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War in Worcester:

Pamela Reynolds

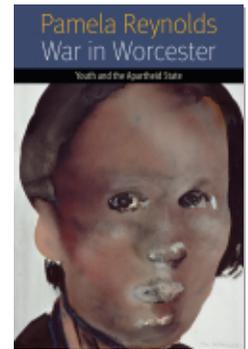
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ONE

The Ground on Which They Stood

I am looking for all this with my imprecise,
because nervous, finger on a map—a child's map, I must admit.

— PAUL CELAN

The Ground and Its Context

The chapter is about the work of war (or the labor of revolt), living in the place of war (or on the battlefield), and local fame and local danger—it outlines the battle in a township under close surveillance. The questions that inform it are: What do the young do in war? How do they do it? How are they drawn in? How do they hold through it? Against what odds? It is about commitment and choice, not simply revolt or rebellion, grasping opportunities, taking advantage, settling scores, or even just having fun. Despite the recent concerted interest in the engagement of the young in conflict, there are few publications (apart from autobiographical accounts) on the details of their actions on the ground in relation to the choices they make, the passion that directs them, and their understanding of their predicaments—which is not to deny the reality of the situations in which children have no choice but to participate in war.

The account given here is centered in one place, and it encompasses a decade. The place is a small, cordoned-off patch of ground at the edge of town. My interest lies in the continuity of the effort that local leaders among the young in Zwelethemba made day after day to sustain the revolt. It is the element most disturbingly left out of the TRC exercise. Once embroiled in conflict, the young had to work at paying attention, planning, and acting as well as concentrating on the continuous threat they faced and on keeping command of themselves during intermittent crises that directly threatened them with pain, extreme harm, and even death. At certain times and in certain places in the 1980s, to be, quite simply, a young black person out of place—moving, hanging out, visiting—was to be a target for the security forces. Even to be in place, in the home or in the yard—or in school—was to be unsafe.

There were obvious benefits to engagement in the struggle for a democratic dispensation in South Africa that made the day-after-day effort worthwhile, and they included the accumulation of local power, status, and admiration; excitement; the pleasure of collaborative efforts; the headiness of leadership; and the comfort of belief in a purpose. The labor of involvement day after day had little to do with the routines of traditional forms of fighting; rather, the work involved “moving”—a colloquialism for networking and gathering information in the community. It entailed seeking contact; affirming ties; acquiring news about exiles, national leaders, and actions in the cities; giving and receiving directives on policy and heeding warnings (for example, to watch out for, report on, or capture certain persons); building connections; drawing in recruits; watching those under suspicion; plotting protests; visiting those in mourning; planning funeral tactics; and seeking solace or healing. In the process, knowledge was acquired about the temper of the community, the mood of the young, police movements, and key persons’ tolerance of or disdain for young protestors. Moving gave the leaders the opportunity to plan clandestine meetings and to avoid capture. In this way they tested “the proclivities and expectations of the social milieu” (Freud 2003, 234).

In part, the young expressed “real rebellious spontaneity” (Deleuze 1995, 176) as they sought “ways of living with what would otherwise be unendurable” and “of confronting the line” (113–114). The spontaneity can be seen in the humorousness of certain actions. An instance of this occurred when

road workers were busy at the edge of the township on the main artery that leads out of Worcester toward Robertson. The workers habitually took a nap at midday, and one day some of the young men crept up and stole the steamroller, driving it into the township, then leaping off to escape through the yards as the workers pursued them in fury. The steamroller rolled on majestically alone.

The Young Seen as Dangerous People

At the height of the revolt, when there was widespread disruption inside the country plus incursions of liberation forces from outside, the South African government had at its command, according to Howard Barrell (1990) four hundred thousand troops, at full stretch; sixty-nine thousand police members; and twenty-two thousand temporary members. Between 1997 and 1987, the liberation organizations, largely the ANC, had 12,500 soldiers with some six months training behind them. About six thousand were deployed in South Africa, of whom, if Barrell is correct, about 30 percent were unable to fulfill their missions. By 1988, some 281 acts of revolutionary armed activity had been recorded. The government commanded vast resources: there was a defense budget of up to R3 billion; the CCB (Civil Cooperation Bureau within the security forces) operated with R29 million annually; and in 1989 and 1990, a huge budget was voted to the Special Defence Fund. It is unclear as to what resources the liberation organizations had, but they certainly were no match for the government's resources. It is not my intention to detail the resources of either side; I simply want to underline the disparity between them.

It is beyond the scope of this book to describe the full conflict between the government and the liberation organizations. Suffice to refer to the literature and to give a few indications of the nature of the force that the young faced. In the early 1980s, Bell and Ntsebeza write that "massive intimidation, murder, torture and detention confronted the rebellious communities. But for all their brutal and bloody response the police were losing control. The army was drafted in. By late September of 1984, there were more than 32,000 troops in 96 townships around the country. . . . Many townships were clearly becoming ungovernable" (2001, 204). The authors outline the

brutal aspects of the internal maintenance of the system of apartheid, one that the TRC examined and on which it reported. Bell and Ntsebeza (2001, 205) elaborate on some of the means the government employed to quell resistance:

During the security crackdown of the 1980s, suspected opponents were detained in their thousands and most of them were tortured. Of 600 released political detainees examined by a panel of doctors from the National Medical and Dental Association in 1985, 93 percent complained of torture and other physical abuse and 83 percent bore evidence of abuse, sometimes weeks after the abuse had occurred. More than 350 of the people examined were classified by the doctors as “severely injured.” This was a pattern that was to continue for years.

By 1986, according to Bell and Ntsebeza (2001, 238), mass resistance had turned the tide against the government. It is with hindsight that some success for mass resistance can be allocated. On the ground, the fight continued, and the government’s force neither diminished in presence nor yielded in attack or pursuit.

Members of the South African security forces and others who had no sympathy with the stance and tactics of political activists in “making the country ungovernable” viewed the young as dangerous people undoubtedly seeking trouble, causing mayhem, indulging in sex and alcohol, spying on community members to detect infractions of local rules they had imposed, stirring chaos to force a retaliation by the police who were trying to maintain law and order, burning targeted homes or *shebeens*, destroying property, and ruining the goods of those deemed to have broken boycotts against white-owned businesses or collaborationist dealers.

I shall use the word “police” in describing the measures that were taken to stamp out unrest in Zwelethemba, although members of other branches of the security forces were often actively involved. (The measures were similar to those taken in the towns and in other areas allocated for the domestic occupation by people identified as “Coloureds” or “Africans” in the Boland; see Skinner 1998). Close surveillance was organized by the monitoring of travel and telephone calls; the manning of a roadblock at the sole entry and exit point; the imposition of a curfew after 6:00 p.m.; a check on the ownership of vehicles; control of bus times and routes and the institution of ran-

dom searches; the maintenance of a network of informers; the occupation of three police stations, including a surveillance tower in the township during the height of the conflict; patrolling on foot and in marked and unmarked vehicles; and the gathering of information on political activists. In quelling crowds that they considered to have gathered illegally or that they thought likely to incite trouble or when conflict had begun, they used *sjamboks* (rubber whips), rubber or live bullets or truncheons, or they set trained dogs on people or sprayed teargas. They caught people and forced them into cars or vans. They spread out into the township ready to catch those who tried to escape. They conducted search-and-seize exercises once the conflict had died down, and they targeted the homes of known activists or political spokespersons. Sometimes they trawled the area and shot or beat or arrested people when there had been no incident to ignite a reaction. The treatment of children who boycotted school was cruel.

The young leaders stood out in a community under surveillance—marked by adulation from those they were leading and by danger in their exposure in a constricted area. Once they had become engaged in conflict with the security forces, it was difficult to retreat, to end involvement. One option was to go into exile, but that was difficult; another was to go underground or merge into the areas demarcated for blacks in Cape Town or in small towns of the Western Cape. Poverty limited some means of escape and strained the resources of kin who gave them shelter. Jobs were hard to find in the area once the attention of the police had been focused on them. Nevertheless, some did find work in fish factories on the western coast and on farms when they had to leave Worcester. Most of the leaders were forced to leave school or dropped out partly because the routine of attendance that it demanded made arrest too easy. Perhaps the single most defining feature of the conflict in South Africa between the local leaders of the youth and the security forces was the fact of their repeated detention and abuse. In Zwelethemba, the young stirred conflict and were arrested mostly in their community, held in police cells and prisons in the town, often released without charge, and then returned to their community. Ground was not gained, battles neither won nor lost: at the beginning of the 1980s, most of them believed that they would defeat the apartheid regime within a few years, but it was only at the end of the decade that signs of change became palpable in Worcester. It was the repetition of that cycle of arrest and return that marked the fight as dif-

ferent from the kind of guerrilla warfare in which surprise attacks could be launched in the countryside, where familiar terrain, a supportive population, and fighter mobility made attacks, retreat, and hiding possible.

For the young men who saw themselves as fighting within the broad ambit of liberation organizations, there was no security in identification by uniform, badge, or base with the protections that in formal wars, as recognized by the Geneva Conventions, are supposed to be accorded a soldier. The possession of symbols of belonging to the ANC, the organization to which most of the young fighters in Zwelethemba belonged, was illegal and offered the opposite of protection. Senior leaders were removed from the district, and contact with national leaders was sporadic; besides, the national leaders had very little to do with local actions. Nevertheless, there was an intricate and important network of communication. Some protection was afforded by being faceless in a crowd, but no leeway was granted to the young in the manner in which the security forces treated them. Legal protections were ignored, although there was a “legalistic façade that cloaked apartheid” (Bell and Ntsebeza 2001, 153), and even in courtrooms, legal recourse was often denied.

Another facet particular to this conflict is that youth were targeted, and in turn, they made themselves a target. The pursuit of youth gave security force members the excuse (or reason) to intrude into their homes. There was, given the structure of colonialism entrenched by apartheid, little institutional support for youth that escaped the imprint of the state. There was scant access to clandestine newspapers, radio programs, or literature. The reversal of roles that occurred when youth took charge of the townships, requiring that their elders obey their authority, made guidance and support of the young by their elders more problematic for some time. Yet another particularity was that the youth took up the cudgels while they were living in the same communities as some who had stood bravely against the state in the 1960s but had been cruelly treated and retreated for many complex reasons. Some of the young suggested that one reason for their elders’ defeat then had been that they had not secured a large enough support base. Many of the young stood in defiance of their elders’ cautions.

The men with whom I worked were born between 1960 and 1972. At the beginning of 1976, the year that the mass resistance by youth was sparked off in Soweto, they were all under eighteen and thus children under the law.

In 1980, the start of the decade that is the focus of this analysis, three were in their late teens, and eleven were under eighteen (nine of whom were under sixteen). In 1985, the most intense year of the conflict, six were in their early twenties, three in their late teens, and five under eighteen. In 1996, the year we began this study, half were in their thirties and half in their twenties.

Four of the men had between them seven siblings who were political activists: three had brothers (two of whom died in the fray), and two had sisters (two of whom were leaders and suffered greatly in detention, and one had a sister who was arrested and harmed by the police in their search for her brother). The mother of one of the men was a committed activist, and she was jailed for three months when he was a child. A maternal uncle of one of the boys was a renowned political figure, and he had been banished from Zwelethemba for many years. Two of them had close kin who stood against them on the other side of the battle lines, and both of those relatives were instrumental in harming them. Two of the men in MAZE are related: one is the son of the other's mother's mother's brother.

Most of the leaders in the 1980s in Zwelethemba were from families respected in the community, and many were successful school children at the local school, confident in their abilities, sure of their identities, and hopeful for a future of opportunity yet aware of the possible costs in terms of loss of education and training that political activism could entail. They saw their efforts as contributing to a broad, persistent revolt by the young. In the 1980s, the activities of the young were drawn together with other forces by the United Democratic Front (UDF) in alignment with the ANC.

Mapping the Battleground

Five men in their thirties stood utterly absorbed as they leaned over a table on which a map of Zwelethemba lay. They were tracing with colored pens their battle with the security forces on the field of war that was Zwelethemba. The five, Xolile Dyabooi, Amos Khomba, Eric Ndoyisile Tshandu, Paulos Mnyuka, and Vuyisile Malangeni, pooled their memories and marked the battleground in a way that I have never seen done for a struggle of this nature on an encircled, urban terrain. In the 1980s, the five men had been part of the top level of leadership among the youth: each had joined the conflict

when very young and had fought for years, each had been detained a number of times, and each had been severely tortured. Each had dropped out of formal education as a consequence of his participation, and only Xolile was then continuing his studies. Three were employed in local government, and one was unemployed but involved in community development. Amos is introduced in interlude 1, Xolile in chapter 3, and the other three in this chapter.

It was April 1998, and we met twice (on April 19 and 26) to complete the map. They had come at my invitation to Zwelethemba's new library. I provided a municipal map that gave the main features of the township—the road along which people entered and left the area, the streets, the houses, the soccer field, and so on. I had brought colored pens and crayons and a tape recorder, but their excitement at sharing memories and recreating the past was beyond the scope of the machine, and I was unable to capture many of the stories that the task called forth. (At an earlier meeting in on May 24, six members of MAZE, Zandisile Ntsomi, Ntando Mrubata [profiles of both are in chapter 2], Isaac Tshabile [his profile is in interlude 1], Zingisile Yabo [his profile is in interlude 2], Eric, and Vuyisile, had noted on poster-paper timelines acronyms of local organizations and other data having to do with the struggle between the community, led by the young in the 1980s, and the forces of the apartheid regime.) The five men and I had worked together for almost two years, and they had come to map their fight against the government. The template that formed a rough guide for their operations in the community was derived from the M-Plan, which had been adopted in 1953 by the ANC, prompted by the belief that political conditions at that time were changing toward much greater repression and that the need was to prepare to organize in a way that adapted to new conditions, precluding public activity such as huge rallies and very large branches (Suttner 2008, 18–19). They decided to take one year, 1985, the year in which the youth had caused the most mayhem and suffered the most extreme retaliation, as a focus for the task of mapping, and they sketched in minute detail the struggle for liberation on one small piece of ground. Zwelethemba was X-rayed. It was a privileged briefing a dozen years after the year depicted on the map.

They began with animated conversation about the map and the past and about what they should record on the stark outline of the municipal map. First they made lists of the leaders of the youth, people who had collabo-

rated with government forces, sympathetic policemen, and those who had been “necklaced” (a brutal form of political lynching)¹ and, in the process, discussed each person’s name and the merits or demerits of the part he or she had played. The homes of the people they named and the sites where three people had been burned were identified on the map. Together we chose the colors and symbols to represent them. It was their social and cultural knowledge of the community that animated the two-dimensional sketch on the municipal grid of streets and houses printed on the piece of white paper. It was animated by their knowledge of which persons and houses they had to avoid, especially those in which policemen and collaborators stayed; the places where it was safe to take refuge; the homes where doors were kept unlocked, providing quick entry and exit as they evaded the police or a place to sleep when it was not safe to stay at home; and the buildings with hidden nooks in which it was possible to hide for a while. That kind of knowledge had to be constantly updated: they had to estimate people’s mood and changes in their attitudes toward them, and they had to sift gossip for information that was being carefully tendered in their interest or cleverly let loose to trap them. In the early 1980s, the men lived at home or in small rooms that they built themselves at the back of their parents’ dwellings or other people’s houses; they had little access to money or to the unrestricted use of telephones. There were no cell phones then.

The map represented the sort of local history that it is a pity not to have had documented before the TRC began to hear testimonies or judge amnesty applications. It was not just naming and plotting that was important but also the way in which the descriptions of actions and connections enlivened the sketch and the ways in which temporality informed place and was, in turn, influenced by space.

Twelve years after 1985, that year of intense conflict between youth and government forces, and four years after the first democratic election and the installation of Nelson Mandela as president, the men still held an intricate and intimate knowledge of the community. Visible changes in Zwelethemba included the erection of a fine library, the foundations of a community center and gym, and an increase in the provision of council housing. Paulos still knew who owned each house and the name and place of residence of almost every person in the area. He recalled with precision where and when each incident had occurred. The five men contributed names to a list of youth

who had played a notable part in leading the revolt, and I wrote down the fifty-one names. Twelve of them were women and thirty-nine men. After careful scrutiny, they crossed out seventeen names and confirmed the significant contribution of others, speaking with care and tact. They ended up with a list of thirty-four names: twenty-five in the top layer of leadership, those at the forefront as leaders of the revolt in Worcester from 1980 to 1986, and nine in the next layer, some of whom were active from 1987 to 1989, during the last three years before apartheid began finally to unravel. Eight women were recognized as leaders in the top layer and four in the next. The names of the fourteen men in MAZE were included.

The details given in the rest of the section refer to the twenty-five leaders identified as having been in the top layer. Their homes were marked on the map. All but four had been held in the cells of police stations and/or prisons, some many times, but they were often released without having been charged.² Four had died, and three had gone into exile to join the liberation forces, one of whom had died in an ambush in Angola. (Eight people are said to have died fighting for the MK in Angola.)

Of the eight collaborators named, the homes of seven are marked on the map. The eighth came from Cape Town: he was believed to have informed the security forces about the detailed plans of two groups from Zwelethemba who were caught on the borders of the country as they were attempting to leave in order to join MK in exile (accounts are given in chapters 2 and 3). As they marked the homes of the collaborators, the mapmakers expressed their ambivalence about naming people thus. Although Xolile had helped to compile the list, he continued to express his doubts about the accuracy of the accusations against some of the persons named as collaborators. He said, "It is not always justified to name someone as a collaborator because he or she may have been caught while protecting kin or may have been targeted out of a personal grudge." They talked about an incident in which one of them had accused a neighbor of betrayal, and his comrades had nearly killed the man without checking the evidence. On the insistence of another member of the group, he was given a hearing and exonerated.

The places where three men were necklaced are marked. Of the three, one escaped and two died. One of the two was burned to death on instructions from senior activists in Cape Town after he had escaped an attempt to necklace him there and had sought refuge in Worcester. Heated discussion preceded his death. Three men employed by the police force were named as

having been sympathetic to the plight of the young escaping from the police in Zwelethemba. It was said by people in the community that two were subsequently punished and the third lured into a trap and killed. Two of their homes are marked on the map.

Later maps, drawn by other members of the group during a weekend workshop, depicted three war zones, six secure meeting places, three training areas for self-defense units, the place where an older leader had been hidden, the beer hall that was burned, a policeman's house that was razed, the avenue where a number of activists dubbed the "Comrades of Moscow" lived, the three police stations (two of which had been since been removed), a shop that supported the activists, the "House of Justice," and nine sites of action that were instigated by the youth to stir confrontations with the police. Each site was described as the map was marked.

Eric, one of the mapmakers, was the judge of the People's Court, and he presided in the "House of Justice," which was no more than a room in someone's home. He was dubbed the "Zwelethemba Magistrate" by the police. The court was set up in accord with the M-Plan to monitor compliance with the rules established in the attempt to form local governance of the township and wrench it from outside control. Under the auspices of the court, he and his colleagues undertook investigations of and negotiations about disturbances in the township. They claim to have helped prevent violence in the community more successfully than in other areas of conflict around Worcester. They held sessions and proclaimed sentences against those found guilty of misdemeanors such as breaking a boycott. Few community members could have welcomed their presumption of authority, but, at the height of the troubles in the mid-1980s, it was difficult to counter the dictates of the activists.

Eric was born on January 28, 1963, to Xhosa parents, and from the early 1980s he was politically active. He became a leader in many local and national structures (a word commonly used by those linked to liberation efforts to refer to organizations established to further the cause), including the ANC, MK, COSAS (he was an organizer in 1982), WOYCO (as a member of the executive committee), and SAYCO. In 1990, he was on the executive committee of the ANC Youth League (ANCYL). In the 1980s, he was well respected in Zwelethemba. When we met, Eric was working in the Tourism Development Centre under the Worcester Municipality.

His activities were closely tied to the central leadership in the township, and, in particular, he played an important part in implementing the M-Plan.

In 1985, Eric left with a group of eight young people, three from Zwelethemba, to travel across the country and cross at a border post in order to join the MK. They were arrested at the border. He and Zingisile, who was with him, believe that they had been betrayed by someone (whom they named) from the township and by a young man from Cape Town. The torture they endured during the forced journey home at seven different sites and in the Worcester cells has marked the two men indelibly. The litany of the variety, intensity, and iteration of tortures Eric suffered at nine different towns during the journey back to and in Worcester was terrible to hear. It included bizarre actions, such as having his hair combed with an iron rake. He and the others were held for six months then released without ever having been brought before a magistrate. Neither he nor any member of the group (two of whom had escaped before the arrests occurred) was formally charged. They were released after six months. Eric bitterly regrets the loss of education and the lack of opportunities to learn new skills and improve his ability to advance in his career. After attending university in 1987 and 1988, he had to leave because of a lack of funds. He worked for the Worcester Municipality for many years, apart from a spell when he left to create a business. The brutality he endured has, he says, affected his temperament and his confidence; he has taken advantage of care from a number of sources, and he has had to draw on his strength of character. He had a solid presence in our group and was a reliable and wise leader.

We are informed both by what is marked on a map and by what is withheld from a map. There is, on this map, no one marked for having collaborated on a minor level; nor are friends or kin who informed the police against them named; nor elders who resisted their activities; nor is anyone noted for weakness, whether lack of courage, timidity, or self-interest. It is an accounting that takes seriously only major forms of betrayal. The map does not record criminal or domestic violence or the pervasive violence of bureaucrats, farmers, or businessmen. In recalling their experiences, both the young and the adults made note of people who had been fair, generous, and kind to them. They included the names of farmers who had treated child laborers relatively well (a number of the men had worked on the farms during school holidays under bad conditions) or who had allowed activists on the run from the police to live among their workers, at significant risk to themselves. They noted those who contributed to the work of the Black

Sash, trade unions, and charitable groups. Other forms of the ordinary as represented, for example, by activities in schools, churches, offices of organizations, or on the soccer fields, have not been inscribed. They appear in stories told in subsequent chapters. It is possible that the ties that bind family and community were stronger here than in areas designated for blacks living in larger towns and cities, and, if that is true, it will have shaped relationships across the generations and among peers in particular ways that helped determine the character of the fight. It is a map of the way in which the young in a mode of resistance fought the local police who acted in defense of the status quo. As a document of a battlefield, the map represents the particularity of an asymmetrical clash that lasted a decade on the ground of the domestic arena.

Let it be remembered that race was at the center of oppression and the need for a struggle. However, the lines that divided groups were not always clearly cut during the fight. The government bureaucracy, including the army and police, employed people defined as white and nonwhite. There were divides within each group that had to do with a variety of differences, some more divisive than others. Extensive efforts were made by the government to divide and keep the groups separate and to nourish antagonisms within and between them, for example, in the 1970s between hostel residents and shack dwellers in Cape Town and between “Coloureds” and “Africans” in the matter of rights to employment and residence in the Cape Province. Like many aspects of life in South Africa, things were characterized by complexity. Persons officially designated as members of specific categories, spuriously declared to be based on scientific classifications of race, stood on both sides of the conflict. All this is not to deny that the majority of whites (beneficiaries of the system) stood on one side, backed by the apparatus of the state, and that the majority of Africans stood on the other, whether actively or passively. This observation may be obvious, but it is made because readers unfamiliar with the history of the country may be surprised to learn that the young activists in Zwelethamba (and elsewhere) were confronted by African members of the police, were tortured by Africans as well as by whites, and were informed on by people living in their community.

A Tensile System of Communication

It was vital to the planning, organizing, and direction of protests (and to the possibility of escaping and hiding from the police afterward) that a tensile system of communication should exist. A network was created based on intimate knowledge of the residents: each resident was pinpointed on an imaginary line that assigned his or her value between trust and distrust. Reassessment was frequently made. Sometimes their judgment was wrong, and when that happened, those in command admitted that they had been “caught napping.”

As the mapmakers traced the elements of the action, they alluded to images conjured by certain yards or corners of buildings. Amos pointed to a place where a shot had felled him. Just prior to that, he had been alerted to the fact that a house was on fire, and he had arrived at the scene to discover what was happening. A crowd had set a house alight that belonged to someone whom they believed to be an informer. As the police Casspirs (armored personnel carriers) arrived, the crowd dispersed, but a woman screamed that there was a baby in the house. Amos ran in, brought the infant out, and handed him or her to the woman, by which time the police were close at hand, and they gave chase. He ran, leaping over fences, dashing across gardens, skirting barking dogs; then he ran into a house but saw a school friend who shouted a warning that it was a policeman’s house. He ran out into the street and was turning a corner when a bullet hit his head. Blood spurted as he fell; young men quickly carried him into a house, then later to his home. In the evening, the police arrived searching for him. He was in the house next door, lying low, and they did not find him. The shot had ripped the flesh of his face near his left ear. There is still something in the wound, but it only bothers him if he bangs his head. He did not see a doctor, fearing that the police would be told that a wounded student had come for attention. (Amos and his induction into politics is described further in interlude 1.)

Other spots on the map were pointed out to me where “incidents” had occurred, sometimes instigated by the leaders to render the place ungovernable, at other times the result of unplanned youthful rebellion or eruptions among residents. They included the sites where school protests and boycotts were held; beer halls burnt down; and areas on the artery road that ran alongside the suburb where vehicles, usually vans carrying goods from local

factories, were stoned or even hijacked—they would be looted, then sent to the “oven,” a site for abandoned vehicles in Worcester. The leaders’ attempts to direct or deflect action were often ignored or opposed. They did not have full control. They recognized passion aroused by anger and “dared not judge” all protests. They tried to use tact and skill in guiding crowds, and they developed a special language among themselves in the process. In the middle of the decade, the country seemed to the men to be on the verge of chaos, and they recognized that it could be dangerous to obstruct people’s anger. This is not to exonerate them for participation in violence but to suggest that they tried to hold to the purpose, which was to instigate incidents that contributed to making the area ungovernable. That purpose was in itself inherently ungovernable.

On August 18, 1985, the United Women’s Organisation held a peace protest against the excesses of the police who had, on August 16, shot Nkosana Nation Bahume on a street in Zwelethemba, and the young activists joined them (see Ross 2003, 141–144). The chair of the women’s group addressed the police, demanding that they stop militarizing the area, end the curfew (which began each evening at 6:00 p.m.), and dismantle the roadblock at the entrance and exit to the suburb. The police were accused of implementing State of Emergency conditions when none had been declared (one had been declared on July 21, 1985, in thirty-six magisterial districts but not yet in Zwelethemba). It was during a period that fell between the first and the second States of Emergency. After the protest, police presence was pulled back for a while, and the youth ironically observed that they missed the targets for stone throwing that the police had presented. To hurl a stone and see it connect with a van was to vent anger and yield satisfaction, even if the effect was puny, some said.

Funerals became occasions for serious clashes between youth and police; it was said that each funeral marked the occasion for another (or others) to die. In an attempt to prevent funerals from becoming focal points for the display of support for liberation organizations and for stirring revolt, the state required mourners to obtain permits to hold funerals and imposed strict rules on the mourners: who might mourn; how the coffin should be carried and by whom; along what routes from home to church to cemetery, accompanied by how many; and who might gather after the burial. Not satisfied with the intrusion on private and communal grief, the police frequently

caused chaos even when their orders were being obeyed. In anger and grief, the rules *were* disobeyed, and the young, in particular, responded to police interference. Vuyisile became embroiled in a clash with the police when he joined the protest against their actions at the funeral of Nkosana. He was chased by the police along the streets of the township. They shot at him as he leapt over fences and dashed across yards with people shouting, "Run, run, Vuyisile!" At a corner, people gathered to hinder the police, and they gave up the chase. They went to his home and questioned his family. He recounts other episodes of close shaves and scrapes with people who turned out later to have been spies. Shortly after his escape from the police, he was detained and held for three days. In August 1985, he left for Queenstown, where he remained for three years.

Vuyisile is the oldest of the fourteen men; he was born in 1960 in Zwelethemba, and he grew up with his father's brother in the Eastern Cape, where he began his political involvement. In 1980, he was imprisoned for a year. Thereafter, he returned to Zwelethemba, where he pursued his devotion to civic organizations by supporting UWO activities and helping to create COSAS in the region. He describes himself as an organization person, not an individual operator. He was involved with the establishment and running of numerous structures. As a chair of CAYCO he came under the direct surveillance of the police, and he was encouraged in August 1985 to leave Worcester. He went to Queenstown and continued his political involvement, in consequence of which he was arrested at the end of the following year and held in detention for three years. He says that the presence of Advocate Dumisa Ntsebeza (who was later the head of the TRC's investigative unit) in the town helped to prevent the authorities from committing the worst of the abuses against him. Vuyisile described in detail his interrogators and the methods they used, including dangling him from a window high up in a building and threatening to drop him. On his release, he returned to Zwelethemba, where he was placed under restrictions that kept him in the township and forced him to walk to the police station in Worcester twice a day to report his presence, despite the existence of a police station in Zwelethemba. In 1982, he went to hospital for a checkup, fearing that he was going to have a breakdown; in 1990, he was treated at the Trauma Centre for Victims of Violence and Torture in Cape Town.

A characteristic of the struggle was that there was very little institutional support on which the young could rely, either at the height of the conflict or

during its aftermath. In general, schools, clinics, hospitals, doctors' surgeries, and public facilities such as libraries, police stations, and courts were sites of danger because the police and the wider population of Worcester reported anything that aroused their suspicions of "terrorist" behavior, although there were individuals who gave unstinting assistance when they could and organizations whose assistance was very important and greatly valued. Some people received extraordinary support from parents, kin, friends, and neighbors; others found themselves isolated, if only because their levels of pain or distress or guilt led them to erect barriers against help. Some visited *amaqhira* (indigenous healers), but none laid much stress on their interactions with them during that time.

Four of the local leaders participated in creating ZWEYO (Zwelethemba Youth Organisation), to take the struggle out of the high-school classrooms, where protest among the young began, to the wider community. It was a concerted attempt to include unemployed and working youth. One of the four was a schoolgirl, and she was recognized as a powerful leader in the community and is still regarded as having played an important role. She has since married and no longer lives in the Worcester area.

Arms were available among some of the activists in the country, but in Zwelethemba, as one of the men said, you had to be creative to get hold of any. Local leaders said that if any arms did pass through their area they would have done so via individuals in cells who would have known or handled only aspects of data or pieces of the weapons. The *tsotsis* (gangsters) had guns, and so did some businesspeople and drug lords; a few people obtained them in the "homelands," where the police and army were said to have been less vigilant in protecting their arsenals. Some activists managed to steal weapons from the police during riots, and there was infiltration of weapons from those in exile. Fire, gasoline, and stones were available and put to use. Violence was used on all sides. Nana Khohloloana (who is introduced in chapter 4), taking the stand as an impartial judge, said that among the activists there were some who often resorted to violence and derived their sense of importance in society from it, at the same time claiming that its use was helping to rid the country of oppression. I remind the reader that thousands of the young joined the struggle between the 1976 and 1990 and that their behavior and actions varied widely.

There seemed to be four principles in accord with which the young leaders worked. The first was to operate in relation to the liberation movement,

predominantly the ANC in Worcester and, from 1983, the UDF, as far as possible. They became members of a liberation organization and joined COSAS, ANCYL, ZWEYO, and other tributary groups. They acknowledged and paid obeisance to the leadership even when directives were sent in from those in exile instructing them to adopt new strategies and fresh tactics that they had already initiated. The second principle was to create alliances with the older generation, workers, women's organizations, unemployed youth, and others to secure their backing and allay some of their fears and doubts. The third was to carry the masses with them, for without that support the government could, they believed, easily quash any revolt. The fourth principle was to acknowledge that their main resource was self-consciousness and discipline and the monitoring and maintenance of relationships with one another (the next three chapters deal with these concerns, especially chapter 4). On the basis of these principles, they set about building leadership structures and taking action.

The bare patch of ground that is Zwelethemba was a scrap of the quilt. I am suggesting that the fight there was initiated and sustained against great odds, with but slight contact with national leaders and those in exile, with almost no resources, and with the knowledge that they would receive minimal support in the conflict as it unfolded day after day and year after year. It is not my intention to estimate the effectiveness of their actions in bringing about the demise of apartheid except inasmuch as they contributed to a youthful rebellion that, in turn, was part of broad liberation efforts within the country. Nor do I claim that the experiences described are representative of those among the young elsewhere in South Africa, but aspects of them certainly are. "We were," said the young men of Zwelethemba, "small fish in the ecosystem of the liberation movement."

Friendship

Friendship was vital for survival. It is, no doubt, true in any group involved in conflict. Facets of the fight at this particular time and place shaped its character. There was the camaraderie of plotting protests; firing up crowds; leading attacks against huge odds; glorying in the admiration of followers, especially girls; and gaining the respect, however grudging, from el-

ders, despite that many were wary of the power the youths represented as a group. There was shared admiration for the talents, courage, and wit that was implied in invitations to join the leaders. And there was responsibility in watching out for one another, for covering risky ventures, for effacing one another's tracks, for paying attention to one another's weaknesses and irresponsible actions in order to limit possible damage.

Ties of friendship seemed to have been placed under particular strain in four ways. The first was the manner in which it was put, again and again, to extreme tests by the pressures cleverly brought to bear by the security forces on loyalty as they tried to break confidences and turn comrades into betrayers. The second resulted from the fact that the conflict largely occurred on the streets and in their homes, so that their pain, cowardice, and fear before police retaliation was exposed in front of the community and their families. The third lay in the humiliation of incapacity and loss of control during or after spells of interrogation and torture, as they were, frequently, kept together in crowded cells or harmed in groups; besides, they held on to an ethic of never complaining about ill treatment and often did not seek medical care because of the danger of being reported to the police. And the fourth resulted from the difficulty of living as if in an overexposed negative: there was nowhere in which to hole up, retreat, lick wounds, and recoup energy, apart from the small houses that were usually full of kin and that were, themselves, exposed, standing on small plots lined along a grid on the unforgiving, hard earth.

An image comes to mind of one of the most fiery members of the group, Paulos, who, on return from each stint in the police cells, would be made by his mother to stand outside his house. She would bring soap, hot water, and fresh clothes from the house and have him strip naked, wash, and change before passing through the door. She supported his political activities yet insisted on cleansing him of the contamination of police brutality before resuming his place in the home. Paulos was exposed even in being cleansed of pollution.

The homestead where Paulos lived with his mother is marked on the map. She was Xhosa by birth, and his father was Sotho. They came to Zwelethemba in the early 1960s. Paulos was born on April 11, 1966. He has an older brother and a younger sister. His father deserted them when Paulos was three years old. He sometimes spells his name as Paulus, and he

said that his name means “depression.” He has too much fire in him for that appellation to be suitable.

Paulos is a wild card. Brave, forthright, active but impetuous. Sometimes, his colleagues said, he did foolish things. He would be called on to stir crowds and to lead protests. The police hated him, and he became a prime target, but he was wily and difficult to capture. He described seven occasions when his human rights were violated, one of which is given in chapter 3. Four of the violations were, he said, committed against his mother, when she was harassed for selling food outside the school; when she was jailed for three days for being in arrears on her rent; when she and his older brother fought the police when they entered the home to arrest him; and when the police searched the house looking for copies of banned pamphlets and when, on her denial that she knew where he was, they sprayed her face with tear gas. The tear gas affected her asthma, and she never recovered her health, Paulos said. She died in 1989. In a questionnaire that he filled in for me, he gave a moving tribute to his mother for her care, her help in his recovery from rage and hatred, for teaching him about human values and morals and how to face reality and the challenges it brought. The other three violations have to do with his spells of detention, during which he endured torture and gross ill treatment and, after his release, harassment that caused him to leave the area, abandoning his home and his job (see chapter 3). Once he was imprisoned with a man who later became one of Nelson Mandela’s guards. The consequences of his experiences included the loss of education and physical damage. Paulos worked in a department of conservation for many years. He could speak five languages and acquired computer skills. He behaved impeccably toward me.

Trust was held by a fragile thread. There was little time for the glue of loyalty toward a unit and its members to be instilled, and there was no opportunity to experience the kind of techniques that organized groups use to bind recruits to “king and country” or cause and comrade. Nor was there much opportunity to learn to resist the precision and the wiliness of schooled security operators and interrogators. Not that loyalty or resistance was weak, just that responsibility was assumed early and preparation was scant. Friendships held across time and still do. Reliance on it in the 1980s was characterized by uncertainty—your claim not to have spoken a name but his claim that your friend revealed your name. A young man who partic-

ipated in my 1992–1993 study and who was a highly trained MK operative told me that during his months of daily torture what distressed him most were the details of small intimacies that the torturers revealed to him as having been extracted from his colleagues under torture. In a discussion of the demands of friendship, T. M. Scanlon (1998, 160–168) formulates two questions: What kinds of priority does friendship demand, and to what extent are its demands themselves limited by some recognition of the demands of morality? He goes on to discuss the nature of friendship, its benefits, the loyalty it requires, and the feelings of loss and betrayal it can engender if one's friend is false or disloyal, and the feelings of guilt if one is disloyal oneself. He ties the case of friendship to that of morality and wrong. In particular, he examines the implications of our relations with others when charges of injustice or immorality are made. The discourse places in perspective the serious cast that conditions in the 1980s in Zwelethemba gave to friendship. (Further analysis of morality appears in chapter 4.)

It ought to be said that, unlike many kinds of battles, in leading the local struggle in Zwelethemba no single person acquired power. No one was the leader; the conditions militated against it. Power spiraled among a group of changing characters. Some spun away from the vortex, and others were drawn in, the latter having to learn without the benefit of much apprenticeship. A commonly held view is that the nature of youthful resistance is reactive and leaderless. Slavoj Žižek's recent book *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (2009) refutes with a close analysis of various cases the view as applied to any sustained action.

Covering the Ground

In summary, the tactics used and the ideals pursued in battle included the following: causing incidents to bring the forces of government out and, once having proved troublesome, evading the police and continuing to be active; gaining the support of other sectors, including women, unemployed youth, trade unionists, and community members, by providing them with information, using persuasion, and stirring emotions; acquiring and updating knowledge of people's attitudes and actions to secure lines of communication and mobility and, therefore, flight; establishing trust among colleagues

paralleled by wariness while attempting to maintain a balance between independence and dependence; pursuit of a knowledge of self to acknowledge weakness and avoid pitfalls, to help rein in fear, and to behave in a manner befitting a warrior to further the cause effectively; maintaining links with liberation organization members elsewhere; and escaping capture and, if caught, enduring the consequences with stoicism and in silence. Who could hold to all of that?

The actions they took included stirring trouble and responding to measures taken by the authorities to keep tight control over the township by gathering crowds, making speeches, breaking curfews, holding clandestine meetings, attending funerals, tackling nodes of corruption (as they defined them) within the community, attacking informers, and securing networks.

I used the map as a methodological tool to find out how a fight in a township was conducted. It is an item in the documentation of an asymmetrical fight. It helps to detail the tactics used by the youth, tactics that, compared to those used in major wars, may seem to have resembled the deployment of fireworks rather than firearms. From where the youth stood, the following features characterized it: They conducted their operations in full cognizance that the area was under surveillance from a limitless “outside” over a bounded stretch of earth, although there could be no foolproof coverage, nor could the boundary be sealed. The terrain on which they operated formed part of a small, rural town in which a relatively wealthy and powerful section of the population had access to an intricate knowledge of the conditions (particularly physical, financial, and institutional) under which they, the youth and their kin, lived. Of course, just as there was knowledge from the outside, so was there knowledge from the inside. The people of Zwelethemba gained knowledge working in the centers of administration, finance, commerce, and industry in a variety of institutions and in homes in Worcester, yet it was hard for them to pierce the protective covering that political, legal, social, and economic power can claim and secure. The connections among residents of a small town and the satellite farming communities meant that “troublemakers” could be identified and often silenced. One way was to ensure that they lost employment and were, thereafter, prevented from obtaining jobs. For example, in the early 1960s, a trained and experienced mechanic lost his job when he joined the protests against passes and was unable to secure employment again.

The map is an extraordinary document, because it pinpoints the means used in everyday pursuits: how the community was monitored and what networks were established. Through the remembrance of events that occurred a dozen years in the past, memory was pressed into place. It is seldom that this kind of detail for this kind of conflict is mapped out in any form. It can be interpreted as a trajectory across time, as a series of movements, or as a log of relationships. The intricacy of detail in the recall was surprising. So too was the level of agreement among them of names, sites, actions, and incidents, and this recall was accompanied by a sober consideration of the ambitions, mood, perceptions, emotions, or motives that could be said to have determined behavior. The act of mapping was an act of political analysis. I watched as the blueprint of the township was crosshatched as the places of residence of twenty-five of the most wanted men and women in the suburb were marked—a small group that was gnawing at the ankles of the state, a group embedded among some thirty thousand (the rough estimate given by the municipal authorities of the number of residences at that time) or sixty thousand (the estimate made by the activists, who claimed that it was in the interests of the authorities to underestimate the numbers for whom services should be provided) people. The map is of interest too for the discussion it stimulated among the mapmakers and the recall of scenes in the drama. It was after 1985 that four of the men, Amos, Eric, Paulos, and Xolile, endured periods of extreme suffering while held in detention. Not one mention was made on either of the days we spent on the task of mapmaking about their terror and pain, some of which is described in the following chapters. Another reason that makes the map of special interest is that it demonstrates the unquestioned inclusion by senior male activists of the role that young women played as leaders. Their homes were plotted and their skill and courage celebrated not as exceptional but as equal to that of the men's.

In the 1980s, conditions in Zwelethemba could have been worse: wholesale slaughter, mass destruction. I am trying to estimate the heft of a continuing level of tension punctuated by terror. How to weigh the horror of an instant against the dragnet of the *longue durée*? It is the former on which the Commission focused and on which they based, in large part, their decision whether to declare someone a "victim" and, therefore, eligible for reparations. The latter has slipped through the truth net.