et al. 2005, 2).¹³ The three men became leaders of the organization. The trigger for a wide-

spread revolt among the youth occurred on June 16, 1976, in Soweto.¹⁴ The apartheid state unleashed its brutality against the children who gathered in an unarmed and peaceful protest against new directives in education that ruled that Africans would henceforth be taught certain subjects in the medium of Afrikaans rather than in English (the latter was seen as the language of access). Many people, including children, were killed that day, and, as the violence spread, more died that week (the numbers are contested). As many as one thousand people were injured. It was the start of violence against the young on a massive and persistent scale behind which lay the technologies of war. The protest among the young gathered force and, between 1976 and 1987, some twenty-four thousand children under the age of eighteen were imprisoned, and many (or most) were tortured or severely ill treated (see chapter 5).

The Violence of the State

Emmanuel Levinas (1996, 23) describes the oppression of the individual by the state:

For me, the negative element, the element of violence in the State, in the hierarchy, appears even when the hierarchy functions perfectly, when everyone submits to universal ideas. There are cruelties which are terrible because they proceed from the necessity of the reasonable Order. They are, if you like, . . . the tears of the Other (*Autrui*).

The violence of the state in South Africa was crafted into a hierarchy of dominance, control, and limitations over the majority of the population. It was terrifying in its reach and durability, and it was founded on over three hundred years of Dutch and then British dominance that carried over into self-governance (see Wilson 2009 for a very short history of South Africa). In 1948, a general election, in which people of African or Indian origin were not allowed to vote, was won by the National Party (NP), which entrenched racism and segregation into a form of governance that operated in accord with a policy of segregation and discrimination on the grounds of race. It came to be called apartheid. The NP ruled until 1994, when the first democratic elections were held and won by the ANC. The ANC was against the

formal, institutional, and governmental racism promulgated and put into effect by the apartheid regime that came into power in 1948 and that extended and entrenched a form of rule established by the British, which was the form of rule that the liberation organizations fought.

The way the state treated African children under apartheid enables us to look closely at how the governance of children in one country was separated out: it allows us to see which children—whose children—were set aside as not deemed worthy of good governance, or any governance, or of only destructive governance. It is the isolation of the child who protested under apartheid that is startling. He or she was targeted as a threat to law and order, as being a terrorist or potentially one. But the system of governance had already isolated the child by undermining the abilities of families or communities to care for them as they saw fit: it did so through a panoply of laws having to do with the denial of, or restrictions on, rights to citizenship and ownership of land and assets, demand for tax and therefore participation in a cash economy, undermining the agricultural base, insidious migration policies, denial of rights to live outside designated areas except under stringent terms involving employment and housing, the separation of heads of household (initially men but later increasingly women, too) from homes, and low wages. This is not to say that the child was not held and nurtured by parents and kin but that the state nestled white children in layers of care and protection, as a state interested in its own reproduction must, while it peeled away such layers for children identified as “nonwhite,” leaving them vulnerable before the forces of the state.

Michel Foucault describes as a fundamental phenomenon in Western history the “governmentalization of the state” as bearing on the mass of the population. Foucault identifies in the great preoccupation about the way to govern and the search for the ways to govern, which exploded from the fifteenth century in Western Europe, a perpetual question: “how not to be governed *like that*, by that, in the name of those principles, with such and such an objective in mind and by means of such procedures not like that, not for that, not by them” (2003a, 265). He locates a critical attitude in this movement of governmentalization of both society and individuals. Those governed would then act

as both partner and adversary to the arts of governing, as an act of defiance, as a challenge, as a way of limiting these acts of governing and sizing them

up, transforming them, of finding a way to escape from them or, in any case, a way to displace them, with a basic distrust, but also and by the same token, as a line of development of the arts of governing . . . a kind of general cultural form, both a political and moral attitude, a way of thinking etc., and which I would very simply call the art of not being governed . . . like that and at that cost. I would therefore propose, as a very definition of critique, this general characterization: the art of not being governed quite so much.

(*ibid.*)

Not to want to be governed “like that” means not wanting to accept these laws because they are unjust and hide a fundamental illegitimacy. Critique, for Foucault, means putting forth universal and indefeasible rights to which every government, including a *paterfamilias*, will have to submit. He is talking about the limits of the right to govern. And, finally, “not to want to be governed” means to question authority, and it raises “the problem of certainty in its confrontation with authority” (2003a, 265–266). The description matches the initial thorough critique that the liberation organizations made of their governance and their eventual confrontation with the state. The refusal to be governed under apartheid laws was a fundamental reason for the revolt by the young. The question for today and tomorrow is the governance of children, how it fits into current notions of obligations and responsibilities of the state, and how it is theorized and acted upon by citizens.

Stanley Cavell lays emphasis on the remarkable fact of the presence of the figure of the child in the opening scene of Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*, which quotes Augustine on the instruction of the child. In it, Cavell is struck by “how isolated the child appears, training its own mouth to form signs”—something you might expect of a figure in a Beckett play. Cavell calls the child “the unobserved observer of the culture” (1995, 169). That is, for me, a moving depiction of the child. It is a theme in this book: how the child comes to a political and ethical understanding, however immature and imperfect, through observing its culture and acting in accord with that understanding. Cavell continues: “The scene portrays language as an inheritance but also one that has, as it were, to be stolen, anyway in which the capacity and perhaps the motivation to take it is altogether greater than the capacity and perhaps the motivation to give it.” A question being raised is: when and under what conditions does the inheritance of a culture—the process of cultivation (of a child into a mature, social being)—end? Cavell

suggests that it does not come “to a natural end, or rather its own end, but to one ended, by poor resources, or by power.” I take from him, for my own purposes, the notion that control over what was taught to the child protesting against apartheid after 1976 moved its locus, on the initiative of the child and at the prompting of the retaliation of the state. In so doing, the child moved into an even greater position of isolation—from family and community and even within the law as it was practiced. I am borrowing from Cavell “the idea of the child as a necessary figure, however obscure and untheorized, for philosophy’s stake (or repression of the stake) in the ordinary” (1995, 167). I do that not for philosophy’s stake but for the sake of clear analysis of what the children did against a system of governance they did not like and how isolated they were in the certainty of confrontation with authority.

On Studying the Commission

The Commission was launched eighteen months after the first democratic elections in April 1994. It was hurried into being without, in my opinion, sufficient thought or due preparation. A sense of rush was derived from a perceived danger of civil conflict, a need to encourage people to speak out about the pain of the recent past, have it publicly acknowledged, begin the move toward reconciliation, and so launch the new national project. The Act defined, the Commissioners often asserted, much of the structure and activities of the Commission, and it was formulated and promulgated during a time of delicate political negotiations, when many leaders feared the outbreak of armed dissension. An issue that has been brought to our attention most forcefully by the writings on the Holocaust relates to the relationships between truth, memory, and time: how soon after a period of deep conflict and horror can those who have been embroiled in it describe their experiences and articulate its meanings? I have in mind the experiences of the young who led the fight within their communities inside the country, suffering dire consequences. How difficult it must have been for them to conceive of the particulars within the sweep of history (the long battle, the eventual victory, the personal loss in relation to their brief lives thus far). Did it help them to tell their stories that the Commission characterized

them as “victims” at that time? Did the asking preempt other forms of listening? “There are,” writes Adam Phillips, “surprisingly few occasions—or rituals—in which people are expected or invited to tell the story of their lives” (1994, 75).

The stretch of time that the Commission examined (1960 to 1994) was—had to be—arbitrarily selected. Clearly, a commission must have limits to its sweep through the past, but there are implications in the choice of beginnings and endings. While the shooting of protesters in 1960 in Sharpeville marked the start of a brutal form of oppression of public protest, it really represents no more than a glottal stop in the history of racial oppression in South Africa. In the process it adopted, testimonies often seemed to have been set free from context and history.

We see, then, the lineaments of time, including those that formed each “victim’s” appearance at a public hearing on “Gross Human Rights Violations,” during which the Commissioners were to examine a specified chunk of the recent past. They were to hear over a period of a year (stretched to eighteen months) “ordinary” people talk about what they had suffered. The 10 percent who were heard in public were selected by the Commissioners and their staff to reflect the range of violations experienced. The slot allowed each person testifying was circumscribed by time (to, on average, half an hour). This was intentional, for the focus was on victimhood and, therefore, on events or incidents of trauma. Every applicant filled in circumscribed forms. (They are described in chapter 2). Of necessity, much was left out, including, very often, political allegiance, activity, and commitment *across time*; the iteration of violations; the subtlety with which fear was instilled; and the sheer brutality of the terror and suffering endured over and over again.

On an Ethnography in Zwelethemba

I worked with young men on the periphery of the ANC: an edge from which they and their comrades across the country sometimes led. I studied the Commission’s search for reconciliation and the fourteen young men’s reach for it among those with whom they had lived and operated and within themselves. It was an astringent ethnography that I undertook in Zwelethemba:

one that made high demands on each of us as we trod with care across eggshell terrain.

The two strands of the study offered a number of ways to triangulate the analysis. Three were of particular use to me: the triangulation between the Commission, the activist, and the State; between a truth commission, a small town, and fourteen individuals; and between the individual, the group, and the community. The study of the Commission offered a background against which to place the close-grained study: it offered a breadth, varieties of context, the findings of the Commission's Research Team, and hearings on famous cases including young activists such as Siphiwe Mthimkeulu, James Moeketsi Seipei (known as Stompie), Hector Pieterse, and the Gugulethu Seven.¹⁵ The Commission was public, authoritative, official, and in possession of legal force, although it operated in the light of an inheritance from the former government of secrets, lies, mass shredding of data, and a refusal to cooperate by many sectors, especially the SADF. By contrast, the study in Zwelethemba was on a microscopic scale. It could only provide a mini-narrative that entailed a search for depth in time unfolding: it could trace how young activists built support and sustained it, renewed their own and others' commitment, regained composure when time stopped (for example, under torture), reflected on failure and humiliation, and nourished networks. It could look at the substance of a life devoted to a cause fraught with dangers that threatened self, family, and community.

Sifting the evidence drawn from parallel studies for the book has meant leaving out a great deal, especially on the Commission. Nevertheless, I suggest that the analysis of a public institution and an ethnographic study of a single community yielded rich material—each strand gaining immeasurably from understandings gathered through the labor on the other.

The core of the study relies on the evidence I gathered from fourteen young men of Zwelethemba. I worked with each of them individually, and we met in groups of three or four and, often, all together. We met frequently during the first year, 1996, while I was on sabbatical, and then often, from 1997 to 2000, during weekends and university breaks. From 2000 to 2011, we met about once a year and maintained other forms of contact; over the last year, we have held a number of meetings and have had many exchanges. We met in their homes, in the newly constructed library in Zwelethemba, and in the offices of NGOs and a trade union. In the charming if not always

welcoming town of Worcester, we met in fast-food joints, municipal offices, and on the village green, as well as at the police station and prison, and we met at sites where they had been tortured beside the Breede River, in a public nature park on the slopes of a mountain just outside Worcester, and on the pavement of the Sanlam Insurance Building; we even met at the train station when the Blue Train made a special stop to allow President Nelson Mandela to address a small crowd. Sometimes we met in Cape Town in my home, in the university residence where two of them were living, and once at my inaugural lecture. We held weekend workshops at Nekkies Resort, a guest house in the Breede Valley, and at Goedgedacht Trust Farm.

Six features of the ethnography that focuses on Zwelethemba make it particular. It is an account of what it means to do research on youth and conflict, for until recently few studies have given satisfactory descriptions and analyses of the subject.¹⁶ It depicts the activities of young people who voluntarily engaged in a fight for a cause beginning when they were still at school and who had been neither conscripted nor forced to participate. They were not children of the street, nor were they gang members. It is a record of the struggle in a small country town compiled soon after the conflict had ended. It is set within the context of an analysis of a truth commission that had been created to document and examine the same conflict and the recent past, thus offering an elaboration of context that few ethnographers could hope to obtain. And, finally, it is a description of the relationships between young men who were brought together as local leaders during the struggle, who led the fight together, and who, in retrospect, examined it microscopically once it had ended.

While poring over a map of Zwelethemba one afternoon, five of the fourteen men in our group and I were tracking networks relied on by the comrades among the maze of identical houses, and it was suggested, laughingly, that we call our group MAZE, for Male Activists of Zwelethemba. And so we did. The group was composed of the young men who had been leaders in the 1980s of the youth and who were still, in 1996, based in Zwelethemba. Together we set out to make sense of the past using what Bernard Williams calls “the small scale of mini-narratives” that gives structure to matters of interpretation on a larger scale (2002, 244). Making sense of the recent past was no easy matter for the men, ten of whom had been tortured and two shot (resulting in paralysis for one and the loss of a leg for the other) by members

of the security forces. Each had been embroiled in direct conflict with the forces of the law. In writing their stories, I recognize that their telling may not have been possible without the opening provided by the Commission.

In anthropology, an array of means to check the truth of what one is told is used. In this ethnography, direct checks were not possible for, for example, the recall of intimate facets of certain experiences, especially of torture and severe ill treatment. My attempts to interview the police were thwarted even with regards to the search for less incendiary information. Veracity was obtained—to the extent it could be about individual memory of an extraordinary phase in the history of the country and in each man's trajectory from childhood to adulthood under dire circumstances—in the interchanges between us all over a significant stretch of time, in the slew of methods that I and others utilized in the community and the town, in the study of the Commission, and in sharing (accompanying and being accompanied through) parts of their everyday lives. The interchanges occurred between each man and me in group meetings, gatherings of a few of us, individual interviews, formal explorations and exercises, three weekends spent together, and attendance at functions, celebrations, and rituals, community meetings, protests, and funerals. On request, I helped people, including men in our group, to fill in the TRC's application forms on human rights violations, once in a group and sometimes with two or three persons engaged in the task. In combination with attendance over eighteen months of HRV hearings, I was able to identify the patterns of torture most commonly found in the Boland area, and I came to know the names of many of those said to have tortured the young, a small coterie of whom traveled the country interrogating activists. I have not included their names in the text because they are in the public realm, having been recorded as spoken by people who gave testimony from the Boland at the Worcester Hearings and at other hearings in the Cape. The Research Team of the Commission examined the veracity of all testimonies in determining who the victims were.

The young men were not equal in status as leaders. Some played much more prominent roles, and some suffered more than did others. There are real differences among them in leadership qualities, skills, education, security at home, and employment opportunities. In 1996, some had full-time employment, others were unemployed, and two were university students; some were married, and some had children; one, the man who had lost a

leg, had given up his post as a teacher in Zwelethemba and had become a prison warden in a town a few hundred kilometers away. The one who had been paralyzed was unable to work. Each is an admirable person on many counts, some revealed flaws in their behavior, and a few are hard to know in their fullness, perhaps as a result of what they have been through. They are, in their variety, ordinary men. (Having written that word—ordinary—I read again Mxolisi Nyezwa’s poem “day” and am rebuked, for he says, “as an ordinary man, / as a man persecuted i’m easy to know” [2000, 50].) They were not formally trained as soldiers; they did not ascend the ranks of a military hierarchy; they were unarmed, wore no uniforms, and had no recourse to the protection of an army or military legal apparatus, nor could they as warriors expect defense from international law. There were many thousands like them, and the nature of the war they fought is not yet well documented. We worked together in a postconflict situation of social change and readjustment.

I do not, of course, know how the men viewed me—the anthropologist, the outsider: as an older woman, a mother figure, a scholar, a companion? I asked a lot from them in terms of recalling the past but tried not to ask about certain matters or probe into sensitive areas beyond what was offered to me. I hardly ever asked about pain, except for the purposes of helping them, at their request, to fill in the Commission’s forms, but it came up, as it must given their history. They quite often characterized me as a “radical,” but I am not sure what they meant. We met much more frequently as a group than I had supposed we would. I would often make an appointment with one of them and, on arrival, find that almost all of them had gathered to meet me. It made for a fascinating dynamic: in each meeting there would be a group of three or four men, not always the same ones, who challenged me, always politely and with due decorum but strongly on many issues ranging from my political opinions to my failure to fulfill promises. I tried to meet many of their requests, for example, to have appointments with psychologists or seek funding for business ventures, but I often failed, usually for logistical or bureaucratic reasons. I did things for them, but fieldwork always impresses on me the tight limits of one’s power, purse, and influence. There were some for whom I wish I could have done more, like Ntando Mrubata, who died in 1998 as a result of the wound that he had received from a policeman’s gun.

The more senior leaders in the group gave the others loose rein in interrogating me but would use tact and acuity in eventually taking control of the conversation, reaching agreement as a group, then focusing on other matters. Another aspect of group dynamics had to do with a gradual evolution in the depth and range of our discussions. There are among certain peoples of South Africa forms of discourse that are bound by rules of respect and avoidance, particularly when people of different age, gender, and status are gathered together—in Xhosa it is called *blonipha*, and it influenced our early relations. In addition, there was a code among activists that called for silence with regard to many matters, especially pain and suffering. Given that the conflict was over and that the Commission and other institutions were encouraging people to speak out about their difficult experiences under apartheid, constraints slowly fell away, and it helped us to achieve an intimacy that was held within a certain formality and economy of expression.

We spoke, for example, often glancingly, about heroism and cowardice and how difficult it had been to hold onto a sense of pride or virtue after torture or after having experienced the clever, invasive forms of humiliation at which the security force members excelled. The men did not speak in romantic terms about the past, though there had been heady days, nor with much nostalgia, except sometimes for comradeship shared, leadership exercised, and direction assured.

The meetings were marked by courtesy, generosity, seriousness, tact, respect, and humor and by their treatment of me as a source of information about the world, especially about national politics, government policies, liberation organizations' offerings, the Commission, and Western forms of therapy. It was often hard to get a hearing for my research agenda; there was scant interest in questionnaires, surveys, categorization, narrative lines, or chronological order, and I had to accumulate such data in less directed ways. As an ethnographer, I found them seriously wanting in terms of gossip—usually an important source of information in the field. While they demonstrated expertise in conflict resolution, they did not shy away from confrontation, especially around community politics. The group worked together over a number of years that allowed individuals time to decide when to talk about sensitive matters. It provided a nonjudgmental space in which to come to terms with damage done and suffering endured and to reexam-

ine lines of loyalty and betrayal. Remembrances of the past were recast and reconstituted through a process of mutual listening. The retrieval of meaning from a powerful and difficult set of experiences was made possible. The group traversed moral difficulties and delicacies. I have tried, in the writing, to keep the tone of mutuality that characterized the group conversations, to hold the delicacies of the exchanges in trust, and to respect the moral difficulties that arose. My participation may have offered a form of acknowledgment. The group gatherings became the framing device for the exploration and the writing.

I should like to make explicit a certain mode of writing and anticipate a certain way of reading that emerges from the nature of the research, for there is something at stake in restraint. It includes the men's ownership of their stories and their vulnerability before my retelling; the complexity of their fight for liberation—its *longue durée*—and the fact that the strands of the liberation efforts have yet to be crocheted into a story. A form of writing that has acquired a style of bareness is the best way I can answer the problem of description in this work. There are many ways of talking about the recent past. Different conversations record various kinds of recognition, often with an elliptical relationship to what actually happened. Various registers are to be found in the text, and sometimes there are internal interlocutors.

In puzzling over the writing of an ethnography of youth sliding into adulthood, I take from Wittgenstein a wariness of superficial similarities of form that can disguise very important differences of meaning. He discourages the “craving for generality” (Monk 1999, 547)—a desire that seems to pervade the description of youth in conflict. I should like to mark some dissatisfaction with the genre of works on children and youth in armed conflict in relation to the kinds of things I want to accomplish. The focus in writings on a youth in war is more often on his or her stuttered existence than on the graph of his or her life's span. The book does not aim to be a comprehensive text on apartheid or the TRC.

We began to meet two years after the election, on April 27, 1994, of a democratic government and just six years after the cessation of turmoil in Zwelethemba. Emotions were raw. Members of the group had operated together in a context in which they had experienced violence that had breached privacy, security, and the forms of presentation of self that normally shield us from intrusion. Past intimacy and present involution charged the atmo-

sphere of the meetings. It is remarkable that they came together, stayed together, and allowed me to enter. The burden of my task in writing has weighed heavily. Would that I could have dispatched it more quickly in their interests and fulfilled the brief more nearly.

At the end of the project, the group announced that, through our shared interest in documenting their past, they had maintained connections with one another after the struggle was over, enabling them to take joint action and make community contributions in ways that might not have happened otherwise.

Specific Procedures Used in Data Collection

On the Commission: In 1996 and 1997, Fiona Ross and I attended almost all the Human Rights Violation hearings in the Western and Northern Cape, each of which lasted three or four days. We took copious notes and have the tapes of the transcriptions that were aired on the radio to the nation, and we have a stash of background notes from the Commission. We attended many other hearings around the country during the full period that the Commission sat. We attended special hearings and amnesty hearings. I talked on a number of panels organized by the Commission, and Andy Dawes and I prepared a submission on children under apartheid that was read out by children at the Children's Hearing in Cape Town. I attended some of the Commission's committee meetings on reparation and reconciliation, and I was one of the editors of the section on children for the *Final Report* (1998), although I declined an invitation to write it because of the academic restrictions involved. I participated in many conferences, including two on the media and the Commission, and have since given over one hundred talks in fifteen countries.

In Zwelethamba, I worked closely with fourteen young men, the testimonies of three of whom I heard being given at the Boland Human Rights Violations Hearing of June 24 to 26, 1996. Apart from conducting many individual and group interviews, the young men and I filled in questionnaires on the basic data concerning their families, households, and education; recorded their life histories, filled in timelines on local history, including the struggle; made charts of important events, connections, and influences; and

drew maps of networks, actions, movements, and players. We held three weekend workshops, once with Fiona and the young women with whom she was working. Geoff Grundlingh photographed the men and women at a site that each had selected as marking an important event in his or her experience of the struggle. The photographs were exhibited in a number of places, including St. Georges Cathedral in Cape Town, and a selection is reproduced in James and van de Vijver (2000, 6ff.). The photographs in the book are his, and some are by Barbra Wright.

In the community of Zwelethemba, I examined, from a variety of angles, the context in which the young men acted. Anthropology graduate students from the University of Cape Town undertook background studies in Worcester on the newspapers, police records, town administration, and other topics. We did a census of Zwelethemba and a household survey of experiences of violence in the 1980s. Barbra Wright compiled a book of photographs of the suburb and donated it to the new library. At the request of the local community statement taker appointed by the Commission, I helped people to fill in the two forms required to document experiences of violations and to claim reparations. I attended community meetings on land, on the elders, on education, and so on. I participated in feasts and funerals, a woman's protest march, and the care of child laborers who had been summarily evicted from a farm. Many members of the community generously granted me interviews.

Other work: Nyami Mhlauli, in 1998, undertook a small study of the children of the Cradock Four.¹⁷ In 1997, M. Thabang, then at the University of Cape Town, studied the opinions expressed by fifty-three African students at eight universities in the country of the Commission, the meanings of words frequently used in its deliberations, and the different connotations they can have in the six languages the students speak, including English. Patricia Henderson researched the formal and popular definitions of a similar but extended list of words in Xhosa and in English—words like “betrayal,” “forgiveness,” “torture,” and “complicity.” Alana De Kock analyzed the testimonies by and about children and youth from nine of the Western and Northern Cape hearings. In Johannesburg, I interviewed, on a number of occasions, women who had participated in the fight conducted by liberation organizations from within countries on the border of South Africa and two groups of youths who had fought in the Vaal Triangle outside the city.

A Sketch of the Chapters

There are two themes in the book, one sheathed by the other. One is the question of the young men's experience during the struggle against apartheid (their recollection of and reflection on it) and the specific ways in which they were targeted and attacked by the regime; the other is the Commission's approach to the documentation of what happened to people, including the young, and how it handled the questions of activism and victimhood. Chapter 1 takes the reader through a compressed account, told through the retelling on the map, of the fight in the 1980s in Zwelethemba and the excruciating conditions in the area. Chapter 2 shows how pain is borne in such a struggle and what it does to one, that there was bearable and unbearable suffering, and the ways of reckoning or acknowledging such experience and its social meaning, specifically in the Commission. Chapter 3 plunges into the heart of the matter—dependence on one another and the regime's use of betrayal as a weapon, both as conditions as well as outcomes, through torture and the threat of pain. Chapter 4 explores the intangible structures probed and built by some of the men, a seeking of meaning, toward a language and grammar for their actions, and the state's response—the “rejects of history” and the “government of children.” This idea of the detritus of history is picked up in chapter 5, which queries, through data and discussion, the Commission's timid approach and its bureaucratic rigidity.