Breaking the Cycle:
producing trust out of thin air and resentment

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Abstract: According to Robert Putnam, social capital exists in a relationship of equilibrium. Its persistence or absence is infinite, locked in 'vicious' or 'virtuous' cycles. Using a fine-grained ethnographic account of the rise and fall of collective action in a small neighborhood of Cape Town, South Africa, this paper seeks to explore alternative forms, uses, and sources of social capital. First, I seek to unpack the definition of social capital, disaggregating networks of civic engagement, trust, and collective action, and probing the relationship between them. In particular I try to construct an account of the creation of trust through collective action, in the absence of previously existing networks of civic engagement. Generalized feelings of trust in turn prolong participation beyond collective action and may institutionalize the type of civic engagement that holds government accountable. As mobilization ebbs, so do the heightened levels of trust that characterize relations during the period of collective action. Nevertheless, a residue of civic engagement persists, making it more likely that residents will engage in collective action in the future. Social capital may be a more fluid resource than researchers have supposed. In particular, this article suggests at least one way in which nascent democratic societies with weak institutions and scant history of civic engagement might be able to produce the type of social capital that may be an important component of democratic consolidation.

Ruyterwacht is a poor and atomized historically white neighborhood of Cape Town, South Africa. In February 1995, ten months after the historic election that ended forty six years of apartheid rule and brought the African National Congress (ANC) to power, the ANC-affiliated National Education Crisis Committee (NECC) began busing three to four thousand black students

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daily into the neighborhood, ostensibly to attend school. The school itself however, had no teachers, no desks, no books, and a maximum capacity of 500 students. Students were left in Ruyterwacht with nothing to do until the buses returned to take them home at 4 o'clock. Residents claimed the students wandered the streets in intimidating and large groups, harassed people, stole food from the store, and generally threatened the security and peace of mind of neighborhood residents. Efforts by town leaders to register protest through official government channels were stonewalled. After two weeks, some neighborhood residents mobilized to protest the perceived threat, engaging in collective action against the students and demanding state intervention. Five hundred residents blocked access to the neighborhood, and stood vigil until the students were withdrawn three days later. Mobilization generated high levels of trust and solidarity among protesters, as well as between protesters and non-participants from the wider community. Residents organized a Neighborhood Watch in an attempt to protect the area from the projected threat of outsiders. Education Ministry officials met once with protest leaders in an attempt to mollify them, but did not respond directly to their demands. The South African press painted the protesters as backward racists. Within three weeks, residents were almost completely demobilized, and when 500 black students returned to a fully supplied school one month later, only a handful of people showed up to register opposition. Nevertheless, a small core of people who had grown active through the school crisis maintained pressure on the government and continued to mobilize around a variety of local issues. Many residents continued to perceive them as community leaders, and persisted in turning to them for advice and help in representing their interests.

This single case of the rise and fall of collective action complicates received wisdom about the endurance and characteristics of social capital. The chain of mobilization in Ruyterwacht suggests that trust is not a pre-requisite of collective action, which was generated in this case by a compelling discourse of threat combined with a sense of the political efficacy of mobilization – a belief that government would be responsive. Collective action nevertheless rapidly generated trust, where none before existed. As protesters' sense of both threat and efficacy waned, so did their

levels of participation and solidarity. Nevertheless a residue of social capital – both networks and the norms and trust they supposedly produce - persisted, making it more likely that the community would behave cooperatively in pursuit of future common goals. In particular, this case study adds to the social capital literature in two ways. It provides evidence that social capital can be produced where it did not previously exist, and demonstrates that social capital may be a temporary and fluid resource, not a stable commodity locked into vicious or virtuous cycles. It holds out hope that social capital is a resource that nascent democracies with weak political institutions and little history of civic engagement might also have access to.

Unpacking social capital

Human communities face dilemmas of collective action (Olson, 1965). Individuals would be better off if they cooperated to achieve goals they are unable to achieve independently. Scholars in the fields of economics, sociology, and political science have recently argued that cooperative behavior and collective action produce economic prosperity, market rationality, and responsive political institutions.[1] Yet it is rational for individuals to choose not to cooperate. Individuals face incentives to 'free ride' on the participation of others, knowing that they will share in the benefits while accruing none of the costs of participating themselves. Since every rationally maximizing individual makes the same calculation, individuals will not cooperate to achieve common goals, especially when such goals are public goods that are jointly supplied and non-excludable – like the departure of thousands of unruly teenagers from a small neighborhood. And yet we know that people do cooperate, all the time, to achieve common goals. Recent scholarship has seized on the concepts of 'social capital' or 'trust' to explain collective action in cooperative communities and, in turn, the success or failure of democracy.[2] 'Trust' explains how the calculations of rational maximizers might change based on their perception of how others will behave. "In a world in which there are prisoners dilemmas, cooperative communities will enable rational individuals to transcend collective dilemmas."[3] Social capital produces collective action.

But problems of reciprocal causation and endogeneity beleaguer explanations of collective action that rely on social capital. The definition of social capital describes a relationship of equilibrium between norms of reciprocity, networks of civic engagement, and trust.[4] Norms, networks, and trust reinforce each other to produce social capital, which inheres in the structure of relations among people.[5] Yet this description of the location of social capital centers trust as both the independent and dependent variable, making it impossible to isolate causal relationships. Putnam defines social capital as networks of civic engagement that produce trust.[6] Trust in turn reinforces the norms and networks that produce it. But where do networks and norms come from in the absence of trust, and is trust possible without networks and norms?[7] The definition of social capital is methodologically problematic because it assumes, and hides, what should be causal and falsifiable relationships among the variables that supposedly produce it. Where does social capital actually come from? Putnam's response, that linear causal questions should not crowd out equilibrium analysis, does not really respond to the type of chicken and egg deadlock that confronts anyone seeking to understand the origins of social capital.[8]

While these problems are on the face of it methodological, they have practical resonance. As Putnam himself admits in Making Democracy Work, (1993) the implications of his model of social capital are depressing. He traces the existence of social capital in the north of Italy, and its absence in the south, to the medieval period, in what amounts to an 'either you have it or you don't' account of the roots of social capital. Nothing explains how the whole cycle might get started at the outset. The reciprocal arrows that bind social capital produce circles that are either 'vicious,' or 'virtuous' -- self-reinforcing in either direction. If a society lacks social capital, the lack will reproduce itself. Without networks, norms will not be produced, without norms there will be no trust, without trust there will be no networks and so on. If social capital does not already exist, it will not spontaneously occur. On the flip side, the model predicts boundless optimism. Where there is social capital, it should reproduce itself infinitely as networks, norms, and trust continuously reinforce each other – for centuries in the case of northern Italy! The apparent decline in American

social capital however, documented by Putnam in Bowling Alone, (2000) cannot be explained using the framework he develops to explain variation in social capital in Italy. The high level of civic engagement and trust that supposedly characterized social and political life in the United States in the 1950s should have reproduced itself. The equilibrium analysis of social capital predicts equilibrium. It cannot explain something that is probably much more common -- the rise and fall of social capital.[9]

A second, and related, problem with the concept of social capital is that it is defined by its function, as some aspect of social structure that facilitates the concerted actions of individuals.[10] As Putnam explains, "social capital refers to the features of social organization… that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions."[11] The definition of social capital thus incorporates the assumption of a causal relationship between trust and collective action – trust produces collective action, or perhaps more accurately, trust produces an environment that makes collective action possible. Part of the reason for this is that most studies of social capital are located at the aggregate level where scholars have used survey data to extrapolate information about levels of civic engagement and social trust that rely on inference and correlation to make their case. Putnam seeks to explain why democratic institutions function properly in the north of Italy but not in the south by demonstrating that social capital also exists in the north and not the south.[12] Yet he is not in a position to advance an explanation of exactly how social capital produces cooperative behavior (and by extension strong democracy) because his method – large-scale survey research – is best used, as indeed he does use it, to establish correlation. His correlations are so compelling and robust however, that they invite a more complete theory of the origins, maintenance, transformation, and effects of social capital.

Recognizing this dilemma, John Brehm and Wendy Rahn have used individual-level survey data to find an actual causal relationship among the component elements of social capital, including civic engagement and interpersonal trust.[13] In line with the social capital literature, they found that interpersonal trust did in fact have a slight, though statistically significant, effect on levels of civic

engagement. More strikingly, they found that the reverse effect, of participation on trust, was one of the strongest of their entire model. So that while it is true that trust may go some way toward producing cooperative behavior, their evidence shows that participation and collective action have a much stronger positive impact on the production of trust.[14] Collective action produces social capital.

If trust is generated by participation, it may be the lever of access into the cycle of social capital. If participation occurs spontaneously (in the absence of social capital) and produces trust, then it behaves as an independent catalyst of social capital. Their finding therefore goes some way toward alleviating the hopelessness of the vicious cycle. As they say, "it is probably easier for a community to generate greater levels of participation… than it is for that community to instill more trusting attitudes in others."[15] Brehm and Rahn's findings, based on statistical analysis of survey evidence, are reproduced, and in many ways explained, through the qualitative analysis of the rise and fall of collective action in Ruyterwacht. Among a group of people with exceedingly low levels of social capital, a spontaneous moment of collective action produced high levels of trust and an attempt to routinize participation through the development of organizational networks. Although heightened levels of collective engagement soon waned, a residue of social capital persisted, and remained available to a core group of people who continued to mobilize collective action over a wide range of political and social issues.

But what produces participation? If trust does not produce collective action, or participation, what does? Going beyond Brehm and Rahn, I found autonomous catalysts to participation in the absence of interpersonal or social trust. In this case, collective action was generated by a compelling discourse of threat to the group, combined with a sense of the efficacy of collective action as a solution to the problem they faced. Protestors anticipated that government would be responsive to collective action. Although respondents themselves admitted that they had not known one another before, that they did not trust each other, and that they had never before

participated in collective action, a sufficiently large external shock led strangers to engage in cooperative behavior that went some way toward ending the threat and solving the problem. Threat and efficacy can generate participation, which will build trust and lead to the formation of social capital. Where social capital does not exist, threat and efficacy may be sufficient to start the cycle.

Threat and efficacy are not the only catalysts of social capital. Theda Skocpol and others have argued compellingly for example that institutions structure the rise and fall of civic engagement.[16] But this neo-institutional literature is caught up in another circle of reciprocity with the social capital literature I have discussed here: good political institutions produce social capital produce good political institutions, etc. Where might one come from if a society lacks both – as indeed many do? This paper is intended to use a qualitative micro-level analysis of a single case study to suggest an alternative, and truly external, origin of collective action and trust, and to explore the ways in which a qualitative study can supplement historical and statistical approaches to illuminate our understanding of the origins, maintenance, and forms of social capital.

In particular, building on the work of Putnam and Brehm and Rahn, this study contributes three insights to the social capital literature. First, it suggests a catalyst to social capital by describing at least one way participation might occur in the absence of trust. Second, it breaks into the framework that locks social capital in virtuous and vicious cycles by situating it in an external environment that conditions its rise and fall over time. Third, this study moves beyond correlating confidence in institutions with trust by asking respondents how relative faith in political institutions affects their political behavior. I find that while a sense of personal efficacy derived in part from a presumption of government responsiveness has some effect on the decision of individuals to engage in collective action (democracy produces participation), institutions most affect the duration and form of mobilization. This study suggests an altogether more fluid, shifting, and contingent understanding of the nature of social capital than has so far dominated the literature. Social capital appears as a feature of societies that might actually ebb and flow quite rapidly, taking a variety of

different forms that vary in the degree to which they support political institutions and economic development.

This analysis is based on interviews conducted by a small team of researchers from the University of Cape Town (including me) between February 14 – 19, 1995, and by me alone for three weeks thereafter.[17] In July 1995 I returned to Ruyterwacht, and spent a couple of days conducting follow-up interviews, mainly with activists I had already met, but also with other participants and non-participants in the school crisis. In the initial period, (2/14-19) interviewers were careful to interview a representative sample of non-participants as well as participants, but in the second stage (2/19-3/5) I focused attention primarily on activists and those who were involved in the Neighborhood Watch. I myself went on patrol with members of the Neighborhood Watch one night, in a particularly over-zealous attempt at participant observation – the stupidity of which became apparent when my white respondent pulled a gun on a large group of young black men who surrounded the car we were 'patrolling' in.

In this fine grained narrative account, based on extensive and detailed interviews with both participants and non-participants over the course of five months, a single case of the rise and fall of collective action details the mechanisms and logic through which collective action produces trust in the absence of pre-existing networks. Ethnography is a particularly valuable research tool in exploring the question of the origins and production of trust. Only ethnographic research establishes the temporal linkages that I rely on to argue that trust can be a product, but is not necessarily a precondition, of collective action. In addition there are some hypotheses that can only be tested using ethnographic methods. One might have hypothesized for example that there would be high levels of anomie in Ruyterwacht, given the almost complete absence of any community-producing mechanisms. But only direct interviews and first-hand experience would expose the extreme levels of distrust and atomism (we didn't like each other, we didn't know each other, we didn't trust each other) that actually constituted neighborhood relations. By conducting research in the community over the course of the mobilization, the attempt to entrench participation, the

subsequent de-mobilization, and the aftermath of mobilization, I was able to track the transformation of people's feelings toward activism, as well as their feelings toward each other, the government, and the target of their ire – the students. While there are many other methods that can answer questions about 'what' is going on, often only ethnography can answer questions about 'why' something occurs, and about what it means to participants.

Social capital in Ruyterwacht

Interviews and observation over the course of three weeks revealed that, before residents mobilized against the students, Ruyterwacht was characterized by a complete absence of such norms, networks, and trust as might comprise social capital. Residents claimed repeatedly that they had not known one another before the 'crisis,' revealing through interviews a picture of a neighborhood that was almost completely atomized. None of the participants I interviewed belonged to any organizations, was involved in politics, regularly attended church, or even knew their neighbors, and only one did volunteer work – coaching soccer in the high school. A random sampling suggested that few had voted in the 1994 election, in which national turnout was over 90%. Residents were unfriendly, and claimed that they were suspicious of each other.

Ruyterwacht has no central business district that might anchor it as a community.[18] Nor is there a single movie theatre, bar, pool hall, bowling alley, or restaurant. There is one under-stocked supermarket and a storefront that offers telephone service. In the center of Ruyterwacht stands the Zerilda Steyn Community Center -- a squat and imposing auditorium. No regular programs or classes take place in the community center, but it is the venue for occasional meetings and political party rallies. The hall is mostly unused. There are four churches in Ruyterwacht, but religious leaders complain that church attendance is low and that it is hard to get people involved. The single park is located, fairly inaccessibly, in the middle of a large traffic circle. Though people meet occasionally in each other's homes, many residents said they cannot invite people over because houses are too small to accommodate guests. Having interviewed some people in their homes, I can

attest to this. Respondents emphasized repeatedly that the hallmark of a good neighbor is that "they are quiet, they keep to themselves, they don't bother anyone."[19]

This picture of Ruyterwacht is consistent with other accounts of areas in which poverty and income inequality are associated with low levels of social capital.[20] Ruyterwacht is a clearly defined suburb of about six thousand residents in a low-income area to the north of Cape Town, accessed by a single road. The neighborhood is, in the words of one woman, "a poor place for poor people." Most residents are retired or unemployed, although a small number of low-income coloured and white families have moved into the neighborhood since 1990. Though some areas of Ruyterwacht are in better repair than others, the suburb is generally rundown. Most homes are single story, consisting of identical front and back rooms. Each house is built on a small plot of land, few of which have lawns, plants, or trees. Many yards are dirt lots filled with derelict cars and appliances, enclosed occasionally by leaning strands of wire. Because almost every household includes a skinny but aggressive dog, walking down the street is a noisy and unnerving affair.

Ruyterwacht also contains highly divisive cleavages along lines of age cohort and length of residency, as well as somewhat less salient racial differences that, according to respondents, tended to make residents suspicious of each other and reluctant to get involved in public matters. Like poverty, length of residence and social heterogeneity are associated with low levels of trust and civic engagement[21]. Since the late 1980s, as younger families and coloured people began to move into the neighborhood, interests have polarized along lines of age and race. In 1995 roughly 75% of Ruyterwacht's population were pensioners -- a legacy of Zerilda Steyn who residents claim left land to the Cape Town city council some forty years ago with the proviso that it be used to house white pensioners. While the proviso has lapsed, the legacy remains. Most pensioners did not own their homes and they felt vulnerable, concerned that the government would take away their housing. They resented newcomers buying housing earmarked for pensioners, and were afraid they were being edged out. Their fear was exacerbated by the ANC victory that marked the end of apartheid in 1994. Families with children on the other hand, believed they had a claim to pensioners' homes

because they had more people to house. They resented the fact that old people lived alone while they were crowded into smaller spaces, often living with their parents as well as two or three children. Many believed the old people should be moved into old-age homes. "There's lots of people that stays here and need a house and now there's one person stays in a house. Now we're five people that stays in a house. That's why if we can put the old people there (in a nursing home), there will be much more houses for the families to move into."[22] Old and young eyed each other with trepidation and suspicion.

Racial divisions between whites and coloureds were less pronounced, but nevertheless appeared to contribute to the widespread anomie of the neighborhood. Whites and coloureds generally admitted that they were not friendly with each other and that their children did not play together. A minority of more politically liberal coloureds who supported the rights of the students to attend school was harassed in the charged atmosphere of the student crisis. Because race is part of the subtext of much of this story, it is important to point out that race did not dominate the political or social landscape of Ruyterwacht before the crisis. Some mixed race couples we interviewed claimed in fact that they had moved to Ruyterwacht because it was less racially hostile than other areas where they had lived.[23]

Threat

In this bleak environment stand the attractive and well-tended school buildings that once housed a primary school for local white children and were used as offices for the South African army between 1989 and 1994. In January 1995, faced with an apparent shortage of classrooms in Cape Town, the army moved out. On 30 January about 3800 black students were bused in from Cape Town's black townships -- Langa, Nyanga, Guguletu, and Khayelitsha. The operation was organized by the National Education Crisis Committee (NECC), an ANC-aligned organization concerned with the transformation of black schooling in South Africa's transition to democracy.

For two weeks, between 3000 and 4000 students were bused to a school with no desks, no books, no teachers, and a maximum capacity of 500 students. The students ranged in age from about ten to 25 or 26. Many students who boycotted Bantu education as part of the anti-apartheid struggle in the 1980s returned to complete their high school education in their twenties. Students, who were also confused about what they were doing in Ruyterwacht, hung out. They were not confined to school grounds. They wandered around the small neighborhood, and they waited for the buses to take them home. The students were bored and restless.

Residents felt threatened. "You know, so the people don't have any security in our suburb. They don't have a lot of money. They don't have a big self-image. They don't have security and anchors. When something like this happens, you know, they are totally disturbed, because their house is beginning to fall apart."[24] During the day, Ruyterwacht residents consist primarily of pensioners, young mothers, and children -- groups the residents consider noteworthy for their vulnerability and defenselessness. They claimed repeatedly that the students were dangerous to the neighborhood. "They were bused in and they were left here. Then they started walking around, ransacking the place, insulting people, stealing, not using toilets, robbing the big shop down there -- they just walked in there and took what they want -- attacking old women, one woman that's in a wheelchair."[25] Some of these things the students admitted to, and some were doubtless exaggerations.[26] Regardless of the truth of these claims, they formed a central part of the discourse of threat that was used to mobilize and sustain collective action. "They were walking up and down and blocking the whole road, people couldn't get through… and making a noise, you know. Our children were so scared. They were scared to come home from school."[27] "They called us 'You *boer*,' things like that…"[28] Ruyterwacht residents perceived that the large influx of unoccupied black students bused into their neighborhood jeopardized their physical safety. The pervasive sense of individual threat was a resource that subsequently played an important role in mobilizing collective action.

Efficacy

The ANC's National Education Crisis Committee later claimed, somewhat implausibly, that they were using the school as a site to register students who would attend other schools.[29] Others speculated that the NECC actually intended to precipitate a crisis to highlight the problems they faced in attempting to reform the education system. Since the Western Cape was governed by the traditionally white National Party (NP), the ANC may also have intended the political ploy to embarrass the NP for failing to provide adequate educational resources for black students. Whatever the motivation, it is clear that the Ruyterwacht crisis was precipitated by irresponsible and probably politically motivated government action undertaken unilaterally, without consultation with either the students or residents who would be affected.

Four local Ruyterwacht leaders, including a Dutch Reformed Church minister and the local National Party organizer, made several attempts to go through "official channels" to register a protest against the use of a school in their neighborhood by thousands of unsupervised teenagers. Their primary request was for consultation, and they hoped to present a case for a negotiated solution.[30] They were finally granted audiences with representatives of the NP-controlled Provincial Department of Education and the ANC-aligned NECC. They requested that the number of pupils be reduced, that teachers be provided, and that the whole exercise be implemented in a "more orderly manner." The delegation was stonewalled however as the NP and ANC each tried to spin the crisis to maximize damage to the other party. The students continued to arrive at 7AM sharp.

Local leaders were partly stymied in their effort to exert pressure on the relevant state organs because Ruyterwacht had no real representatives in the new democratic system. The electoral rule that governs South Africa's post-apartheid democracy is a list-system proportional representation method under which representatives have no electoral connection to particular districts or regions. Though the majority of Ruyterwacht voters chose the NP in national elections, no National Party MP was personally responsible for the area. Moreover, in the underlap between

national and local government elections, Ruyterwacht fell under the jurisdiction of a divided Transitional Local Council (TLC) made up of ANC and NP appointees with little power or political acumen. The delegation that first attempted to broker the crisis through institutional channels was unsuccessful in part because Ruyterwacht lacked institutional leverage and access. Nobody was responsible for listening to them.

Ruyterwacht residents made no collective response to the students in the initial two-week period of busing. Residents with no personal history of activism explained their passivity fatalistically - "I was flabbergasted, but what can you do?" said one old man.[31] Another resident said "You've got to let the powers that be handle it. What are the neighbors going to do?"[32] On February 13, by which time the streets of Ruyterwacht had been congested with almost 4000 unoccupied and unsupervised pupils for two weeks, the delegation called a meeting in the community center to report on the actions they had attempted to take and the lack of government response. Willem Doman is the NP party organizer for Ruyterwacht. Though he does not live in Ruyterwacht, he is widely known (though not universally respected) in a neighborhood that was traditionally an NP stronghold. Koos van Rensburg is the minister of one of the four churches in Ruyterwacht. He is a young man who has not lived in Ruyterwacht long, and though he is involved in church programs and other local projects he was not well known to most of the people we interviewed. Ruyterwacht residents, who by their own account had talked of little else besides the school, the black students, and their own fears regarding the students' behavior for two weeks, turned out in large numbers for the meeting.

Doman and van Rensburg together reported to the residents the failure of their efforts, describing their inability to access the appropriate government channels, and their frustration with the provincial government. Dominee Van Rensburg, who spoke first, tried to emphasize the importance of continuing to work through established channels to convince the NECC and the Department of Education to reduce the number of students bused to the school.[33] He was not well received.[34] Doman, who followed him at the podium, gave Ruyterwacht residents the impression

that it was up to them to raise the profile of the issue and force the government to reverse the decision to give the school to township students. He invoked the success of the anti-apartheid movement in mobilizing against the government, and described the neighborhood as a community with democratic rights to consultation and a voice.[35] Asked about the meeting for example, one resident said, "They just spoke out to say that we as a community must stand together and this thing must be sorted out as soon as possible."[36] Some angry residents stood up to denounce the government and to criticize the inadequacy of the lawful efforts made by the delegation. Some threatened to take action unilaterally.

Van Rensburg later described the order of the meeting. "We went to the community and asked them what do they want to do about this whole situation. And then we give them time to bring all of their grievances; they had thirty or forty minutes. Then after that they, as a community, decides they can't handle this anymore. The community decided there won't be any school here. Because of how it happened."[37]

At the close of the meeting, residents stood around talking. Groups formed around people who told stories of things they claimed to have witnessed, and stories they had heard from others. Most of the worst allegations against the students -- that they had stolen from the store, that they had tipped an old lady out of her wheel chair, that they had sexually harassed a little girl between the parked buses -- were circulated that night. Many respondents later said that their perception of the danger they faced had been crystallized as people repeated these stories to each other. Many agreed that 'enough was enough' and that 'something must be done.' A few young men bragged that they would prevent the buses from entering the community themselves by forming a human chain across the road. Others agreed that they would join them, and reassured each other that they would be there the next morning. "Nobody planned it, nobody planned. Nobody actually decided that we would be here protesting. I mean it was just coming from the community. And Tuesday morning, I showed up here. Because I heard somebody. I mean it was just like a rumor. Be there. I'll be there. So I was there, 5:00. It wasn't decided. We just said 'what can we do to stop this

thing?"[38] Respondents insisted that the protest was spontaneously agreed to by a small number of people milling around after the meeting. These people did not, for the most part, know each other.[39]

The meeting in the community center played an important role in constructing a cohesive narrative of threat, and in generating a sense of efficacy that was new to most residents. Residents reacting in isolation had feared unruly teenagers wandering through their yards and streets in gangs of 20-30. They were shocked at the decision to transform Army offices to a school, offended that they had not been consulted, and overwhelmed by the manner in which the decision was implemented. But until they came together to examine the extent of the problem, and until their own feelings were validated by the escalating frenzy of their neighbors, individuals were merely isolated and afraid. Grievance was manufactured in the course of communal interaction and through common expression of frustrated concern. It was exacerbated at the meeting itself with reports that the government had disregarded local leaders' efforts to register opposition. Because the provincial Department of Education and the NECC were blamed in equal measure for the problem, it was framed from the outset as a standoff between a democratic community and an unresponsive government.[40] Doman and Van Rensburg played a crucial role in identifying the source of the problem - the state - and in framing the parameters of the solution – direct action.

Collective Action

On the morning of February 14th 1995, approximately 500 Ruyterwacht residents congregated at the entrance to the suburb with dogs, sticks, and other types of ad hoc weaponry.[41] When eleven busloads of students arrived at about seven o'clock, residents stood in the street and refused to let them past. Some people lay down in the street, employing a classic technique of non-violent direct action. Bus drivers and students remained on the buses. Residents stood in the street. In the course of the standoff, students on the buses and residents on the streets traded racial epithets and threw rocks and bottles at one another. Nobody was hurt in the exchange. After an hour or so, someone in a nearby house phoned Dominee van Rensburg to alert him to the potential for violence.

He phoned the police and went to try to pacify the residents. After another hour or so a squad car of policemen arrived on a scene of racially charged mild violence. With no prior knowledge of the situation and no particular brief on how to handle the students or the residents, the police focused on trying to keep the two groups apart. At about 11AM, after a four-hour standoff, the buses left, and protesting residents retreated to the area surrounding the school where they "stood watch" the rest of the day, lest the buses return.

No neat pattern distinguished participants from non-participants. Most active participants were young and male, though there were a significant number of older men and women on the front lines. People who lived closer to the school were more likely to get involved than people who lived further away, but one of the most active leaders and organizers lived at the furthest possible distance (within Ruyterwacht) from the school.[42] Coloureds were less likely to engage in collective action, but were roughly evenly divided in terms of their attitudes toward the students. Many fully endorsed community opposition to the school.[43] The greatest division to emerge was probably between the employed and the unemployed. Those with jobs were less likely to get involved than those who were unemployed for the dual reason that they had to go to work, and that they feared that they risked getting fired if they were captured on the evening news among a crowd of whites yelling racial slurs at black schoolchildren.[44] People with jobs and other ties outside the community were more likely to resent the images of racism and backwardness they felt were being portrayed by the protesters.

On the second day, residents resumed the vigil, and so did the police. When 33 buses arrived on the morning of February 15th, they were escorted to the school by armed police. Students piled off the buses and swarmed to the fences to taunt residents from inside the school grounds. One resident hit a student with a *sjambok* and was arrested. Police formed a cordon around the school to prevent students and residents from reaching each other through the fence. Though one side or another occasionally lobbed a rock, bottle, or other missile across the fence, students and residents mostly yelled racial slurs at each other across the police cordon for the

remainder of the day. Neighborhood residents dropped by continuously to see what was going on and to bring coffee and sandwiches to the protesters. Many people stood at some distance to see what would happen.

Collective Performance

The confrontation was initially perceived by Ruyterwacht residents as an immediate response to a critical problem. It was a short-term attempt to physically prevent buses from entering the neighborhood. Interviews revealed that the residents who turned out to block access to the students did not have a plan that extended beyond the arrival of the buses at 7AM.

The arrival of the police at about 9AM heightened the terms of the dispute by raising the cost of collective action with the threat of arrest. Some participants insisted they would gladly be arrested for the sake of the community, and challenged the police to demonstrate their bravery and resolve. Most residents avoided direct confrontation with the police, but still refused to get out of the road to let the buses by. On the first day, protesters made no effort to discuss a solution to the problem. The presence of the police probably most importantly reinforced the solidarity of the group by introducing a further source of threat.

The media arrived on the morning of the second day. The arrival of cameras and news teams, which residents plausibly claim they never anticipated, provided an audience and a platform. Residents did not immediately respond to the shifting parameters of their space for activism however, and swung between trying covertly to engage directly with the students (yelling insults and hurling missiles when they thought the police were not watching) and standing around in frustrated clumps trying to figure out what to do next. News reports claimed that residents initially assaulted journalists and physically tried to prevent them from reporting events.[45] Residents claim that reporters misrepresented them to get a story, and that reporters and camera men taunted residents to get a response they could record. One woman said that a coloured camera man had

called her an obscene name so that he could film her response to him as part of the demonstration.[46] The media was initially seen as a further threat.

By the afternoon of the second day however, the combination of the police, who prevented direct confrontation with the students, and the media who provided an audience, shifted the terms of engagement from collective action to collective performance. Late in the afternoon some residents decided to try to use the media to establish and publicize a set of demands.

Protesters told reporters they would not leave until a representative of the Cape Education Department came to speak to them. Community representation became the central grievance motivating protest and further cementing a nascent community consciousness. "See, what upsets the community the most is that they haven't informed anybody about this whole situation. What was going to happen, that it's going to be a school, or anything like that. The way the NP did it had everybody mad in the community."[47] Residents consistently framed the conflict in communal terms. "The community is shocked at the whole way the NP and the NECC handled this whole thing. It's shocking! They didn't even have the decency to come here to the community and say listen here, we need the school for five or six hundred people. At the moment I've got no democratic right. I mean, they never even talked to us." [48] Democratic discourse dominated their conception of who they were and how sides to the conflict were constituted. "I think it's very undemocratic to decide something for a community that's going to happen in the midst of the community without knowing that community and pulling that community into negotiations so it can come smoothe on them. But this was like a crash landing![49] The conflict over the school was rooted, according to residents, in the democratically guaranteed "rights" of communities to be consulted and heard.

A Member of Parliament for the Afrikaner nationalist Freedom Front arrived in Ruyterwacht on February 16th to try to defuse and mediate the situation. The commanding police officer and Van Rensburg together selected a delegation of six of the most vocal and militant protesters to meet with FF MP Pieter Grobelaar. Their intention was in part to control the group by

coopting its most strident elements, henceforth called “the committee.” The committee immediately assumed the status of leaders as a result of their selection by the MP and the police as representatives of the protesters. Committee members later explained that individuals like van Rensburg, who tried initially to negotiate a solution with the government, were discredited because they had not behaved more forcefully. "The crowd wasn't interested in that four people anymore (those who had been trying to resolve the issue through official channels) because that people made to them promises and said to them a lot of things. So those people got aggressive towards that people. They even wanted to hit one of them. Then the (police) colonel grabbed them and said listen you people are not happy with those people, we will go to the community and choose another six."[50] The committee was given a chance to air its grievances to a member of parliament while the police and local figures such as Van Rensburg who had emerged as moderators, were able to isolate a group with which they might be able to negotiate a stand-off.

All of the committee members were men in their late twenties and thirties. The two who dominated the group had grown up together in Ruyterwacht and attended the school that precipitated the conflict. Their parents had been what Afrikaners call 'house friends' -- close enough to visit each other in their homes. One worked in security (though he lost his job as a result of the confrontation) and the other was a contractor. Another was a policeman who volunteered as a soccer coach at a primary school in Ruyterwacht and lived near the school. Two were unemployed and one had a serious heart condition for which he received a medical disability pension. All were white. Apart from the first two, none of the committee members knew each other.[51] All of them initially claimed long-standing ties to Ruyterwacht and deep community involvement, but over days of interviewing many of these claims fell away. One of the leaders, for example, had not lived in Ruyterwacht for ten years, though his mother still lived there. He moved back into his mother's house during the confrontation so that he would be seen as part of the community. He didn't want people to think "people was coming from all over to support this thing. It has to be a community thing."[52]

Trust

The chance to meet with an MP, the presence of the media, and the creation of a "committee" to represent the protesters, further fueled a sense of efficacy and success, as well as trust. "They could not control the people. I tell you, they could not control these people. And they decided to choose another six members, from the community, to join the committee. And from then on things started rolling. I mean, the way the leaders handled the situation, I just thank God for that."[53] By the end of the second day, protesters were in high spirits, convinced that collective action was paying off and that the government would be forced to listen to them. "We've had calls from all over the world, from Pretoria, from Johannesburg. Japan. That's why we said to Mr. Kriel (the Provincial Premier) you must watch out what you do here because the whole world is watching you."[54] One committee member marveled, "I never thought the response from this town would be so big and so quick."[55]

The experience of collective opposition to the students had an almost immediate effect on the residents' sense of solidarity and community. One respondent described her experience of participation on the picket line as "(a)mazing. I tell you it was a great experience. There was no violence, there was a lot of swearing. They shouted at us. I'll be honest with you, I was scared. I didn't know what the outcome would be... We spent the whole day there, from morning to the afternoon; it was a great experience. We didn't know what was going to happen. I'm telling you, through this protest thing we have become quite strong together, we've become like a family. And people who I never dreamed of meeting, I've met them. We're like one big family."[56] Mobilization and collective action very quickly produced tight bonds of solidarity and comradeship among the protesters, and even between participants and non-participants. "We knew each other, but not like we know each other now. Because what happened in the past three weeks is like a very heart-sore story for the community."[57] A few residents, who said they felt guilty that they had not taken a stand

with their neighbors, participated by bringing food and coffee to the group and running errands for people on the front lines.[58]

This sense of solidarity also manifested itself in heightened levels of trust. Picketers asked community residents they did not know to pick up their children from school. Strangers were invited into each other's homes. "When I drive down the street, people waves at me, they don't even know me."[59] When residents with very little money were asked why they brought coffee, snacks, and beer to the protesters, at significant personal expense, they generally made the point that someone else would do it another time, for them. One said "I do not mind using my own money so that these people (the protestors) can protect the people."[60] At an extreme, a few protesters tried to heighten the terms of the engagement by making outrageous claims that they would die for the community and for the school. They also claimed that anyone in the group would do the same for them, as proof of the high levels of solidarity and trust the community could call on. One committee member stated, "I would trust this people with my life. This is my family."[61]

Recognizing moreover that there had previously been divisions in Ruyterwacht, some community members stressed the ways in which the school crisis had precipitated a common consciousness that eclipsed many of those cleavages. "…and the people that stood up were the young ones who were protecting the others. Look, there's 70% of the people in this town is pensioners. They can't help themselves, and they actually got respect for us now. For the youngsters. Before they look at you, you know, 'what the hell you gonna do now?' And now they will invite you in for a cup of coffee. They trust us. Come, sit down, let's talk about this thing. And you know, (we talk about) the past, the future. It's just like we are one big family."[62] Racial as well as generational rifts were said to be healed by the experience of common opposition and action. "The old people is living in fear. We even had coloureds to come forward and say we can't go on like this. He gave his point of view and everyone stood with him. The coloureds are with us. Even they give up their time because they are part of our community and they are involved with us."[63]

Trust is the common consciousness and shared understanding that breaks down the alienation and isolation that otherwise typify human experience. Evidence of trust is found in the statements people made, about trusting each other and feeling part of the same family, and in their behavior toward each other. Evidence of trust is also to be found in converse statements about exclusion. Trust involves building webs of solidarity that include some people and in so doing exclude others. Fukuyama illustrates this phenomenon well for example in his description of German guilds specifically designed to generate internal lines of trust through exclusion.[64]

The constitution of trust in Ruyterwacht similarly derived from inclusion rooted in exclusion. Ruyterwacht's moment of collective action took place in the broader context of South Africa's transition from white minority rule to a multi-racial democracy dominated by the majority African National Congress. Elections that ended 46 years of apartheid rule took place in April 1994, 10 months before the confrontation over the school. In such a context, race underlay political interaction, and permeated the subtext of confrontation. It is hard to imagine that white residents would have reacted with equal fervor if the students bused into the neighborhood had been white. And although Ruyterwacht was generally devoid of the type of norms and networks that are said to constitute social capital, trust may have been partially rooted in an 'imagined community' of whiteness, recently expanded to include coloureds, but still excluding black South Africans.[65] There is no question that the level and type of collective action and solidarity that were generated by the 'crisis' were partly rooted in racism. As one protester explained, "That school is our school. That school is not for the darkies."[66] Many respondents tried to mask blatant racism with coded language, saying "these people are like animals, they proved themselves here. The children were walking around in the streets and they were littering. This place was very dirty. And our town was never like that, I'm sorry. We keep our place tidy because it is a small community."[67] One young woman described the students as an "uncontrollable rabble." Ruyterwacht became a community of mutual trust only after it closed ranks against a threat from students whose status as outsiders was rooted primarily in race.

Civic engagement

On the third day, thousands of black students from Ruyterwacht and other area schools marched to the parliament buildings in downtown Cape Town to insist on their right to attend school in Ruyterwacht. Although bus service to the school had been suspended, a small group of about fifty students entered the neighborhood on foot and proceeded to the school grounds on the same day. Students stood inside the school as Ruyterwacht protesters watched them and police stood by to prevent confrontation. The day passed uneventfully, and protesters began to wander away from the front line. They ran errands, went shopping, picked up children from school, and came back.

On the fourth day of the standoff, a delegation of six committee members met with Provincial Premier Hernus Kriel, ostensibly to discuss the future of the school. While community leaders hoped the meeting would mark the beginning of negotiations, it appeared that Kriel's intention was to stall and co-opt the protesters without seriously considering their concerns. The committee reported that Kriel was unresponsive, and they returned frustrated. "We asked them to please reduce the numbers while the negotiations at that school is going on. They broke their promise. That's why we as a community can't accept that. They had a chance to prove themself, but they couldn't prove themselves."[68] Recognizing that the government had failed to take seriously their concerns about the school, the committee returned newly frustrated from the meeting.

By the fifth day, Ruyterwacht was quiet. As the inter-departmental turf wars, games of party brinksmanship, and bureaucratic foul-ups that appeared to have precipitated the Ruyterwacht school crisis were being worked out in government circles in Cape Town, students stopped attending school in Ruyterwacht. The number of protesters who met to "keep watch" (over an empty school) every day dwindled. Most of those with jobs went back to work. Though tension persisted, the absence of the students robbed the community of a rallying force. There was nothing to do, and those people who did continue to meet at the school every day started to liven up their

gatherings with *braais* and beer. On the first Saturday after the protest, about 50 people came down to an empty lot across from the school with lawn chairs, coolers full of drinks, and their children. By mid-afternoon, most protesters were fairly drunk.

Aware of the danger that collective action would disintegrate after the crisis passed, committee members tried both to re-mobilize and routinize a spirit of civic engagement in Ruyterwacht. The camaraderie and unity of purpose that motivated activism and trust at the height of the crisis was kept alive by a loose collection of mostly unemployed and older residents who set up headquarters in the empty lot across from the school. Ostensibly, they were there to keep an eye on things and to make sure the students did not try to come back. Committee members drew up a list of rules and policies to govern the behavior of the protesters. In order to avoid the appearance of unruliness, protesters were to remain on the sidewalks, not stand around in the streets. Because reporters had manipulated the statements of residents to make news stories more compelling, only committee members were allowed to speak to outsiders. "The main thing (the committee has to do) is control the people and handle the press. Because the press reported a lot of things that the people didn't say."[69] But requiring a committee member to "handle the press" was also an effective ploy for maintaining engagement through effective inflation of the stakes and the establishment of protocol.[70]

Various other procedures and routines served to maintain residents' sense of communal engagement after the crisis tailed off. Rules were eagerly embraced by protesters for the sense of discipline and higher purpose they inspired. Protesters spoke proudly of their "policies." The presence of the police, who remained at the school because of threats of damage to the school buildings, also injected meaning into their vigil. If the police were keeping watch, there must be something to keep watch over (notwithstanding the fact that the police were actually watching the protesters.) The small group of twenty or so protesters who remained additionally maintained the communal space that had been carved out by collective action as the empty lot became a focus point of the community. A core of people remained at the lot most of the day, and people from the

neighborhood dropped by continuously to hear the latest developments, catch up on new thinking among community leaders, exchange gossip, and have a beer. The empty lot across from the school became the locus of the Ruyterwacht community, the space in which civic engagement was reproduced. "We became one big helluva family. Because I was staying here for a long time and I didn't know half the people here. And I mean, we're here every day. The whole community is actually closer than it used to be."[71]

At the beginning of the second week the committee decided to organize a Neighborhood Watch to harness and organize the activism and networks sparked by mobilization.[72] Activism had trailed off in part because the students, who constituted the threat, were gone. Therefore, part of the task of the committee was to redefine threat and to maintain a threatening atmosphere. A plan to patrol the perimeter of the small and vulnerable neighborhood to secure the community at night was an almost natural outgrowth of activism that had hinged on a discourse of threat. The Neighborhood Watch played a crucial role in generating the organizational and dialogic space that could lead to longer term civic engagement even as students withdrew from the school and a resolution to the conflict appeared to stagnate in distant bureaucracies.

Over 100 people showed up at the organizational meeting of the Neighborhood Watch. These 100 subsequently went out and signed up over 500 volunteers. The Neighborhood Watch undertook to patrol the streets of Ruyterwacht between 8PM and 6AM. Patrols were organized into shifts -- from 8PM to 1AM and from 1AM to 6AM. People with cars took two to three people in a car, but large groups patrolled on foot. Each car and at least one person in a group was supposed to carry a two-way radio to make contact with headquarters at the Zerilda Steyn community center. Neighborhood Watch patrollers were armed with *kieries* and batons, and at least one patroller I accompanied carried a gun. The Neighborhood Watch was officially tasked with patrolling the perimeter of Ruyterwacht. "Suspects" were to be stopped, questioned, and asked for identification. All black people and most coloureds counted as suspects. Though coloureds were usually released

because they lived in and around Ruyterwacht and were therefore deemed to be "allowed" in the area, blacks were always apprehended.

Neighborhood Watch volunteers consisted of both men and women ranging in age from twenty to forty five. The people who were on patrol for the first shift congregated at the community center at 7:30. Many other people who were not on duty came along and either hung out at headquarters, rode around in the vehicles, or wandered the streets with foot groups. The Neighborhood Watch had clearly injected a sense of purpose, belonging, and group membership into the lives of many of its most avid volunteers. One unemployed couple consistently worked through the night on patrol. "We work straight through. We get little sleep, but it's for our community."[73] One leader, who was postponing a badly needed heart operation so as not to abandon his perceived responsibility, said "I've had six hours of sleep since last week. But it's just for the sake of the old people around here, and the children. Not to be harmed."[74]

Themes like this, of selflessness, dedication to the community, and martyrdom, pervaded the discourse of those at the forefront of the protest and the Neighborhood Watch.[75] "A lot of people has lost their jobs because of this thing."[76] "They (my employer) cannot expect from me that every day I must go to work when this thing is going on in my town and my mother must stay home alone."[77] "I'm still going to fight, and I'm going to fight 'til the end. Even if my blood is dripping in this tar road here. Then they must put up a little monument to me, and I will still be here."[78] Melodrama highlighting the sacrifices that had been, and would continue to be, made for the sake of the community was also partly intended to sustain the energy of the crisis (as well as to lionize the speaker himself.)

Committee members stressed the good relationship between the Neighborhood Watch and the rest of the community. "I think the Neighborhood Watch has got more support from the community than the town council has got. Because we're not only here to get the blacks out of our town. That's not our whole purpose. That's not how we operate. We are here to stay and to help people and to help solve people's problems. We've been going to houses where they've had

problems at home where the male and female has been fighting. A old lady who stays by the little bridge there by the railway station, every night she brings us a tin of cake and something to eat. So we're getting the support of the people at the moment. I've got people who's given us vehicles and I've even got people who's going to give some two-way radios and even uniforms."[79] One resident did in fact donate a car to the Neighborhood Watch.

The Neighborhood Watch was crucial in prolonging Ruyterwacht's moment of collective action. It provided a physical location in which neighborhood residents could congregate, it generated a sense of further purpose, and it created an organizational base for continued interaction and mobilization among residents. For most participants it was their first experience with civic engagement. The Neighborhood Watch also highlighted the perception that Ruyterwacht was a community under threat. Though they never got around to it, the committee planned to publish a community newsletter in which they reported their activities and chronicled threats to the neighborhood.

De-mobilization

Within two weeks however, civic engagement began to unravel in ways the committee members were powerless to prevent. At the end of February, trucks carrying school desks arrived at the school grounds in Ruyterwacht. On March 8th roughly 500 black pupils, accompanied by teachers, entered the school under police surveillance. Residents, who had not been notified of the new plan, were not on hand to oppose the arrival of the students. In the next few days a handful of the most militant activists attempted to revive the protest around the school. Residents, however, would not be moved to do more than stand around in small clumps and scowl. Committee members were furious with the apathy of the community, and condemned many of those with whom they had recently pledged solidarity. They were put in the strange position of simultaneously declaring the extent of their dedication and sacrifice for the community, and their anger and alienation from the community.

Interviews and participant observation over the course of three weeks in Ruyterwacht suggest that the demise of collective action and civic engagement resulted from a combination of the removal of threat and from feelings of failure, embarrassment, and alienation. Absent a continued direct threat, protest leaders were hard pressed to generate the levels of support initially sparked by the students and by the discussion of the crisis in the community center. At some level the government had responded very quickly to the demands of the protesters, halting student busing into the neighborhood after only 3 days of protest, and properly equipping the school with desks, books and teachers before returning a limited number of pupils to the school in a well-organized manner. The protest successfully accomplished its initial intention of stopping thousands of students from wandering through the neighborhood day after day. Once the object of mobilization – the students – disappeared, the obvious pleasure that the protesters had derived from participating in political action also dissipated however.[80] It was an overwhelming perception of threat that motivated the virtuous circle of political engagement coupled with a strong sense of solidarity and trust. Recognizing the importance of threat to maintaining high levels of participation and engagement, the leaders of collective action worked hard to keep the perception of threat alive through the Neighborhood Watch. As the sense of threat faded, despite their efforts, so did the impetus for political engagement and solidarity, for many of the protesters.

There was dissent among protesters however, between those who held that the withdrawal of the students indicated the residents had "won," and those who believed that the absence of any clear promise from the provincial government meant the issue was unresolved and that pressure should be maintained. For the latter, the goals of collective action had shifted in the context of political engagement from a direct attempt to remove the students from the neighborhood to protesting the community's right to be heard. For activists who demanded a voice, and who were more outraged by the absence of consultation than by the fact of the students themselves, the government appeared essentially non-responsive. The NECC and the provincial Department of Education initially stonewalled the attempts of community leaders to negotiate a settlement. No

representative of either of the two political parties in power ever visited Ruyterwacht, or made any conciliatory gesture toward the outraged residents. The NP, which was attempting to reinvent itself as a multi-racial party of progress and tolerance, had nothing to gain from being associated with whites defending an unpopular cause, even if they were their constituents. The ANC sided with the students. When the state did withdraw the students from the school, it did so unilaterally, without the appearance of making concessions to the protesters, and when they returned a limited number of students to the school their action was also unilateral, coming as a further surprise to residents. The government managed to respond to the situation while maintaining a stance of unresponsiveness that successfully delegitimated the protesters.

That government non-responsiveness should have led to demobilization, and not to renewed protest, should be understood in the context of widespread condemnation from the media and from other white South Africans. In the first couple of days of the protest, images of racist Ruyterwacht residents preventing black schoolchildren from access to education permeated the South African media, and the community of Ruyterwacht came under considerable fire for being a last, and unacceptable, bastion of the old South Africa. National opinion was overwhelmingly against Ruyterwacht residents, as amply evidenced by a barrage of condemning letters to the editor in Cape Town area newspapers. Newspapers all over the country ran exceptionally un-flattering front-page photos of the protesters for two or three days. Although some residents never got the type of response and recognition they sought from the government, they were unwilling to risk further isolation by stepping up the level of confrontation or formulating any other concrete plan of action that might further isolate or embarrass them. Residents who were employed or had other ties outside the community were particularly embarrassed by association with the protest, even when they agreed that the grievances of the community were legitimate.

Evidence of the extent to which charges of racism affected the morale of the protesters can be found in the lengths they went to deny it. "There's no racism in this town. You get your one or two elements, obviously, in any town. They were here (at the protest) but we kicked them out.

There was only a few and we asked them to leave. They were throwing racist remarks, *kaffir*, things like that. Those are racist comments. We don't need that."[81] Residents made significant attempts to try to reverse the media portrayal of them as racist. "On the Wednesday we made a few decisions and one of them was that people would protest in a behaved way. In such a way that people who saw them would not think they were ill-behaved or racist. So one of the things was that the people did not go into the streets. They were just standing on the sidewalks around the school."[82] On Saturday February 19, local area churches organized a march to show their support for a peaceful resolution to the conflict. Though the march took place in Ruyterwacht, the intended audience was national. March organizers called the media, and marchers carried placards clearly not intended for a local audience saying "We are not racist" and "Ruyterwacht wants peace."

By the time the committee held a meeting on February 20th to report on the status of talks with public officials, several of its most militant leaders already appeared subdued by government recalcitrance and national condemnation, adopting a more conciliatory stance. The committee initially demanded the unilateral withdrawal of the students so that the school buildings could be used as an old-age home, saying "We don't want even ten students in this school."[83] At the meeting the same committee member said they would be prepared to accept 500 pupils "on condition that they are registered, well-behaved, and interested in learning."[84] This line of thinking matched closely the shifts that we had tracked among the majority of people we had interviewed over the course of the first two weeks. Most respondents said they would not object to a reasonable number of students so long as they were inside classrooms learning and not wandering the streets. Residents were moved to this more reasonable position in part because their disavowal of racism demanded it.

The Neighborhood Watch also failed to get the kind of support it expected from local police. At first, suspects were taken to a nearby police station, but that changed. "At the moment we aren't getting the support from the SAP (South African Police) that one might want because one night we arrested a guy with a knife who tried to stab one of the people. And we took him to the

police station and what did they do? They just warned the guy and said okay now you must go. So that's why from now on we use our own discretion. We sort a guy out ourselves."[85] 'Sorting a guy out' generally entailed heavy intimidation and armed escort out of the area. Although this was far from satisfying the bloodlust of most members of the Neighborhood Watch, residents were intimidated by lack of police cooperation, and feared they would be arrested if they went further.

By the end of March the Neighborhood Watch had essentially ceased operation. The police had finally come down hard on the patrols, and prohibited them from apprehending black people in and around Ruyterwacht. They never did get the support they anticipated from the police. Residents complained that they were powerless to protect themselves and that the Neighborhood Watch was constrained to helplessness by the lack of external support. People eventually stopped showing up for shifts, momentum was lost, and the whole thing disintegrated. Though some respondents who I returned to interview as late as July remained committed to the Neighborhood Watch, in concept and in operation, they were too few to make it effective. Ruyterwacht's moment of civic engagement had passed.

Trust, revisited

Five months later, non-participants were most likely to recall the crisis, as well as the community response, in negative terms, and to be glad things were 'back to normal.' A number of houses went on the market within days of the school crisis, but the market seemed to have stabilized a few months later. Nevertheless, non-participants said they were more skittish than they had been, going to even greater lengths to avoid their neighbors. Some said that the crisis had reinforced cleavages that had previously divided the neighborhood. Older people were more wary than ever of the young, after their goal of converting the school into an old-age home had been publicly aired. And racial cleavages had become more salient in the highly racialized atmosphere sparked by the confrontation between white residents and black students.

Many of those who were initially involved in the protest against the school were disenchanted with public engagement of any sort. In general they felt they had never been taken seriously by the government and that the effort was a waste of their time. They pointed to the fact that the school was being used by black students after all to illustrate their point. In addition, the accusations of racism still rankled, and many protesters resented the fact that months later the name of Ruyterwacht was still synonymous with white racism. Many of the initial protesters who went back to work after the first couple of days of mobilization were also wary of the committee, intimating that committee members had had a personal agenda and were power-hungry.

Others on the front lines had started to organize events at the community center however, including popular musical entertainment that drew large crowds. One of the unemployed women who had been very active in the Neighborhood Watch had started to teach sewing classes at the community center.[86] Many regretted the demise of the Neighborhood Watch, had fond memories of collective mobilization, and continued to rely on the support of people they had met on the front lines. These respondents appeared much more likely for example to do favors for each other – run errands, give lifts -- than other people in Ruyterwacht, or, by their own admission, than they themselves had been before the crisis. Among this group, collective action seemed to have generated a more persistent reservoir of trust and community engagement.[87]

The core group of people who had anchored the protest maintained even higher levels of continued solidarity and political participation. When I met them in July, they continued to speak in the familial terms of solidarity that characterized discourse at the height of the confrontation. "No, I feel the same towards them people. Look at us now in her house, meeting. They stood up for this thing and I know I can count on them. She is my family now."[88]

Moreover, Leon de la Fonteyn, who had emerged as a leader when he was chosen as a member of the committee, had become involved in a number of other public acts of protest against government policies in the months after the school crisis. He had never before been politically active, and he said he would not vote in elections again because of his disappointment with the

government's failure to recognize the concerns of Ruyterwacht residents. But after the crisis he spent the bulk of his time organizing demonstrations to make demands on behalf of the community.[89] In one highly publicized episode Leon and some of the other school protesters built and lived in a shanty for weeks in order to highlight the need for housing in Ruyterwacht.[90] This group continued to be very tightly knit and politically active, and they claimed that others had started to turn to them when they needed help or advice. They also continued informally to monitor the situation at the school, occasionally dropping by in the morning to count the number of buses entering the neighborhood to make sure that the number of students was not being surreptitiously increased. This they did conspicuously, to ensure that school administrators knew they were being watched and that the community was poised to respond to any irregularities.

The trust and political engagement initially produced by a perception of overwhelming threat persisted beyond the moment of threat among a small core who maintained high levels of solidarity and engagement. This group tried to keep up the organizational networks established through the Neighborhood Watch, as well as public awareness of local and political developments. Although the trust and heightened political engagement produced by threat was ephemeral for many in Ruyterwacht, it did appear to create a more lasting focal point of networks, norms, and trust that continued to motivate a stronger sense of community awareness and politicization. Collective action may in this sense have longer term, learning-type effects that affect the level and type of social capital a community is able to call on when it tries to mobilize again. A less outrageous catalyst might suffice to produce political engagement the next time around, and it might take different form. The shanty protest demonstrates for example that Leon had learned the political value of the spectacle, and would be likely to try to attract sympathetic media attention, skipping over the collective action stage that marked the beginning of the school crisis, and moving directly to the performance of grievance.

Collective action, trust, civic engagement, and the state

This account of the interaction between collective action, trust, civic engagement, and the state suggests a number of interesting relationships. First, although individuals are probably more likely to behave cooperatively when they exist in a web of social capital, evidence from Ruyterwacht demonstrates that collective action is nevertheless possible even where social capital does not exist.[91] Social capital is not a pre-requisite of participation. Instead, the first meeting in the community center produced a discourse that transformed isolated sentiments of fear and helplessness into a coherent language of threat to the community. Furthermore, although Ruyterwacht residents lacked any experience or memory of effective collective action themselves, they invoked the success of black mobilization against apartheid to produce the widespread belief that mobilization was an effective tool against an unresponsive government. If a sufficiently disruptive external provocation is read as a threat to a group, and not just to individuals, it may produce solidarity. And if individuals believe that direct action will produce results, either because of past experience or because they have witnessed the success of others, the solidarity produced by a discourse of communal threat can anchor collective action.

Second, collective action sparked by the combination of communal threat and efficacy can produce trust, even where none has existed before. Whereas Ruyterwacht residents reported that they did not know each other, did not trust each other, and did not belong to any social or political organizations before the school crisis, they raved about the heightened levels of trust, solidarity, and familial sentiment they felt as a result of collective mobilization against the students. Defiance against a perceived common threat quickly generated very close ties among participants. Perhaps more surprisingly, mobilization also fostered close relations between participants and sympathetic non-participants. The school crisis generated a sense of community that was not limited to those on the frontlines, and which was immediately manifested through behavioral changes and the sudden development of norms of mutual assistance and reciprocity.

Third, an internal logic linked collective action and the organization of more routine political engagement. Those at the forefront of collective action have incentives to maintain their leadership positions by harnessing heightened levels of participation. If they can, they will try to sustain participation by building an organizational structure to anchor continued civic engagement. So while the existence of networks and norms of engagement may generate collective action in the ways predicted by the dominant literature, collective action may also serve as a catalyst to the development of more lasting structures of civic engagement. In Ruyterwacht, the committee soon realized that the withdrawal of the students had a de-mobilizing effect on the protesters. They tried to maintain participation by reproducing a discourse of threat, and by creating a structure -- the Neighborhood Watch -- that would channel participation. Although for extenuating reasons the Neighborhood Watch also collapsed, the creation of organizational networks may be a lasting legacy of a moment of collective mobilization.

Fourth, although it appears that collective action, trust, and civic engagement can all be generated in the absence of responsive political institutions or a sympathetic external environment, the institutional and ideational context of mobilization may affect its character and duration. The South African government managed to stifle opposition by simultaneously responding to protesters' demands to withdraw the students, and de-legitimating the protesters by ignoring them. The government thus undercut both the senses of threat and efficacy that had sparked collective action. Even a charismatic leadership and such a locally-based and sympathetic cause as the Neighborhood Watch could not sustain a sufficient level of participant commitment in the face of feelings of helplessness and widespread accusations of racism from fellow white South Africans. The lack of police support for the Neighborhood Watch was the last straw for many protesters, who grew disillusioned by feelings of powerlessness.

When those engaged in collective action are looking for change through the system, as they were in the case of Ruyterwacht, government responsiveness is an important source of the sense of efficacy needed to maintain participation. Government responsiveness also affected the character of

participation. The appearance of police and the media changed the orientation of the protest from collective action to collective performance, additionally civilizing the tone of the actors. To the extent that action is oriented toward the state, the behavior of political actors may affect the duration and form of mobilization. If efficacy depends on government responsiveness, lack of government responsiveness will undermine a sense of efficacy, and probably undermine collective action. Where collective action is oriented outside the state, or toward bringing down the state, institutional responsiveness is less likely to be a condition of the persistence of mobilization.

Finally, even if collective action and political engagement disintegrate, they may leave a residue of the social capital they produced, which may make it easier to mobilize protest in the future. In Ruyterwacht it took an outrageous act of possibly deliberate provocation, plus two weeks, plus a community meeting, to provoke residents to take action against the students in 1995. Subsequent interviews with neighborhood residents indicated that widespread feelings of solidarity and community dissipated as the level of engagement ebbed. Nevertheless, interviews also showed that a core group remained politically involved and had begun to use tactics of protest as a regular habit. High levels of interpersonal trust persisted among members of this group. A more diffuse sense of trust also persisted among residents who felt they could reasonably hold certain expectations of the future behavior of the core group and of each other, based on experience of their past behavior. Expectations of future behavior is one of the conditions that underpins trust.[92] Collective action therefore not only creates interpersonal trust that persists to varying degrees among some, but probably not other, participants; it also fosters learning that changes the expectations and assumptions that underpin group interaction. Collective action can therefore go some way toward creating not just inter-personal trust, such as develops among people actually involved on the front lines, but social trust of the type generally considered necessary to solve the free rider problem.[93] Residues of social capital may spur Ruyterwacht residents to collective action with less outrageous provocation in the future.

More generally, this narrative account of a single episode of collective action in South Africa highlights a more fluid, shifting, and contingent side of social capital. Trust may be better framed as a moment than a history. Although trust may rest on a background of implicit practices and understandings, it can also be predicated on a foreground, a critical sense, of threat and efficacy. If trust does not pre-exist in some natural state forged over hundreds of years, it can still be sparked in meaningful ways through a potentially random coincidence of events, feelings, and collective responses. Moreover, people do not necessarily become civically engaged as a result of the structure and responsiveness of political institutions. But how, and how long, social capital endures may still depend on the character of the political institutions activists hope to influence. By locating autonomous social catalysts to collective action and trust, this account seeks to isolate possible origins of social capital and to explain variation in the degree and form it takes over time. The qualitative approach fills a methodological gap by suggesting some contingent empirical generalizations that might be made about the origins, maintenance, transformation, and effects of social capital.

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[1] Francis Fukuyama, Trust: Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity (New York: Free Press, 1995); Robert Putnam, Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis "The Moral Economy of Communities: Structured Populations and the Evolution of Pro-Social Norms," Evolution and Human Behavior 19 (1998):3-25

[2] Ibid.

[3] Robert Bates "Contra-Contractarianism: Some Reflections on the New Institutionalism," Politics and Society Vol.16, No2-3, September 1988 p.398

[4] Putnam (1993) "Social capital refers to the features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions." (167)

[5] James Coleman, Foundations of Social Theory (Harvard University Press, 1990) p.302

[6] Putnam (171)

[7] There is an entire literature that starts with networks as the catalyst to collective action, or as an explanation of the eventual outcome of mobilization. In this case however, networks mostly do not pre-figure mobilization, and develop primarily as a result of civic engagement. Gerald Marwell, Pamela E. Oliver, Ralph Prahl "Social Networks and Collective Action: A Theory of Critical Mass. III" American Journal of Sociology, Vol.94, Issue 3 (Nov. 1988) 502-534; Mark S. Granovetter "The Strength of Weak Ties" American Journal of Sociology, Vol.78, No.6 (May, 1973) 1360-1380; Mustafa Emirbayer and Jeff R. Goodwin "Network Analysis, Culture, and the Problem of Agency," American Journal of Sociology 99, 1994: 1411-54; Mario Diani and Doug McAdam, eds. Social Movements and Networks: Relational Approaches to Collective Action, (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Roger V. Gould "Collective Action and Network Structure," American Sociological Review, Volume 58, Issue 2 (April 1993) 182-196; Roberto M. Fernandez and Doug McAdam "Social Networks and Social Movements: Multiorganizational Fields and Recruitment to Mississippi Freedom Summer" Sociological Forum, Vol. 3, No. 3. (Summer, 1988), pp. 357-382; Doug McAdam and Ronnelle Paulsen "Specifying the Relationship Between Social Ties and Activism" American Journal of Sociology, Vol. 99, No. 3. (Nov.,1993), pp. 640-667.

[8] Putnam, p.181

[9] Of course it is in response to precisely this dilemma that a host of critics have turned to the role of political institutions in producing and undermining social capital. See for example Theda Skocpol and Morris Fiorina, eds. Civic Engagement in American Democracy (Washington: Brookings Institution, 1999); Margaret Levi, "Social and Unsocial Capital: A Review Essay of Robert Putnam's *Making Democracy Work*" Politics and Society, Vol.24, No.1, March 1996; Sidney Tarrow, "Making Social Science Work Across Space and Time: A Critical Reflection on Robert Putnam's *Making Democracy Work*" American Political Science Review, vol.90, No.2, June 1996

[10] Coleman, p.302

[11] Putnam, p.167

[12] Putnam, chapters 4,5

[13] John Brehm, Wendy Rahn, "Individual Level Evidence for the Causes and Consequences of Social Capital," American Journal of Political Science, Vol.41, No.3, July 1997

[14] Ibid., p.1014. Muller and Seligson (1994) also found that years of continuous democracy was a significant predictor of levels of interpersonal trust. The two findings may be complementary to the extent that democracy implies participation. It may be the participatory aspect of democracy that generates trust. Edward N. Muller and Mitchell A. Seligson "Civic Culture and Democracy: The Question of Causal Relationships," American Political Science Review 88:635-52

[15] Ibid. p.1017

[16] Skocpol and Fiorina, 1999; Theda Skocpol, Marshal Ganz, and Ziad Munson, "A Nation of Organizers: The Institutional Origins of Civic Voluntarism in the United States," American Political Science Review Vol.4, September 2000

[17] The decision to visit Ruyterwacht was a spontaneous response to early news reports of white residents blocking black students from school, not the result of a planned research project on social capital. The respondents are predominantly Afrikaans-speaking, and interviews were conducted mainly in English. Quotes have been left in the original language (and not corrected to conform with English-language usage) to maintain the integrity of the responses.

[18] This is important to note because in many towns in South Africa, shopping in town on a Saturday morning is one of the major social events of the week as people slow down at intersections to greet each other and congregate in stores to exchange news and gossip. A central shopping district provides a space for social capital.

[19] Emirbayer and Goodwin discuss the problem of what constitutes a social bond. It could be argued for instance that, despite the fact that there were no literal links between people who became active in the mobilization against the students, there were cognitive links, or they shared a cognitive framework as white South Africans. Emirbayer and Goodwin (1994). It should be pointed out that the accusations of racism that were leveled at Ruyterwacht residents by other white South Africans were a factor in the fragmentation of opposition to the students.

[20] Muller and Seligson (1994) p.645

[21]Mark Schneider, Paul Teske, and Melissa Marschall, Michael Mintrom, Christine Roch, "Institutional Arrangements and the Creation of Social Capital: The Effects of Public School Choice," American Political Science Review, Vol.19, No.1 March 1997 p.87

[22]Interview with Marie

[23] "Since I lived here I never had any problems. I had plenty of problems before, in other areas, people wanted to chuck me in the street or whatever. When we moved in here people were quite happy." Interview with coloured woman in a mixed marriage.

[24] Interview with Dominee Van Rensburg

[25] Interview with Thys

[26] Students admitted in interviews to walking around in large groups, taunting residents, walking into people's yards to drink water, urinating in public (there was only one working toilet in the school), and apparently one student at least did steal some food from the store. The storeowner reported a theft to the police. On the other hand, nobody was hurt, and I don't believe an old lady was tipped out of her wheelchair. In general, the students did not behave any differently than teenagers anywhere would have responded to similar circumstances.

[27] Interview with a coloured woman who did not participate in collective action.

[28]Interview with her husband, elderly white man. 'Boer' is an Afrikaans word that literally means farmer, but takes on a pejorative connotation when used against whites.

[29] Students said there was nobody there to register them and that they had not been told about a registration process. Some students had been pulled out of other schools to go to Ruyterwacht.

[30] Interview with Dominee Van Rensburg

[31] Interview with Charlie

[32] Interview with husband and wife who had just moved to a house directly across from the school and were very worried about property values.

[33] Interview with Dominee Van Rensburg

[34] Interviews with various participants on the front lines who essentially described him as a wimp.

[35] Weekend Argus 2/18-19

[36] Interview with Marie

[37] Interview with van Rensburg

[38] Interview with Piet

[39] See Anthony Oberschall Social Conflict and Social Movements (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1973) and Charles Tilly From Mobilization to Revolution (Reading, Mass: Addison Wesley, 1978) for early formulations of the proposition that prior networks and ties are crucial in predicting who will organize and how.

[40] This is noteworthy in that it could easily have been racialized as a confrontation between the black ANC government and powerless white citizens.

[41] At the outset, there were only about twenty protesters, but Ruyterwacht is small and many residents driving to work past the protesters stopped to join them. Word of the mobilization spread quickly and many people came simply to see what was going on. By 7AM the group had swelled to roughly 500.

[42] Marwell, Oliver, and Prahl (1988) include an interesting discussion of the location of participants and their distance from the site of engagement in their development of a theory of critical mass.

[43] Most coloureds we interviewed were completely opposed to what they called the "school invasion" but stressed that they would not object to 500 black students attending the school if it was properly equipped.

[44] Interviews with non-participants

[45] Cape Argus 2/15/95

[46] Interview with unnamed protester

[47] Interview with Piet

[48] Interview with Leon

[49] Interview with Van Rensburg

[50] Interview with Leon

[51] Although it is normally presumed that strong ties are more likely to produce engagement (Oberschall, 1973; Tilly, 1978) Granovetter (1973) has shown the capacity of weak ties to draw a broader circle of engagement.

[52] Interview with Leon

[53] Interview with John

[54] Interview with Leon

[55] Interview with Piet

[56] Interview with protester

[57] Interview with self-identified non-participant

[58] Interviews with non-participants

[59] Interviews with Marie and her husband

[60] Interview with one man who came down to the picket line with coffee

[61] Interview with Leon

[62] Interview with Piet

[63] Interview with Colin

[64] Francis Fukuyama, Trust, (New York: Penguin Books, 1995) Chapter 21, "Insiders and Outsiders"

[65] Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities, (London: Verso Books, 1983)

[66] Interview with middle aged man, non-participant

[67] Interview with Renelle

[68] Interview with Thys

[69]Interview with Leon

[70] Gould (1989) argues that control over communication is a crucial factor in determining which individuals will emerge as powerful or influential. Recall that the 'leaders' initially derived their influence from the fact that they were tapped to meet with the police and the Member of Parliament. Later they continued to monitor access to communication. Roger V. Gould "Power and Social Structure in Community Elites,," Social Forces, Vol.68, Issue 2 (Dec.1989) 531-552

[71] Interview with Piet

[72] Cook and Karp (1994) discuss the differences between 'organizer centered mobilization' and the more diffuse forms of mobilization that for instance characterized the initial action against the students. (363) Karen Cook and David Karp "Review Essay: Providing for the Common Good," Social Psychology Quarterly, Vol.57, Issue 4 (Dec. 1994) 360-367

[73] Interview with Marie

[74] Interview with Thys

[75] Gould (1993) makes the important point that norms of fairness encourage individuals to match the contributions of others. (183) By making their own contribution seem enormous, leaders were able to increase

the responsibility others felt to do their part. Roger V. Gould "Collective Action and Network Structure," American Sociological Review, Volume 58, Issue 2 (April 1993) 182-196

[76] Interview with Piet

[77] Interview with John

[78] Interview with Leon

[79] Interview with Leon

[80] This idea of deriving pleasure from participation, or agency, is fully explored in Elisabeth Wood, "Peasant Political Mobilization in El Salvador: The Contribution of Emotional In-process Benefits," in Jeff Goodwin, James M. Jasper and Francesca Polletta, eds., Passionate Politics: Emotions and Social Movements (University of Chicago Press, 2001).

[81] Interview with Piet

[82] Interview with Dominee van Rensburg

[83] Interview with Leon

[84] Notes from speech

[85] Interview with Colin

[86] Interview with Marie in April

[87] "The insight that in real life people meet again, and often remember what happened last, has proved to be of paramount importance for an understanding of the logic of collective action." (243) Lars Uedhn "Twenty-Five Years with the Logic of Collective Action," Acta Sociologica 36: 239-261

[88] Interview with John in April

[89] Interview with Leon in April

[90] Cape Argus, June 22, 1995

[91] Fukuyama describes how trust is presumed to solve the "free rider" problem. Trust, p.155

[92] H. Peyton Young, Individual Strategy and Social Structure: An Evolutionary Theory of Institutions. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998) p.6

[93] Bo Rothstein, "Trust, Social Dilemmas and Collective Memories," Journal of Theoretical Politics, vol.12, no. 4, October 2000