Building Power:
Tenant Organizing, Community Land Trusts, and the Right to the City

A Study of Housing Justice in Boston

A thesis submitted by

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Abstract

In the Boston neighborhood of Dorchester, a group of residents facing eviction from 6 Humphreys Place organized into a tenant association with the support of local organizers and successfully fought back against their neglectful landlord. They won not only the right to stay in their home but also forced the sale of the property to a nonprofit that moved it off the market and into permanently affordable community control. This thesis examines the organizations and individuals involved in this struggle, painting a case study of 6 Humphreys Place but also crafting a broader view of the housing justice movement in Boston through interviews and observations of the staff and resident leaders of City Life/Vida Urbana, the Boston Neighborhood Community Land Trust, and the 6 Humphreys tenant association. I find that both tenant organizing and affordable housing development are key in pursuing housing justice through a model of development without displacement.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

"When We Fight, We Win!": Celebrating a Housing Justice Victory

In June 2022, nearly a hundred people gathered in the back yard of 6 Humphreys Place to celebrate a hard-earned victory. The mood was jubilant; iconic orange letters, so common to housing justice rallies across Boston, triumphantly declared the building an "EVICTION FREE ZONE" above a back porch where a series of speakers gave testimony to the power of tenant organizing and the importance of fighting to stay in one's home against unjust threats of displacement (see Figure 1). Banners hanging below the makeshift stage acknowledged the roles played by key organizations in facilitating the struggle: City Life/Vida Urbana (CLVU), the heart of Boston's housing justice ecosystem, organized the tenants of 6 Humphreys to fight against their eviction with direct action and legal defense; Dorchester Not For Sale (DN4S), a grassroots neighborhood group, provided mutual aid for the tenants and coordinated direct action in response to their landlord's nearby proposal for luxury condo development; and the Boston Neighborhood Community Land Trust (BNCLT), a nonprofit organization, purchased 6 Humphreys Place to remove it from the speculative market and place it into permanently affordable community control. The event was also co-hosted by the Harvard Legal Aid Bureau, whose lawyers were key to securing the court-ordered judgment that allowed residents to stay in their home while BNCLT negotiated to buy it. By working in tandem with these organizations, the residents of 6 Humphreys struck a victory for the housing justice movement by securing the right for their house to be used as a home on the community land trust, and not as an instrument of private profit-making for their landlord.

Figure 1. A long-expected party: Residents, activists, and staff from BNCLT and CLVU celebrate the victory of the years-long 6 Humphreys campaign at a party behind the building. Photo by author.

The lineup of speakers at the celebration event reflected the variety of the stakeholders involved in the struggle for the building (Levy 2022). Two featured speakers were residents of the 6 Humphreys tenant association, whose life experiences reflected the challenges of the existing housing system and the possibilities opened by creating an alternative. Eric Boyd, the longest-tenured resident of 6 Humphreys, spoke about his life of activism against displacement stretching back to the gentrification of his childhood home in Boston's South End, while Jean Paul Doh described how the terrible building conditions and the challenges of the years-long struggle had taken the life of one of their housemates and resulted in the heart attack of another. Now a part of the Boston Neighborhood CLT, these residents no longer have to worry about

poor housing conditions or displacement thanks to the permanent affordability of the CLT. As the newest members of the community-controlled BNCLT board of directors, Eric and Jean Paul now exercise direct and collective control over the development of their housing and neighborhood.

The next speakers demonstrated the deep intertwining of tenant organizing and affordable housing preservation in the movement for housing justice. The residents of 6 Humphreys were publicly welcomed by BNCLT's board president Alma Chislom, a volunteer leader with City Life/Vida Urbana who, along with Susan Chihambakwe, is one of the longest-tenured residents of BNCLT stretching back to the acquisition of their building amidst an organizing campaign with CLVU. Denise Matthews-Turner, co-director of CLVU and another BNCLT board member, spoke to BNCLT's history as an organization co-founded by CLVU and other housing organizations in order to create permanent stability for residents through "community acquisition" of land and housing. BNCLT's executive director Meridith Levy echoed those sentiments, emphasizing the critical importance that tenant organizing has played in the success of BNCLT's building acquisitions. Rounding out the lineup were two officials from the City of Boston – at-large City Councilor Ruthzee Louijeune and the Mayor's Chief of Housing Sheila Dillon – reflecting the key, if outside, role that institutional political power plays in these otherwise grassroots efforts; the City's Acquisition Opportunity Program, a funding source established thanks to pressure from housing justice activists, was crucial in assisting BNCLT in acquiring 6 Humphreys.

As Meridith later wrote, "The atmosphere was festive with balloons and streamers; a tuba player; and familiar faces reuniting as everyone gathered behind the building for delicious food cooked by 6 Humphreys resident Eric Boyd" (Levy 2022). How did this festive reunion come to

pass? How did these people and these organizations, seemingly disparate in their area of focus – tenant organizing and nonprofit housing development – come together to earn this victory for housing justice? This question is at the root of this research project.

An Activist-Oriented Research Project

I first became interested in community organizing and the community land trust model through my own experiences as an activist, which began in early 2017 when I joined the housing justice working group of the anti-racist organization Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ) Boston. My time with SURJ, and especially with our partner organization City Life/Vida Urbana, planted the seeds of what would eventually become this thesis. It was with CLVU that I first knocked on the doors of tenants facing eviction, where I first learned of the horrendous conditions that low-income people dealt with in the housing market, and where I first understood the importance of housing stability in the production of community. It was also where I first heard about alternatives to the existing housing system. These interrelated themes form the core of this thesis: the role of organizing against the system as it exists while constructing alternative models to find a way to a transformative future.

Lisa Owens, the former director of CLVU, was the first person to introduce me to such an alternative. The community land trust (CLT) model features a nonprofit organization that acquires land in order to remove it from the speculative market by maintaining it as permanently affordable, typically through permanent ownership of the land paired with ground leases that enable deed-restricted use of the land. For housing, the deed restrictions mean that speculation is capped at a certain amount for homeowners, preventing wild profiteering. This likewise removes the pressure of unfair rent increases for tenants because, on the CLT, housing is treated as a place

to live instead of a vehicle for profit-making. In a political economy defined by private ownership of land and housing, this marks a rather radical shift in property relations.

As it removes housing from the speculative market, the CLT simultaneously aims to put residents in control over development of their homes and neighborhoods through its community-controlled board of directors. In the canonical CLT board structure, two-thirds of the seats are filled by residents of the CLT and the surrounding neighborhood. The CLT model is a part of the vision of what Sharon Cho and Markeisha Moore, activists with the grassroots organization Dorchester Not For Sale (DN4S), described as "development without displacement." As Markeisha defiantly said at a rally at 6 Humphreys Place, "You're not going to come into our neighborhood and be a nasty landlord and profit off us." Sharon shared their organization's aspirational view of "a vision of development where we can stay in our neighborhood" (Lovett 2021). BNCLT, CLVU, and the 6 Humphreys tenants have demonstrated how to put that vision into practice.

As I explored theory and learned practical skills during my time in graduate school, I strove to stay rooted in the housing justice movement. I knew from my years as an activist that there can be a tendency for folks to lose sight of the goals of the movement when entering into professional roles; it is an understandable impulse to prioritize one's professional needs or those of one's employer, but the goals of even the nonprofit housing development industry do not always align with those of the grassroots housing justice movement. How can affordable housing preservation and development be done in a manner accountable to the movement? As my activist comrades might put it, how can we undertake development without displacement? This is one of the core topics that I interrogate in this thesis. It is a question for my personal and professional

life, to be sure, but one that this research reveals as essential to the success of the housing justice movement as well.

Methods

In the story of 6 Humphreys Place, we see the key roles played by both tenant activists and nonprofit housing professionals, and the way that BNCLT's relationship to CLVU – stretching back to the CLT's very creation – helps the two practice the sort of accountability that is essential in pursuing development without displacement. As such this thesis is, in part, a case study of the struggle for 6 Humphreys Place. Over a period stretching from October 2021 through June 2022, I interviewed key players from the saga, including staff and resident leaders from both organizations as well as 6 Humphreys residents themselves, and engaged in participant observation at CLVU's weekly meetings, BNCLT's monthly resident meetings, and various rallies and events held at 6 Humphreys. In total, I conducted ten interviews with:

- 3 staffers from CLVU, including two organizers and a grant writer;
- 2 staffers from BNCLT, including the executive director and the community organizer;
- 3 residents of BNCLT properties who are on the board of directors of BNCLT and hold leadership positions in CLVU as well; and
- 2 residents of 6 Humphreys Place who are members of the tenants association, one of whom is now on the BNCLT board of directors.

I also reviewed local reporting on the case and the surrounding neighborhood to color the story with additional depth. My research spiraled out from this particular case, however, as I followed the threads that led to this success. Ultimately, I undertook a deeper interrogation of the organizational roles and responsibilities of, and relationships between, City Life and BNCLT in

an effort to produce a more holistic understanding of the housing justice movement. To characterize their work and assess their relationships, I draw upon theoretical frameworks of the right to the city and constructive resistance, discussed at greater length in my literature review below.

Through this approach of blended qualitative methods, I sought to answer the following research questions:

- What are the goals of these various agents – residents, organizers, and housing professionals – who identify as part of the housing justice movement in Boston?
- How do the different parts of the housing justice movement in Boston conceptualize each other's work, including their roles, tactics, and sense of shared mission?
- How can affordable housing preservation and development be practiced in ways accountable to this movement for housing justice? How can we pursue development without displacement?

While a case study – 6 Humphreys – and application of theory are at the core of this research project, I aim to go beyond a theoretical interrogation by centering the experiences and perspectives of those most impacted by the housing system – the residents themselves. As I work to assess the larger scale organizational work of housing justice nonprofits, I necessarily begin to pull away from that more intimate lens, as my goal is less to understand the world of professional practitioners and more to construct a model of the broader housing justice ecosystem and their organizational roles within it. However, my use of interviews and participant observation helped me to better understand how the lives of residents have shaped and been shaped by their participation in this movement. In so doing, I offer a holistic assessment of this slice of the housing justice movement in Boston.

Review of Literature

In this thesis I contextualize my research on the housing justice movement of Boston by recruiting certain theoretical frameworks that I hope will help to illuminate the intentions of my interlocutors and the dynamics of their relationships. Here I present a review of literature that I draw upon and put in conversation with my research. I begin with a brief historical review of urban political economy and housing policy from the 1970s until today, providing a backdrop for the work of my interlocutors in this period of neoliberalism. I then introduce the overarching theoretical framework of this thesis: Henri Lefebvre's "right to the city," an overarching right to producing urban space, including its component practices of appropriation and participation. I explore these component themes which are explored in more depth in Chapters 2 and 3. I contrast the radical "right to the city" with a more limited "right to housing," touching on important themes of resident agency in the process. I explore notions of value in a subsection on appropriation before a review of participatory processes from urban renewal to the present in the subsection on participation. Here, I introduce a typology of approaches to community organizing that might be used to prepare residents to take part in such processes, emphasizing the importance of the transformative approach that City Life/Vida Urbana employs. In my research, the organizations striving for the right to the city are nonprofits, and so I spend some time in this review examining literature on the nonprofit industrial complex and the history of the community development industry. Finally, I introduce "constructive resistance," the framework utilized in Chapter 4 to theorize on the relationships between tenant organizers and nonprofit housing developers and explore its theoretical connections to abolitionist theory and practice.

The Neoliberal City: The Backdrop of the Housing Justice Struggle

Neoliberalism is the political and economic backdrop for all the events described in this thesis. It is at the root of the precarity experienced by the tenants I interview; under neoliberalism homeownership has declined (in a racially disparate manner), rents have skyrocketed, and evictions and homelessness have risen apace. The entrenchment of the market as the means to distribute housing – the "financialization" of housing – has only deepened the treatment of housing as a commodity to be speculated on instead of its use as a home. As David Harvey (2005) describes it, the era of neoliberalism is marked by the retrenchment of material securities provided by the post-war Fordist state in employment, retirement, housing, etc. and the investment instead in policing and surveillance. The neoliberal subject has been conditioned by this system to think of oneself as an individual and a consumer, a market-oriented approach that engenders a sense of competition against other individuals and leads to feelings of shame and self-blame when "failures," such as eviction, occur (McGuigan 2014). This sense of individualism and self-blame is one of the first barriers that tenant organizers encounter when working with tenants against eviction.

Moreover, due to the continually increasing power of real estate capital in shaping municipal land use decisions (see e.g. Stein 2019), communities most impacted by the displacing effects of development are left out of the decision-making processes of city governments and private developers that drive urban changes. Purcell (2002, 106), as with Appadurai and Holston (1996), identifies this as a crisis of democracy in cities directly resulting from the growing power of capital in tandem with the increasing inadequacy of liberal-democratic political structures to check that power. This thesis describes the efforts of housing justice activists and affordable housing developers to work against the neoliberal system of housing, removing homes from the

market and creating pathways for meaningful, democratic forms of community control over development.

Another defining trait of neoliberal governance is the turn to private organizations to carry out programs once managed by government agencies. There is a reason that this thesis, which aims to study processes of decommodifying housing, focuses on the activities of private (if nonprofit) organizations and not public housing authorities: since the heyday of public housing in the New Deal era of the 1930s-1950s, the federal government has slowly but consistently pulled back from directly constructing and managing public housing, turning instead to models of funding private organizations to develop what is now broadly termed "affordable" housing. The 1960s and 70s saw the rise of the community development corporation model, and as DeFilippis (2004b) and Levine (2021) describe, a brief moment in which federal governments provided direct financing to these new community-based organizations. However, the "Reagan revolution" marked the triumphant emergence of neoliberal retrenchment from social welfare and simultaneously saw drastic cuts in federal funding for housing (and countless other social programs) and a shift toward indirect, private approaches to financing. In an illuminating essay on the "nonprofitization" of services for the homeless, Rosenthal (2022) writes,

> From 1981 to 1989, the HUD budget was slashed by almost 80 percent, turning public and subsidized housing into the housing of last resort, allocated not by eligibility but by lottery. Since the 1987 McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, the federal government has delivered resources to unhoused people by issuing block grants to municipalities to distribute to nonprofit contractors—establishing "the homeless industrial complex," as Paul Boden calls it, a baroque system of public-private partnerships.

Rachel Bratt describes the resulting shift away from direct federal investment to a complex system which saw "CDCs as nodes of 'patchwork financing,'" featuring "the assembling of

numerous types of loans, grants, and tax credits" (2006, 342). The increased challenge of affordable housing has exacerbated the process of professionalization, and a concomitant drift from community organizing, described later in this review.

Cities, meanwhile, have been left out to dry by the federal government; without those resources to support local programming, municipal governments have limited means to fund their budget. As Rosenthal explains, "The withdrawal of federal funds has locked municipal governments in a devil's bargain: To create a tax base for their resources, they must court investment and raise property values. As the social wage withers, individuals pin their hopes on the appreciation of their homes…But when property values rise, more people lose access to housing. 'In a good economy,' [Los Angeles] Mayor Garcetti once explained, 'homelessness goes up'" (2022). It is in this environment of austerity and instability that my interlocutors – members of the housing justice movement of Boston – find themselves struggling.

The Right to the City

Against this backdrop of neoliberal urban governance, Brenner, Marcuse, and Mayer remind us that "Capitalist cities are not only sites for strategies of capital accumulation…[they] have long served as spaces for envisioning, and indeed mobilizing towards, alternatives to capitalism itself" (2012, 2). The entries in their edited volume *Cities for People, Not for Profit* insist that the dominant power of real estate capital in today's cities does not go uncontested: "Urban space under capitalism…is continually shaped and reshaped through a relentless clash of opposed social forces oriented, respectively, toward the exchange-value (profit-oriented) and use-value (everyday life) dimensions of urban sociospatial configurations." (2012, 3–4).

This spirit, of contesting the status quo and fighting for more just alternatives, imbues the work of the housing justice activists and social housing developers who I interviewed for this project. The struggle for housing justice may best be encapsulated under the framework of the right to the city, a concept first introduced by Henri Lefebvre in his 1968 book of the same name. In her assessment of the right to the city as it applies to interlocutors in the slums of Lima, Kristin Skrabut sees this framework being taken up by both academic theorists like Brenner et al. as well as activists in the streets. She writes:

> Over the last two decades, Lefebvre's 1968 treatise has been revived by critical urban theorists who see in his framework a compelling description and potential response to the urban displacements wrought by neoliberal capitalism…Concurrently, the phrase "right to the city" has been appropriated by myriad social movements who, perhaps with little knowledge or concern for Lefebvre, have used it to claim greater voice in the decisions that govern their cities (2021, 3).

Indeed, City Life/Vida Urbana, an activist group who I focus on in this thesis, is a core member of the Boston chapter of the nationwide Right to the City Alliance. The same spirit that animated Lefebvre amidst urban uprisings in 1968 France governs the actions of housing activists today: the right to the city is the ability to shape the city to meet the needs of those wielding it. This is not a "negative right," those restrictive rights more common in liberal democracies – a right to not be infringed upon, such as property rights or free speech rights – nor quite a "positive right," such as a right to housing or to food. Indeed, Lefebvre is critical of the simple positive right to housing "for reducing the creative act of 'inhabiting' to a bureaucratically conceived 'habitat,' such that the house became an individual's only site for transformative appropriation" (Skrabut 2021, 7). The "right to housing" is a common demand among activists but is more commonly conceived as a claim made upon the state to provide an essential service (see e.g. Bratt, Stone, and Hartman 2006), which may represent an important

move away from housing as a commodity but leaves existing relations of power intact. The right to the city, instead, is an all-encompassing right for the urban working class to produce the city itself. How is this abstract notion put into practice by urban residents and activists?

Purcell, following Lefebvre, conceives of the right to the city as a means of self-determination and a move toward anti-capitalist futures. In his "excavation" of Lefebvre's *Writings on Cities* (1996), Purcell identifies two key processes toward enacting the right to the city which, taken together, work to counter the anti-democratic trends of neoliberal development: appropriation and participation. He describes the *appropriation* of urban space by the dispossessed, a reclamation which resists the encroaching power of capital, while reconceptualizing *participation* as a form of grassroots democratic control that can offer radical alternatives to liberal-democratic decision-making. These two practices – appropriation and participation – form the theoretical basis for the first two of my results chapters. In what follows I offer more insights from literature into each practice and begin drawing connections between these and the practices of my interlocutors.

On Value and Appropriation

Lefebvre repeatedly emphasizes a distinction and struggle between urban space as *appropriation* (use value) and *commodity* (exchange value) (1996, 67–68, e.g.). According to Karl Marx's theory of political economy, use value is the result of an item's intrinsic capacity to satisfy human need or want; this is a social use value, meaning that it is useful not just to the producer but for others generally. The exchange value of that object, however, is for the benefit of the producer: it results from what price the commodity can fetch on the market, in exchange for other commodities or cash (Marx 1986; 1987). Because the means of production are privately owned under capitalism, exchange values tend to be prioritized over use values in order to

deliver the maximum profit to the owner. As social movement activists would put it, profits are put before people.

This is especially evident when considering housing under the market system. As argued by prominent economists and political theorists such as John Stuart Mill and Henry George, the increase in value of a home often has little to do with the labor of investment by individual homeowners but rather "by the growth and development of the surrounding society" (J. E. Davis 2014, 6–7). Per Davis, Mill called this the "social increment," suggesting that the majority of the value of a property is socially created. Henry George built on this, arguing that the society that produced this value did not in turn benefit from it because land ownership is concentrated among the few, not the many. His proposed solution was a single land-value tax that would take back those unearned gains from property owners and return it to the public (George 2006). Marx or other socialist approaches might prefer to socialize its benefits via the nationalization of land or its direct takeover by the working class, but the American state is not likely to take such a radical approach anytime soon. Actors in the housing justice movement in Boston thus must take matters into their own hands.

Instead of being valued as a home – a place for people to live – housing is too often seen as a way to make a profit, often at the expense of tenants who have no say in how their home is used. To explain these property relations to their tenant-activists, Boston-based housing justice nonprofit City Life/Vida Urbana (CLVU) adapts a concept elaborated by Michael Lebowitz (2009) called the "elementary triangle" of political economy. The three legs of this triangle are (a) ownership of the means of production as the basis of (b) the form of production which determines (c) whose needs are met by that production. Under capitalism, Lebowitz explains, the triangle consists of "(a) private ownership as the basis for (b) exploitation of workers in

production to (c) drive profits." Under socialism, however, these relations will look like "(a) social ownership of the means of production as the basis for (b) social production to meet (c) communal needs." Steve Meacham, an organizer with CLVU, explained how CLVU adapts this triangle model to the real estate system during political education sessions with tenants to help them understand the property relations underpinning the existing system of housing – and what an alternative arrangement would mean for them. The "elementary triangle" of the political economy of housing, then, explains the relationship between (a) ownership of the means of production of housing (private or social/collective) which is the basis of (b) the form of neighborhood development (top-down or democratic), which determines (c) whose needs are met by development (the private owner or the neighborhood more broadly). In CLVU's conception, a nonprofit organization such as a community land trust can provide the first leg of social ownership, but the model will not work – communal needs will not be met – unless decision-making about neighborhood development is done collectively. As this thesis examines, CLVU and the Boston Neighborhood Community Land Trust work together to establish this three-legged model to realize their shared vision of social housing.

Resistance to precarity in the housing sphere has taken the form of localized, neighborhood-based movements fighting back against eviction, occupying homes, and creating community land trusts to secure affordability and community control (Yates 2006; Liss 2012; Hoover 2015). Through these tactics of disrupting capitalist urban practices, Hoover (2015) argues, activists, residents, and housing professionals work together to realize Purcell's notion of *appropriation* of urban space and establish community control of housing. My thesis seeks to contribute to this body of work by examining how tenant organizing and social housing development might function as processes that enact the anti-market logic of appropriation.

Toward Meaningful Participation

Nominally participatory processes in urban planning have opened up over the past 50 years or so, since the heyday of top-down "urban renewal" plans. Developers are now required by regulatory agencies – such as the Boston Planning and Development Agency (BPDA) – to present their plans in public meetings and solicit input from affected residents, though as Einstein, Palmer, and Glick have empirically shown, the people who attend such public hearings tend to be older white male property owners, potentially exacerbating existing racial inequalities in city-making by overrepresenting this population (2018; 2019). Arnstein's canonical "Ladder of Citizen Participation" (1969) conceptualizes participation as a "categorical term for citizen power," developing a gradient of approaches used by planners which are defined by the extent to which power is redistributed to citizenry, from "manipulation" to "consultation" to citizen control. In public meetings where those citizens who already hold an amount of power are the only ones being heard, there is in reality little redistribution taking place. As Marcuse (1970) by way of Krinsky and Hovde (1996, 87) framed it, these processes tend to simply "involve" residents, which "says nothing about the effect of the activity on the decision," rather than grant them *control*, which "objectively influence[s]…the residential environment."

In contrast to these nominal and "inclusive" participatory processes, Mark Purcell's radical conception of participation (following Lefebvre's right to the city model) is expansive: "Instead of democratic deliberation being limited to just state decisions, Lefebvre imagines it to apply to all decisions that contribute to the production of urban space" (2002, 101). The struggle for economic democracy has a deep history in the United States and abroad, from cooperative farms and worker co-ops to community land trusts and housing co-ops. Within the existing American political economy, these cooperative organizations typically will incorporate as

501(c)(3) non-profits. While there is a body of literature critical of the capacity of nonprofit organizations to produce real resident control over development (Stoecker 1997; DeFilippis 2004a; Laskey and Nicholls 2019), the accountable relationships that the Boston Neighborhood Community Land Trust (BNCLT) maintains with the grassroots through City Life/Vida Urbana enable the two organizations to experiment with putting Purcell's radical notion of participation into practice. A truly transformative approach to property relations, however, may necessitate a simultaneous change in how individuals understand and relate to their housing and to each other. Under neoliberalism, subjects are individualized and view housing problems as personal issues; a move against neoliberalism, then, requires a shift toward a collective understanding of injustices and solutions to them, along with the reconstruction of community relationships that have been frayed by the impacts of displacement in cities. As DeFilippis et al. write on the importance of a "collective understanding of injustices and the solutions to such injustices":

> An essential step in efforts for social change is changing people's understandings of injustices from individualised to collective; that is, injustices happen to groups, not individuals as such. Changing people's perceptions of injustices—to see them as collectively experienced—is therefore necessary to challenge the injustices. Social movement activists and researchers have long recognised this…So too have community organisers (2019, 801).

Indeed, community organizing is an important means of realizing this sort of subject transformation. Through organizing campaigns, residents take part in a process to change the world and find themselves changed in the process, as the quote above describes. Community organizing is a multifaceted process of coordinating and empowering a base of people – such as tenants – toward a shared goal. Organizing may involve practices of relationship-building, popular political education, identifying common problems, and mobilizing toward solutions, and

it is often articulated through an organization (such as City Life/Vida Urbana or Dorchester Not For Sale).

Organizations may take drastically different approaches to their organizing, however, as Smock lays out in her "five-model typology" (2004). All forms of organizing seek to create a change in the world, but their goals may vary in geographic or jurisdictional scale (i.e., the neighborhood, city, state, federal scale) and/or by the extent of change demanded (reform vs. revolution, e.g.). Smock is less concerned with the nature of their demands, however, and more with the approach that organizers take to their work. She also identifies distinctions based on the positionality that organizations adapt with respect to the existing system: Do they accept the power structures of government as they exist, taking a collaborative or even a confrontational approach to them but accepting the need to work within the system to change it? The "community-building" and "power-building" (Saul Alinsky-style) models fit into this mold, respectively, and both have some resonance with the organizing work that takes place in my thesis; as a part of the community development industry, BNCLT is in some ways seeking to "strengthen the internal social and economic fabric of the neighborhood itself" (Smock 2004, 17), while necessitating "consensual working partnerships" with government officials and funders who provide the essential resources needed to preserve affordable housing (2004, 18). Meanwhile, CLVU's approach to direct actions (the "sword" tactic, described later) may superficially appear to follow the Alinskyite model of confronting authority.

After reviewing the final model that Smock presents, however, it is clear that the political intentions behind both CLVU and BNCLT's organizing better fit the "transformative" mold, which, crucially, incorporates a critical analysis of urban problems as symptoms of broader systemic injustices. This model agrees with the power-building approach in that a core problem

is the lack of power for the working class in the public sphere – but unlike the power-building model, which assumes that the political system basically works, "the transformative model's proponents believe the system itself is at the core of the problem," and that "In order to create systemic change…community organizing needs to challenge society's taken-for-granted ideological frameworks and introduce new conceptual categories for making sense of lived experience" (2004, 29). This explains the transformative model's focus on political education as an essential part of community organizing, evident as well in CLVU's approach; residents are conditioned to feel individualized and to accept the status quo, as described above. This transformative approach, then, opens their eyes to alternatives while building toward that new world.

Nonprofit Organizations and the Need for Community Organizing

Beginning in the 1960s, organizations emerged from the grassroots movements for Civil Rights that sought to put the concept of *community control* over economic development into practice. The institutions that sought to enact community control in this manner following the 1960s movements for Black power, direct democracy, and cooperative living were community development corporations (CDCs; DeFilippis 2004a), followed later by a "second wave" of housing nonprofits (Yates 2006, 229) in the form of community land trusts (CLTs). CLTs in particular are structured in such a way that community control is at least nominally built into the organization (J. E. Davis 2014; Swann 1972). However, some scholars and activists argue that the radical roots of these organizations may have been left behind. In her chapter in *A Right to Housing*, Rachel Bratt assesses this shift among CDCs: "Although many CDCs arose from an organizing and advocacy agenda, as their work became increasingly focused on the technical aspects of development, many groups began to lose sight of their mission to organize and

advocate for community needs" (2006, 350). This is directly related to the incentives of funders, who increasingly prefer to fund the easier-to-measure outcomes of physical development:

> Community development, like CLTs, had emerged from the political and community organising that occurred in the 1960s. Unlike CLTs, however, community development very quickly—by the end of the 1960s—was more about bricks and mortar development in poor neighbourhoods (by integrating those neighbourhoods into larger capital markets) than about larger scale social change (DeFilippis et al. 2019, 798)

Fisher and Shragge (2007) contextualize this shift in the community development "industry" in the shifting political economy of the day. The increasing expense and complexity of affordable housing development in an age of neoliberal austerity demands a deeper commitment of resources and labor toward property acquisition, construction, and maintenance, which in turn can force these once-radical organizations away from oppositional politics and toward consensus-building with, for example, banks and political actors once seen as the cause of community problems. "The community efforts of the 1980s and 1990s tended to lose their explicit political edge and found a new place alongside government and the private sector in reconstructing social and economic provision," as Fischer and Shragge write (2007, 202).

Other assessments of coalitions of community organizations paint a more nuanced picture. Numerous authors demonstrate how committed organizing, inside and outside of the land trust, can keep the mission of community control intact (see Gray and Galande 2011; Krinsky and Hovde 1996; Engelsman, Rowe, and Southern 2018). In his article "Deep Democracy," Arjun Appadurai (2001) shows how a coalition of three organizations working in Mumbai (but with connections across India and internationally) coordinate differing positionalities with respect to the state and the grassroots in order to deliver an empowering approach to organizing that gives those in urban poverty increased control over their living

conditions. Indeed, as my research shows – and as elucidated in the following section – such coalitions can be crucial in establishing accountability across organizations and moving the coalition toward its shared goals.

Abolitionism and Constructive Resistance

In Chapter 4, I examine the relationship between City Life and their CLT through a theoretical framework called "constructive resistance." In his essay on the subject, Vinthagen (2022) elucidates a framework essential for understanding the importance of both the "resistance" work – like CLVU's anti-eviction campaigns – and the "constructive" task of creating new institutions, such as CLTs. Crucially, he describes how each is made stronger by working to support the other. In this sense, constructive resistance can be viewed in the same vein as W.E.B DuBois's concept of "abolitionist democracy," which Angela Davis tells us "is not only, or not even primarily, about abolition as a negative process of tearing down, but it is also about building up, about creating new institutions." DuBois, she says, "pointed out that in order to fully abolish the oppressive conditions produced by slavery, new democratic institutions would have to be created" (A. Davis 2005, 73; quoted in House and Okafor 2020). This abolitionist framing can be applied to my analysis of appropriation and participation in the housing justice movement: activists seek to do away with the system of housing commodification that leads to eviction and instability, while creating "new democratic institutions," such as CLTs, to fulfill those goals.

As described in the previous section of this review, there can often be tensions between the work of resistance and that of construction, as belied by funders' preferences for "brick-and-mortar" projects. Vinthagen argues, however, that resistance and constructive work are not only in tension but also are interdependent, and are each benefited by that interdependence. Speaking

of the Brazilian grassroots Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (MST; the Landless Workers Movement), he observes:

> Their resistance creates the possibility of breaking the chains of the exploitative capitalist modernity that entraps them in poverty, injustice, repression and isolation from each other. Resistance is what makes the re-creation of communities possible, and the building of community is what makes resistance possible. It is an integrated form of "constructive resistance." (Vinthagen 2022)

To better understand the benefits gained from synthesizing construction and resistance, it is worth reflecting on Vinthagen's observations of the limitations of each practice in isolation. "By combining resistance with constructive work, they avoid the fundamental weaknesses of each approach," he writes. "For resistance, that weakness is to just be against, to protest, critique and obstruct what is 'unjust' and 'wrong,' and to demand that others – often the state – correct it." Resistance work that does not build independent political power is not transformative, Vinthagen argues. By engaging in the construction of alternative systems, activists can sustain their resistance work through building both community and material structures – like permanently affordable housing – that can enable ongoing activism. Turning to constructive work, Vinthagen writes, "[T]he fundamental weakness is to only build up what is already tolerated, legal and fits into the existing system, like adding new alternatives for us to choose from in a market." This concern reflects those criticisms of the non-profit industrial complex and of the professionalizing trends in community development organizations observed by many scholars and activists previously discussed in this thesis (e.g., INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence 2017; Piven and Cloward 1979; DeFilippis, Stromberg, and Williams 2018). Without the radical edge brought by activism rooted in resistance, newly constructed institutions tend to avoid "rocking the boat." New alternatives are created, yes, but only those which do not upend

existing power relations; transformative potential is quashed as these constructions are coopted into the existing system, following the path of Polanyi's "double movement" (2001).

Only together – construction and resistance explicitly working in tandem – can transformative progress be made and sustained:

> Resistance will always face repression if it is strong and poses a real challenge to the elites and the privileged. It will need resources and a community to survive and endure. Meanwhile, constructive work will always be co-opted if it becomes popular enough that corporations exploit and steal it to make a profit. Resolve and struggle are needed to maintain the foundational values and principles of constructive work, in order to push the limits and break the rules that otherwise force it to conform to existing systems. (Vinthagen 2022)

This quote highlights the two phenomena that resistance and construction must respectively fight against – repression and cooptation – and the ways that cooperation between organizations undertaking these types of work enables each to do so successfully. As this thesis hopes to demonstrate, this is a reasonable approximation of the way the relationship between CLVU and the BNCLT operates in practice in the housing justice movement of Boston.

Application of Literature Review

In this research project I will attempt to apply Purcell's elucidation of Lefebvre's right to the city framework – appropriation and participation – to the practices employed by tenant organizers and the community land trust in my case at 6 Humphreys Place. I aim to utilize Samara's concept of the "urban polity" to understand the CLT as a site of further politicization of tenants, a "liberated zone," in the parlance of one of my interlocutors. In my interrogation of the relationships between a nonprofit housing organization (BNCLT) and a grassroots community organization (CLVU) I adapt the framework of "constructive resistance" to better understand how these organizations work both independently and together, strengthening the other as a

cohesive movement for housing justice. As I present this research I will keep in mind the criticisms leveled upon the community development industry by DeFilippis, Stoecker, and others, while remaining open to the alternative arrangements of organizations described by Appadurai and Vinthagen. My research among housing justice actors in Boston builds on the literature presented here by investigating how these actors understand, clash, or collaborate with one another in strategic moments, and by considering the effects their interactions have on their collective capacity to contest dominant housing paradigms.

Overview of Chapters

This thesis opens with the story of 6 Humphreys Place, its residents, and their struggle against displacement and for control over their home. As described above, this struggle was the seed for this research project and provides crucial backdrop for the remainder of the text by introducing the reader to a vivid example of the injustices visited upon working class tenants of color in Boston and demonstrating how they can fight back, while highlighting the tactics that CLVU and BNCLT utilize to empower tenants to do so. Throughout this campaign, CLVU worked with residents to set in motion processes of appropriation – reclaiming control over housing – and participation – empowering residents to have a say in what happens to their neighborhood. As described in the opening paragraphs of this introduction, their struggle culminated in the ultimate form of appropriation in the acquisition of 6 Humphreys by BNCLT, putting their housing under permanent affordability and community control.

After this background interlude, Chapter 2 of this thesis explores the tactics employed by City Life/Vida Urbana and the Boston Neighborhood Land Trust, both individually and jointly, to work against the forces of the capitalist housing market that they understand to be the root of the crisis of housing instability and displacement. City Life's tactics of direct action against

landlords and financiers (the "sword") and legal defense in court (the "shield") build pressure against landlords and can result in tenants' collective victory (the "offer"). While the "offer" might be an agreement on apartment repairs or a multi-year lease, the ideal outcome is a direct sale of the property to an allied nonprofit (such as the Boston Neighborhood Community Land Trust) which can steward the land as permanently affordable. Following Lefebvre (1996) and Purcell (2002; 2014), I framed these activities collectively as "appropriation," the reclamation of urban space for use by its residents, rather than for individuals' profit. These practices alone, however, do not enable the right to the city. As detailed in Chapter 3, residents involved in campaigns of appropriation must also be empowered to participate in decision-making over their housing. This radical notion of "participation" goes beyond tweaking the margins of a development plan already near approval by the City or voting for elected representatives every couple of years. By participating in decision-making through a democratically controlled vehicle like a community land trust, residents can come closer to the meaningful control over the fate of their housing and, by extension, their neighborhoods; residents, that is, can practice the right to the city. Chapter 3 explores the ways that members of the housing justice movement work to prepare residents to take part in such processes, and examines the experiences of those residents as they move through that organizing journey.

Chapter 4 focuses more explicitly on the relationships between my two institutional actors – City Life/Vida Urbana and the Boston Neighborhood Community Land Trust – and the people who comprise those organizations, who work with tenants to appropriate urban space in Boston while enacting pathways to tenant participation over what happens to that land and housing. Guided by a framework of "constructive resistance," as introduced to me by one of CLVU's organizers, I hope to explain how the nominally separate practices of *resistance* against

oppressive systems (CLVU's organizing against eviction, e.g.) and *construction* of alternative models (such as BNCLT) are, in fact, strengthened through collaboration. Resistance creates the space needed for the creation of new communities and new institutions, and those novel constructions in turn stabilize previously oppressed tenants and enable the continuation of the struggle. The collaboration between organizations relies on the relationships among the people who make up those organizations, including a certain amount of co-conspiracy as they navigate existing systems of power to leverage resources and opportunities for the good of the broader movement. At the center of it all are those tenants who have fought for their homes through anti-eviction organizing, joined the community land trust, and now regularly participate in decision-making about their collectively governed housing. By being a part of both resistance against the existing housing system and the construction of an alternative model, tenant leaders embody the synthesis of constructive resistance. Together, CLVU, BNCLT, and Boston's residents are fighting to transform a city that prioritizes the exchange value of housing over its use value into one that puts people above profit. By weaving their work together, their collaboration for housing justice through constructive resistance enables the movement to move toward the right to the city.

Finally, I draw some conclusions from my research on and experience in the housing justice movement in Boston which I hope will inform the practices of community development professionals, planners, and policymakers. Our approach to reshaping the housing system should be informed by and follow the lead of those most impacted by the injustices of the existing system. Crucially, we will not transform the system in a way that corrects those injustices if working-class residents are not involved in that process of transformation. The work of CLVU

and BNCLT offers examples and lessons for how to fight injustice while building alternatives, and we would be well served to pay attention.

Interlude: The Story of 6 Humphreys Place

The seed of this research project is the story of 6 Humphreys Place, a rooming house in the Boston neighborhood of Dorchester where tenants, along with organizers from City Life/Vida Urbana and staff from the Boston Neighborhood Community Land Trust, led a years-long fight to stay in their homes against the threat of displacement and create permanently affordable, community-controlled housing. The tactics employed during the nearly four-year struggle – including public displays of direct action against the landlord, legal defense strategies against eviction, and negotiations with nonprofits to purchase the property – illustrate how a coalition of housing justice organizations, each with its own strengths and limitations, can come together with tenants to fight for the right to the city. The process of tenant organizing with CLVU shaped the 6 Humphreys residents into a collective force – a tenant association – that successfully fought off eviction while building the political power needed to secure the appropriation of their home by BNCLT. These residents now participate in decision-making over not just their own home, but over the wider swath of properties that the CLT stewards.

In February 2018 Gabriel Lepe, the owner of the 6-unit, 20-tenant building at 6 Humphreys Place, informed tenants that he had sold the building to a buyer, Gregory McCarthy, who wanted the building empty of tenants so that he could renovate and "flip" the property for a profit. Lepe, who had neglected the condition of the property and its residents over his years of absentee ownership – residents complained of a broken heating system in winter, rat infestations, and leaking ceilings – further demonstrated his lack of care by addressing the eviction notices to "John and Jane Doe"; he did not even know his tenants' names. Residents sought help from City Life/Vida Urbana, a Jamaica Plain-based nonprofit organization that focuses on tenant

organizing against landlords who impose unjust evictions or rent increases (Morales 2018). The tenants of 6 Humphreys won their first court case against Lepe's eviction efforts and were able to stay in their homes – an initial victory of the sort that, according to CLVU's organizer Steve Meacham, is critical to empowering residents to keep fighting for more. The sale of 6 Humphreys Place to Greg McCarthy for $850,000 went through – but as Steve tells it, the residents were now prepared to say: "Okay, let's fight this guy too."

This was the first of a series of victories for the 6 Humphreys tenant association in a campaign that demonstrated the power of tenant organizing. The organizing model developed by City Life involves three main tactics, and all three were employed during the struggle for 6 Humphreys. The "sword" is public-facing direct actions which build political pressure against landlords, demonstrated in this case by a series of rallies organized by CLVU and other community organizations including Dorchester Not For Sale (DN4S) that generated considerable local media coverage (Tache 2018; Trojano 2019a; 2021). The second tactic in CLVU's model is the "shield": legal defense against eviction which is practiced by allied lawyers at Harvard University's Legal Aid Bureau (HLAB) or Greater Boston Legal Services (GBLS) and which resulted in the tenants' victory in court, 18 months after the initial notice to quit; they won not just the right to stay in their home but also damages against McCarthy (Trojano 2019b).

The final element of City Life's three-fold strategy represents a path to longer-term stability for tenants. The "offer" is a resolution of the struggle and can take the form of a long-term rental contract collectively bargained between the tenant association and the landlord, or – in its ideal form – the purchase of the property by a nonprofit housing organization, such as a community development corporation (CDC) or community land trust (CLT), for permanent stability by removing the property from the speculative market. According to City Life's

organizers, this final element can often feel like an unattainable dream, especially to tenants used to having no control over what happens to their housing. The story of 6 Humphreys, however, illustrates what victories can come through committed organizing for "community acquisition," or the purchasing of property by an allied nonprofit. The sword and shield approach yielded a five-year, collectively bargained rental contract for the tenant association, which included a court-ordered mandate on McCarthy to make improvements to the building's condition, until which time the tenants had the right to withhold rent. This provided for a period of stability for the tenants as they and City Life continued to negotiate for longer-term stability through community acquisition. A variety of housing nonprofits put in bids to purchase the building from McCarthy but could not meet his asking price. In a final push for community acquisition of 6 Humphreys Place, CLVU coordinated with a CLT that they had helped create: the Boston Neighborhood Community Land Trust.

The Boston Neighborhood Community Land Trust (BNCLT) was formed in 2019 as the successor to the Coalition for Occupied Homes in Foreclosure (COHIF), an arrangement of housing professionals, organizers, and legal and policy specialists that emerged in the wake of the 2008 foreclosure crisis. COHIF worked with homeowners who were facing foreclosure by repurchasing their mortgage from the bank and enabling residents to stay in their homes, which now belonged to COHIF. These 15 units now form the base of BNCLT's land trust as the organization has evolved to take the form of a CLT, which has now grown to 30 units across the neighborhoods of Dorchester, Roxbury, and Mattapan. A community land trust is an organization that separatees ownership of the land from ownership of the homes on top of the land. The CLT owns the land in perpetuity and provides affordable housing to renters and/or homeowners; for rental housing, as in BNCLT, the nonprofit also owns the housing under a

permanent deed restriction. These layered land use restrictions dampen any potential increase in property value, enabling the CLT to maintain affordable rents into the future. For CLT homeownership properties, a shared equity formula, spelled out in a ground lease between homeowners and the trust, puts a cap on the amount that the owner can profit off of the home in the event of a sale, and also ensures that the home will return to CLT stewardship upon a sale by giving the trust the right of first refusal. While preserving housing as permanently affordable through these legal structures, CLTs also work to enact community control over housing development through the composition of their board of directors, which typically consists of one-third CLT residents, one-third residents of the neighboring community, and one-third representatives of other special interests (leaders from other community organizations, local politicians, technical experts, etc.). While there is nothing inherently "sacred" about this organizational structure, as one interlocutor told me, it does provide pathways toward decommodification and collective stewardship of land – the potential for radical departures from existing neoliberal forms of property relations.

After over a year of rollercoaster negotiations with Greg McCarthy, the Boston Neighborhood CLT finally closed on the acquisition of 6 Humphreys Place just before Christmas 2021. The final offer left the neglectful landlord McCarthy with nearly $2 million in his pocket but resulted in a building controlled by its residents and removed from the market for permanent affordability, stewarded by the CLT. The saga of 6 Humphreys is a testament to the power of community organizing and also reflects the importance of the technical capacities of nonprofit housing organizations like BNCLT. The alliance between CLVU and BNCLT is what makes the housing justice movement work; tenants are empowered to exercise control over their housing

while that housing is decommodified through the CLT model. With its foundational roots in tenant organizing through CLVU, BNCLT is a fitting choice to acquire 6 Humphreys Place.

Chapter 2. Development Without Displacement: Appropriation and Participation

As described in the literature review, appropriation is the reclamation of urban space by the working class in order to subordinate its exchange value to its use value – to prioritize a house's use as a home, rather than as a vehicle for private profit. How is the theory of appropriation put into practice by actors in the housing justice movement in Boston? In the struggle for 6 Humphreys Place, CLVU and BNCLT demonstrate how the "sword, shield, and offer" tactics work to slow down the forces of the market and potentially decommodify land and housing via acquisition by the land trust. At its base, this transaction is a real estate deal and requires resources and technical expertise – key roles played by staff at nonprofit housing organizations like BNCLT. Many activists maintain a skepticism of nonprofit organizations and developers due to concerns about how the "nonprofit industrial complex" can coopt the goals of even the most radical organizations. My research shows how this risk can be avoided, however, through partnerships like that between CLVU and BNCLT. Such relationships build accountability into the development process by enabling residents to participate in it. Without meaningful control over development – and the political and technical education needed to make such decisions – residents can become alienated by the CLT model and reject it. This chapter demonstrates that nonprofit acquisition of housing is a necessary but not sufficient step toward the right to the city; proper appropriation of urban space requires participation. Organizing residents for participation, as the following chapter explores, is essential.

Contesting the Right to the City in Dorchester

> I think that [the landlord] just didn't know anything about the building and the people in it, you know? I think he just seen a price tag and said 'Boom,' you know, 'That's affordable. I'll grab that, I'll flip it. I'll try to get these other units out there,' you know. And try to buy the block, so to say…But he was rudely awakened, 'cause he was just not aware that we weren't givin' in, we were gonna fight, yeah.
>
> – Eric Boyd, member of 6 Humphreys Tenant Association

The struggle of the residents of 6 Humphreys Place, along with allied local organizations, is a story of how the efforts of a private property owner to extract as much profit as possible from a residential building were met with a collective challenge from its tenants, a push for appropriation of urban space for the good of the working class of Dorchester. Greg McCarthy purchased 6 Humphreys Place in 2018 for the hefty sum of $850,000 and, despite neglecting his tenants and the physical condition of the units in the years since, sold that same property to the Boston Neighborhood Community Land Trust in late 2021 for an eye-popping $1.8 million. Over those three years, McCarthy invested very little in improving the building or taking care of its tenants, and yet he profited nearly one million dollars off its sale. This is a clear example of exchange value being prioritized above use value; 6 Humphreys Place as a *home* for its tenants has not improved under McCarthy's ownership – if anything, it has deteriorated – so its use value certainly has not increased. However, as the surrounding neighborhood has seen investments and improvements, especially over the past decade as the City of Boston has sought to prioritize development along the Fairmount commuter rail line, the *exchange* value of properties in the area has increased as investors/owners see the potential for higher rents or higher profits from rehabilitation-sales (also known as 'flips'). Real estate advertisements posted by McCarthy are evidence of his intention:

> A real estate posting after McCarthy bought the property touted a potential for rents at $2,500 month, or sales from condo conversion fetching as much as $3 million. The posting called the property an "Investors and Developers Dream" [sic], with a promise in capital letters to deliver vacant. Another potential scenario was redevelopment of the parcel with as many as 20 units, which the posting described as an "Amazing opportunity for Cash Cow or huge returns on Condo Conversion." (Lovett 2021)

McCarthy profited so richly from the sale of 6 Humphreys Place because he prioritized the exchange value of the land and building at the expense of its use value as a home, ignoring the needs of the tenants who make their lives in this place.

The improvements to the neighborhood of Upham's Corner in Dorchester that drove so much of the increase in exchange value of 6 Humphreys Place have been sorely needed and, indeed, advocated for by local residents of the historically disinvested neighborhood. However, the residents who fought for investment are now facing the threat of displacement amidst rapidly rising property values and rents. Residents here are not opposed to development per se but seek development *without displacement* – an outcome that may only be possible through the decommodification of property. Without taking property off of the market, individual property owners who do nothing to improve or maintain it are rewarded with rampant speculation that pushes out existing community members. How do working class tenants fight back against the power of private ownership?

Figure 2. Protestor at CLVU rally holding sign; photo from CLVU and Walker report (2021).

The Sword, the Shield, and the Offer: Tactics of Appropriation

City Life/Vida Urbana and the Boston Neighborhood Community Land Trust utilize a variety of tactics that work against the market logic of neoliberal capitalist real estate practices. The most obvious of these is achieved when tenants and CLVU achieve the "offer," the direct decommodification of land through its transfer from private to community ownership in the form of a nonprofit organization such as a CLT. Gaby Cartegena, an organizer at CLVU, reflected City Life's position that "taking as many buildings and land out of the speculative market and into social ownership is what we see as the most effective tactic to fight the housing crisis." By removing properties from the market, the housing justice movement seeks to prioritize the use value of housing – as *home* – instead of its exchange value as a commodity to be traded for

profit. However, acquisition and development of affordable housing by a nonprofit organization does not inherently equate to appropriation; this real estate transaction must be paired with the political goal of organizing for community control in order for CLTs to reach their radical potential.

The Sword and the Shield: Slowing Down the Market

While direct decommodification of housing represents the clearest example of appropriation by the housing justice movement, I argue that CLVU and BNCLT employ a variety of other tactics which work against the market logic of neoliberal housing and tilt the balance of power toward urban residents. The "sword and shield" tactics of CLVU, which help to keep residents in their homes by actively working against the speculative tools of eviction and foreclosure, represent strategic moves against the market. Public actions and court cases against an evicting landlord help to slow down the eviction process, effectively "gumming up" the gears of the property market and buying the residents time to organize for an "offer."

Figure 3. "We Shall Not Be Moved" sign in tenant window (Photo via Bennett 2021).

CLVU utilizes the "sword" – direct action and public rallies – against landlords and banks in order to draw attention to the injustice of imminent displacement and to build public support for tenant associations. This is one tactical part of the larger strategy to slow down the effects of the market and buy time for tenants to pursue the "shield" of legal defense and pressure the landlord for an "offer." Occasionally, however, the direct actions that CLVU organizes represent an even more direct threat to private property relations. Most notably during the period following the 2008-09 foreclosure crisis, CLVU escalated its "sword" tactics to include eviction blockades (see e.g. Katz 2014; Annear 2014) and disruptions of foreclosure auctions. Two of my respondents, Alma and Susan, are BNCLT residents and board members who first joined the housing justice movement when their landlord went into foreclosure in 2012. With no advanced notice from the owner, their home was suddenly up for auction and Alma and

Susan were facing eviction, as the bank requires properties to be vacant for auction. CLVU organizers caught word of this foreclosure and staged a protest that directly disrupted the auction on Alma and Susan's front steps, chasing off the auctioneer. Through the efforts of the emergent Coalition for Occupied Homes In Foreclosure (COHIF, which would later become BNCLT), the mortgage was repurchased from the bank and Alma and Susan were able to stay in their home. These tactics, which disrupt the process of routine speculative real estate dealing, are intimated by the iconic CLVU signs which read "WE SHALL NOT BE MOVED!" (Figure 3). In cases where the landlord is clearing out tenants in order to sell the property, CLVU's first step is to place these signs in the window of the building. Steve Meacham, an organizer at CLVU, argues that if potential buyers "are aware of City Life's presence with a tenant association, that will affect how much they want to pay. Resistance by tenants reduces the appreciation of absentee owned buildings. The signs are designed to signal to investors that City Life is there; some investors do back off when they see that." It may be difficult to quantitatively measure the impact of this signaling to prospective buyers on sales prices, but the intent is clearly to depress the profit margins for the seller and scare off potential buyers. Through these tactics, as with their work on 6 Humphreys Place, CLVU and its partner COHIF/BNCLT worked to directly promote the use value of a home over its exchange value on the market.

Getting to the "Offer": Grassroots Forms of Rent Control

City Life and its allies in the Boston chapter of the Right to the City Alliance have been engaged in a long-term campaign for legislation at the state level that would enable municipalities to enact rent control policies at the local level. Rent control – a cap placed upon the amount that a landlord can increase rent by – would represent a clear instance of regulating the housing market by reducing the speculative potential of properties. While this legislative

campaign has been a long, uphill battle, City Life and tenant associations have secured a form of rent control on a building-by-building basis through the other form of the "offer." Community land trust rental housing is a form of rent control, where rent increases are capped and typically based on resident income; one BNCLT resident I spoke with characterized her tenancy using exactly that term. Beyond that, however, both CLVU organizers I spoke with characterized the collective bargaining agreements that many tenant associations have secured as an alternative form of rent regulation. "You have to either regulate the market or you have to get buildings out of the market," Steve said. "And regulating the market can be our individual collective bargaining agreement or it can be rent regulation, rent control." Thus the "offer" of a long-term, collectively-bargained rental contract – while not as direct a form of decommodification as community acquisition of property – is a tenable approach to reducing the market influence over housing and increase the control of tenants over property. In the absence of legislative action on the matter, we see instead tenant activism and private nonprofit organizations creating their own piecemeal but grassroots forms of rent control.

Of course, the clearest example of appropriation utilized by the housing justice movement of Boston is the direct acquisition of housing by one of City Life's nonprofit partners, a process that my interlocutors describe as "community acquisition." The purchase of 6 Humphreys Place by BNCLT is only the most recent in a line of victories over the past decade. Amidst the foreclosure crisis, CLVU and COHIF worked together to stabilize a dozen units across four properties through their foreclosure buy-back model, properties – including Alma and Susan's home – which now form the base of BNCLT's land trust (Bratt 2014, 57). The mission-based CLT model works better for these smaller-scale properties that larger, efficiency-minded organizations such as community development corporations (CDCs) might prefer to

avoid. City Life is not afraid to take on those larger challenges, however, and in the past has worked with several allied CDCs to stabilize larger apartment buildings, including 59 units at Waldeck and Orlando Streets in Dorchester and Mattapan, earning a sale from the bankrupt landlord to Codman Square Neighborhood Development Corporation (Smith 2016). Even more recently, CLVU worked with the East Boston Community Development Corporation to secure the purchase of 114 units across 36 buildings, a "Blue Line Portfolio" that will now become a community-controlled mixed-income neighborhood trust (MINT) in east Boston (Mayor's Office of Housing 2022; Betancourt 2022; 2023). The slow but steady work of removing properties from the speculative market is essential to the mission of the housing justice movement because it gets to the core of the housing crisis: housing is treated as a commodity.

"Anti-Capitalist Measures" Against Displacement?

During our interview, CLVU's organizer Steve Meacham told me "I think [our tactics] are anti-capitalist measures, even if we don't conceive of them that way, because there's just no way to organize against a rent increase, to organize against a mass eviction without challenging the market." While CLVU's organizing and the CLT model do buffer residents against the forces of the free market, it is perhaps better to frame their work as "anti-neoliberal," rather than the outright anti-capitalism that Steve aspires to. Neoliberalism is a contemporary formation of capitalism that pushes markets into previously non-commodified areas of life, continuing but intensifying the enclosure of commons that has marked capitalism since its origins; it also reinforces the individualizing nature of capitalism, while foreclosing on even the envisioning of alternative systems. The work of housing justice aims to undo these trends by shifting away from private property relations while organizing residents against individualism to fight collectively.

However, we must be clear about what a community land trust is and what it is not. The CLT does remove the influence of speculation on housing, but it does not necessarily do away with markets entirely. It still relies on financing from capitalist investors seeking profit; the CLT itself still relies on rents to sustain operations. The work of the CLT, then, can be called anti-neoliberal – but not necessarily anti-capitalist. Indeed, the CLT could be characterized as part of what Karl Polanyi calls the "double movement" of capitalism: he argues that "market societies are constituted by two opposing movements—the laissez-faire movement to expand the scope of the market, and the protective countermovement that emerges to resist" that tendency (2001, xxviii). Under Polanyi's double movement framing, capitalism generates crises through the expansion of markets and society produces measures to soften the blows of the market – for instance, mid-20th century government programs such as public housing to aid residents who could not afford housing on the market. While public housing is a non-market option, it did not eliminate capitalism by any means; indeed, Polanyi's argument would be that it only stabilized the capitalist system by softening its worst impacts. Neoliberalism has deepened the capitalist crisis of housing through the retrenchment of government investment in non-market options such as public housing. Today, private non-profit organizations do what they can to produce affordable housing, but like public housing, are not threatening to overthrow the system. Community land trusts will not overthrow capitalism either – but by removing land from the speculative market and organizing residents for collective control its development, the CLT can act as a "liberated zone" for tenants to practice democratic decision-making, a portal to a non-neoliberal way of being. Without that commitment to community control, however, the CLT may simply stabilize and reproduce capitalist property relations.

“It’s Hard Work”: Affordable Housing Development and the Housing Justice Movement

Under neoliberal capitalism, the right to shape the city is largely wielded by real estate capitalists – developers and landlords – who seek to create housing in order to maximize profits via rents and speculation. The tools of housing development, however, are largely the same for affordable housing developers as they are at for-profit firms. With the technical, specialized knowledge that is required for the acquisition, development, and preservation of affordable housing, nonprofit developers can be an important ally in the fight for housing justice. This section focuses on the role that professional developers can play in the housing justice movement; the risks and contradictions that can accompany an alliance with nonprofit professionals; and the ways that tenants and housing activists can be involved in affordable housing development to add accountability and justice to the process.

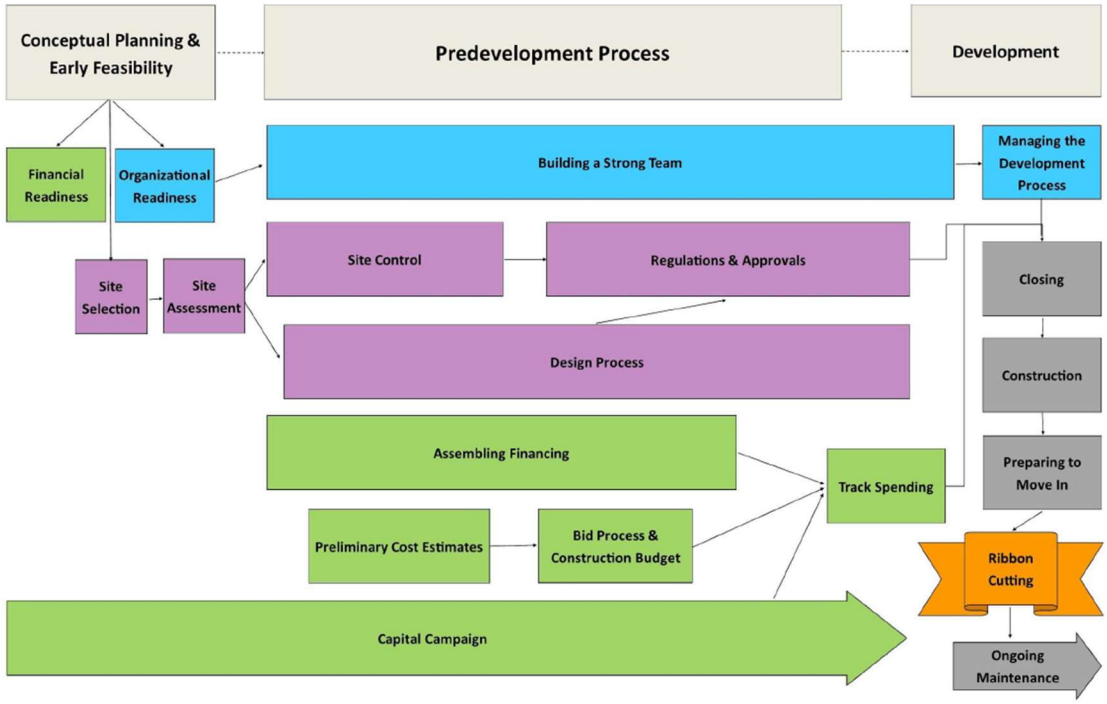

Figure 4. A flowchart of the real estate development process (Gilbert 2021, 5).

The flowchart in Figure 4 details the enormously complex process of real estate development. Every step of the process – from site selection to site control, acquisition, financing, permitting, construction, marketing and (for rental units) ongoing maintenance – requires meticulous planning, project management, and coordination across a multitude of stakeholders and experts, as well as substantial capital to fund the entire enterprise. Assembling and operating this sprawling machine is hard enough at large for-profit development firms; for a tiny nonprofit like the Boston Neighborhood Community Land Trust, where margins are thin and funding is scarce, the scale of the challenge is difficult to comprehend. Managing the process of affordable housing acquisition and development while maintaining a commitment to

empowering residents to exercise control over that process makes BNCLT's efforts all the more admirable.

In contrast to the direct federal investments in housing for low-income people during the mid-20th century heyday of public housing, today's affordable housing is produced in a deeply neoliberal context by small, private, nonprofit developers competing over limited public subsidies. Perhaps the most bracingly neoliberal aspect of the contemporary affordable housing development process is the low-income housing tax credit (LIHTC), by far the most commonly used subsidy. Under this convoluted scheme, developers apply to the state for federal tax credits, which the developers then turn around and sell to investors such as large banks in exchange for equity investment in their project. The developers ultimately receive the funds necessary to subsidize affordable housing production, but in the process already-wealthy institutional investors receive a break on their taxes, further starving the federal government of funds that it may once have used to directly build public housing itself.

BNCLT and other CLTs tend not to develop their own housing – focusing instead on acquisition and preservation of existing affordable housing – and thus don't rely on LIHTC, but the sources of funding they do pursue operate under similar neoliberal logics. These small nonprofits need to demonstrate to those public funding sources – in Boston, the Mayor's Office of Housing and the state Department of Housing and Community Development – that their projects are financially viable and minimize total development costs using pro forma cash flow models. The projections for small projects with very poor residents, of the sort that BNCLT prioritizes as part of its mission, are rarely rosy. The scattered-site nature and small size of BNCLT housing makes it challenging for the organization to realize economies of scale when it comes to fixed costs such as property management and administration. These fixed costs are the

reason that many nonprofits, such as community development corporations (CDCs), would not pursue the challenging cases that BNCLT takes on; administrative costs for a large multifamily development might not differ much from a single triple-decker, for instance. Mission-driven developers need to be both creative and flexible to stabilize the properties and people who need it most.

The Boston Neighborhood Community Land Trust is not immune to these restrictive conditions and levels of risk; what sets them apart from other organizations is simply their willingness to go the extra mile for tenants, a mission shaped and fostered by accountable relationships with grassroots activists, including the tenants on their board. BNCLT's executive director Meridith Levy shared that at a recent retreat with the board of directors, BNCLT reflected on the difficulties of recent acquisition battles like 6 Humphreys Place. The board asked themselves, "If this isn't a replicable model, should we walk away?" Ultimately, though, they reaffirmed their commitment to their mission. As Meridith shared, "The market is brutal – but that's exactly why we're needed. Every unit we save is a win. We make it work." Alma, a BNCLT resident and president of the board, affirmed that sentiment: "We persevere, we keep going because we wanna make sure that people will have affordable rents and we want them to stay in the city of Boston. They want to be able to live, you know, safe and secure." It's hard work, but acquiring and protecting affordable housing for Boston's lowest-income residents is essential to the success of the housing justice movement.

The Risk of Mission Drift

The Boston Neighborhood Community Land Trust is uncommon among housing nonprofits in its commitment to acquiring occupied buildings of organized, low-income tenants and maintaining accountable relationships with local activist organizations. As has been

documented by numerous scholars and activists (DeFilippis, Stromberg, and Williams 2018; INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence 2017; Bratt 2006), the structural forces that shape the nonprofit industry can often coerce nominally mission-driven organizations to drift from their more radical goals and instead conform to – and reproduce – existing inequalities. Because of these trends within the nonprofit industry, many grassroots housing activists harbor an understandable skepticism of the reliability of affordable housing developers (and the nonprofit industrial complex more broadly) to the cause of housing justice. Professional housing developers, even those committed to housing justice, must maintain cordial relationships with institutional sources of funding and policy which may be the targets of antagonistic direct action by their activist counterparts. To work against this reputation, staff at affordable housing organizations must maintain accountable relationships with grassroots activists, work closely with them on community acquisition of homes, and put residents in charge of development.

Internal accountability within affordable housing organizations can be sought through organizing their own residents – especially by hiring a paid organizer, as Gray and Galande (2011) argue. Some scholars and one of my activist interlocutors argue, however, that development organizations themselves might not be the best place for organizing to take place. In her review of community organizing and CDCs, Bratt again references Stoecker's argument (1997) that "organizing should be carried out by other neighborhood-based organizations, since CDCs are not able to mediate the contradictions of working within a capitalist development model, while also serving as advocates to low-income communities." Instead, "[Stoecker] has recommended that CDCs adopt a community-controlled planning process" (Bratt 2006, 351). Thomas Lenz concurs, suggesting that "development-oriented groups should subordinate their plans to the organizing agenda" of local grassroots activists (1988, 30). These scholarly

arguments are echoed by Steve Meacham of CLVU. He contends that, although CLTs and other nonprofit housing organizations are potential "liberated zones" from which to launch more radical organizing, "that doesn't mean that the nonprofit itself is doing the radical organizing" – that work may best be done by an external, grassroots organization like City Life/Vida Urbana.

The partnership between City Life/Vida Urbana and the Boston Neighborhood CLT is a notable example of how those accountable relationships can develop from the very inception of the housing nonprofit through each new acquisition. Such accountability can keep the CLT from losing sight of its goals of not just creating truly affordable housing but also enacting community control over that housing. In pursuing these goals and maintaining accountable relationships, the experience of organizational leadership matters. Meridith Levy of BNCLT shared how important a background in community organizing can be toward those ends. She has been working in leadership roles at affordable housing development organizations for nearly a decade, first as deputy director at Somerville Community Corporation and now as executive director of BNCLT – but before that spent over 15 years in organizing roles at CDCs in Minnesota and Massachusetts. "Organizing experience makes a huge difference," she told me. "If people in technical roles are grounded in the organizing world, you're in a good place" when it comes to accountable relationship-building. "Technical work can be overwhelming when you're in the 'belly of the beast' of development, but all it takes is a call from a tenant to remind you: 'We're all in this together.'" Some of the more movement-aligned affordable housing nonprofits in the Boston area in recent years have been led by directors with a background in organizing: Meridith of BNCLT, Lydia Lowe of Chinatown CLT, and Danny Leblanc at SCC (until 2020, when the organization made a significant turn away from community organizing). A background in real estate development is common among affordable housing organizations – understandably so,

given the technical skills involved. The danger with that, as Meridith and many of the scholars cited above argue, can be risking a move away from the grassroots activism for housing justice that lies at the heart of many such organizations. As Meridith provocatively argues, however, "It doesn't have to be that way!" The experiments described in the following section demonstrate that sentiment and offer opportunities for housing organizations to practice accountability to residents in their everyday operations.

Building Accountability into the Development Process

Under the existing development paradigm in Boston, developers tend to acquire property, generate plans that match their vision (and meet their financial requirements) for the site, and then seek funding and community approval in parallel. New project proposals are required to be announced and presented to the public through meetings facilitated by the Boston Planning and Development Agency (BPDA) and various offices of City government. In order to secure governmental approval and funding, private developers must "check the boxes" of community participation through these required meetings, and also demonstrate "community buy-in" by procuring letters of support from local elected officials and community organizations. Besides recruiting friendly organizations to public project meetings and extracting letters of support, many affordable housing developers have little meaningful engagement with local residents during the development process. Moreover, project proposals are typically not brought to the public until they are nearly completely planned, such that community feedback is often restricted to tweaking at the margins of the plan. Because these "participatory" processes are only nominally inclusive, they generate frustration and distrust among residents and community organizations. However, progressive elements in the community development industry – in partnership with actors in movement for housing justice – are working creatively to include

residents in the process in ways that are empowering and rewarding. In so doing, they are baking accountability into housing development in the process, from site control to project financing to organizational strategy.

Organizing for Acquisition: Site Control

BNCLT is one of a handful of housing organizations which seek to acquire and stabilize *occupied* properties where tenants are facing displacement or other instabilities. Because of the CLT's relationship with CLVU, most properties acquired by BNCLT have been sites of active tenant organizing. In this approach, residents are *inherently* involved in the process of establishing site control for the nonprofit developer: By organizing and fighting back against forces of displacement, residents help make the properties available for community acquisition via the nonprofit. This approach to securing occupied, privately owned homes for community control was notably used in high-profile cases in Oakland (Moms 4 Housing; see Cohen 2020) and Minneapolis (Inquilinxs Unidxs por Justicia/United Renters for Justice; see Desmond 2020) as highlighted by Sabonis and Murray (2021, 13). The technical details of the acquisition – purchase and sale agreements, financing, etc. – are navigated by the professional staff and consultants of the organization, but the role that organized residents play in securing the property for acquisition is essential in this first step of the development process.

"Closing the Gap": Local Investment for Local Land

The extent to which housing developed by nonprofits can be affordable depends on the amount of subsidized capital available to the organization. Lowering the average interest rate for a given project's capital "stack" is the goal; the cheaper the capital, the more affordable the housing can be. Grants and donations are an important source of funding for nonprofits like BNCLT, but nearly half of a typical project is traditionally financed by debt held by banks or

other lenders. Even after traditional and subordinate sources of debt are tapped and philanthropic funds are stacked on top, there is often still a gap in funding to meet the CLT's affordability goals (see Figure 5 below). For nonprofit developers like BNCLT, executive director Meridith Levy told me, "The hardest thing is closing the gap" between available funding and the cost of property acquisition and development, while maintaining the ability to provide meaningful affordability to low-income residents. The tricky part about pursuing public subsidies to support acquisition of tenant-occupied housing is the timing; such properties often become available suddenly and with little warning, while public funds tend only to be offered on a cyclical basis until depleted. "It doesn't line up," as Meridith put it.

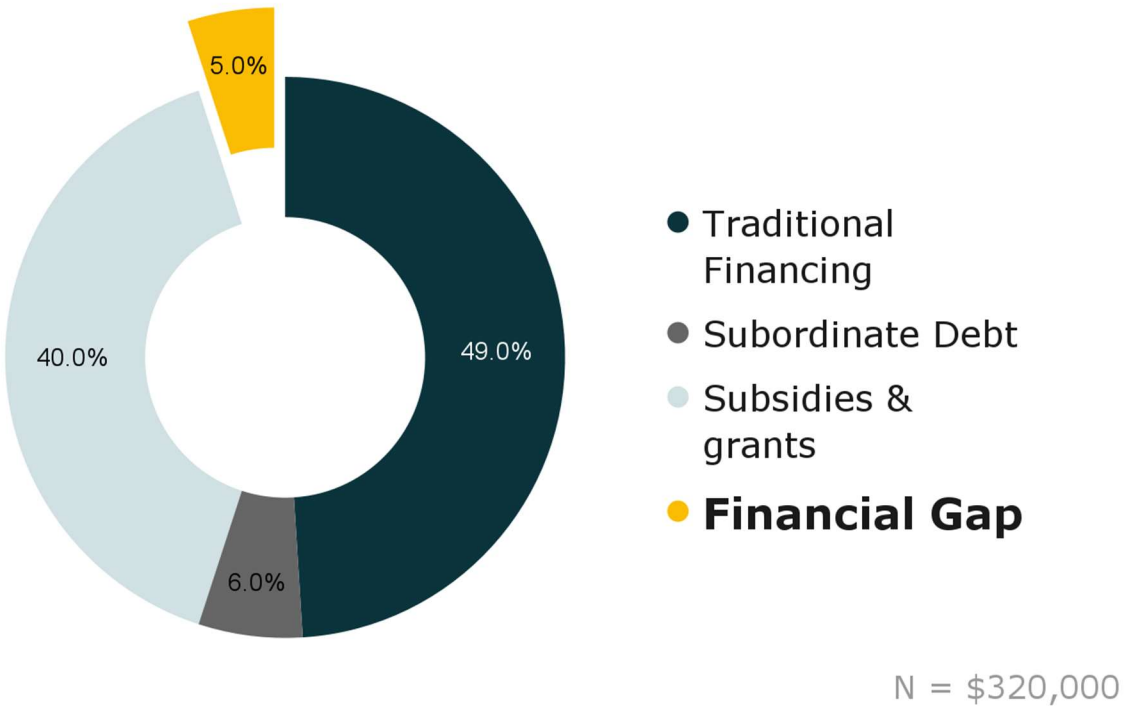

Figure 5. Sources of Funding Per Unit at BNCLT (Bull et al. 2021, 104)

One important way that CLTs and other organizations are seeking to give themselves more control over project funding, while empowering democratic control over finance, is

through a model of community investment funding in which local community members (which could include CLT residents) can invest in a project and receive the benefits of development in addition to (a typically small, 1-2%) return on investment. Community-controlled investment projects such as the recent Blue Line Portfolio in East Boston (Leyba and Hahnel 2022) and those described in a to-be-published report from the Local Enterprise Assistance Fund (LEAF; McLinden 2021) present a unique opportunity to exercise distributed local control over development financing while building real collective ownership among people usually excluded from ownership and development. Community investment funds thus represent an opportunity to not only fill the funding gap that many housing organizations face, but also to deepen their commitment to community control: "Democratized finance on democratized land," as the LEAF report frames it.

Residents in Control of Development

The approaches taken to empower resident leadership in organizations like BNCLT represent a radical departure from the nominally participatory development planning process overseen by the BPDA. As Tanya Hahnel, project manager at East Boston CDC (EBCDC) said during her talk with CLVU's Mike Leyba, their Blue Line portfolio deal is EBCDC's "first formal partnership with activist organizations – not just asking them for a letter of support or to show up at a public meeting, but to have them actually be involved in management and decision-making power over real estate" (Leyba and Hahnel 2022). In that project, as with BNCLT and the canonical CLT model, residents of the properties and surrounding neighborhoods will be members of the governing board which makes all decisions on acquisition and development, among other issues. This approach to development empowers residents to have a direct voice in what happens to land and housing in their neighborhoods and can help housing organizations

avoid losing sight of that goal. When combined with the transformative community organizing of CLVU – described in the next chapter – these practices can ensure that "community acquisition" of housing can move beyond simple nonprofit housing development toward a true form of appropriation by subordinating the exchange value of a commodified house to its use value as a home for people to live and grow in.

A Shifting Sense of Property and Control Under the Community Land Trust?

By removing land from the speculative market, the community land trust model represents an opening to an alternative form of property relations. As defined by the ground lease between the nonprofit and its residents, the land trust limits speculation on land, capping the allowable increase in rent or property value (for rental and homeownership housing, respectively), enabling housing to be used as a home for low-income people rather than as a vehicle for profit-making, thus presenting a challenge to the investment model of private property. In this section, I explore how organizers and nonprofit housing developers are conceptualizing the ways that this shift toward collective land stewardship affects the capacity for – and approach to – community control over neighborhood development. I also examine some of the tensions that arise between former homeowners who are now tenants on the land trust as control over the individual household is somewhat restricted while influence over the development of the neighborhood is, in theory, expanded. These shifting notions of property on the CLT provide fertile ground to examine the dynamic relationships residents have with each other and with their homes and neighborhoods.

Scales of Ownership and Control

Part of the appeal of individual homeownership is the right to do what you want with your property. Within limits imposed by zoning, neighborhood association rules, and other regulations, homeowners can decorate and remodel their homes or mold the landscape of your private plot as you see fit. In a literal sense, homeownership conveys the right to (a small slice of) the city. However, while homeownership does often produce a more politically engaged subject – think of the archetypal public meeting attendee, there to oppose new development out of concern for his property value or other (perhaps racially coded) quality-of-life concerns (see, e.g., Einstein, Palmer, and Glick 2019) – the individual homeowner has only a limited form of control over the composition and development of their neighborhood.

During a recent talk about "Building Community Wealth and Ownership Through the Solidarity Economy," CLVU's co-director Mike Leyba and East Boston CDC's real estate project manager Tanya Hahnel offered alternative perspectives on the commonly held notion that homeownership is the ultimate form of neighborhood stability. Tanya shared how she once believed that renters, who lack a financial hook in the neighborhood, were more transient than homeowners, but found upon her move to East Boston that the longest-standing members of the neighborhood were renters who had lived in their apartment for multiple generations. This contrasted with the transience of the owners of new condominium units across the street, which saw frequent turnover as investor-owners took advantage of the rapidly rising market to sell and profit off of their housing, rather than stay put and be a part of the neighborhood. The speculative nature of homeownership, in this case, meant that homeowners lacked stable roots in East Boston. Mike then told a story of his neighborhood in Jamaica Plain, where homeowners are indeed the longest-tenured residents and key members of the community, but who have seen the

neighborhood around them change completely as a result of the same dynamics of speculation and unstable tenure as in East Boston. In J.P., homeowners are indeed more stable than renters, but this anecdote demonstrate the very limited control that owners can exert over their surrounding area. These stories thus contest the commonly held notions that homeowners are either more stable parts of the community (as shown in East Boston) or exercise political control over development (as shown in JP's turnover). Private homeownership, then, can confer control over ones own home but not its surroundings, and can provide stability over time but does not guarantee it.

Mike further contextualized the limits of individual homeownership by introducing a much broader spectrum of control and ownership (see Figure 6 below) from the scale of the individual household to the collective neighborhood. Both speakers (and Aliana Piniero of Boston Impact Initiative, who designed the slide) took care to insist that this isn't as linear a spectrum as is presented in the figure and that each example along the spectrum has its own contradictions, complications, and limitations. With that context in mind, we can explore how the various models help broaden our understanding of the varieties of ownership over land and housing and how those affect the scale on which control can occur.

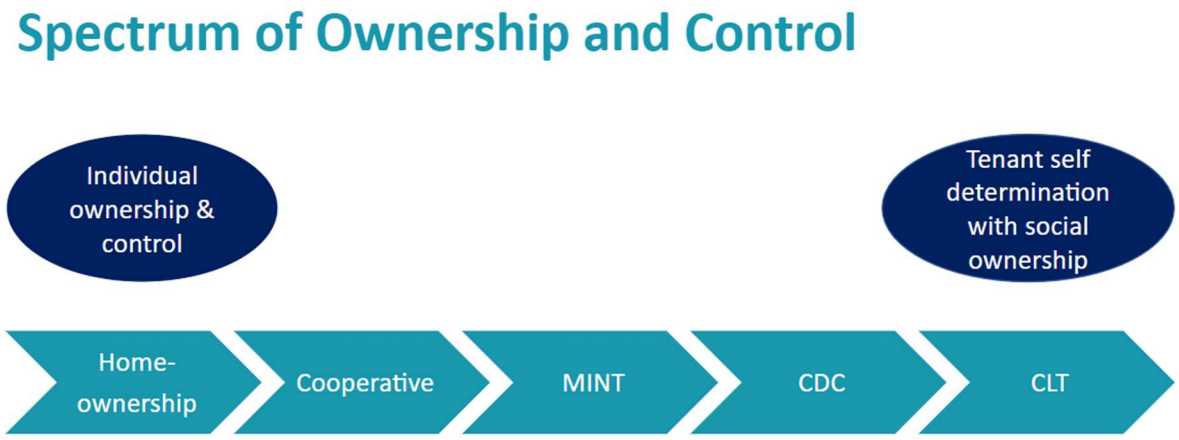

Figure 6. Spectrum of Ownership and Control in Housing (Leyba and Hahnel 2022)

Individual homeownership gives you control over what happens with your home and property, though as described above, there are restrictions on both what decisions you can make and on what scale you exercise control. Housing cooperatives operate on the same scale as individual ownership – the household – but introduce an element of collective decision-making that points toward the larger scale represented by the various trust models on the right side of the spectrum. The approach to decision-making in a cooperative can be an excellent example of the everyday practice (and struggle) of democracy in housing, a way of "strengthening the democratic muscle," as a practitioner once told me, and a strong primer for collective decision-making at larger scales.

The organizations that "create the container" for such larger-scale decision making include community land trusts as well as mixed-income neighborhood trusts (MINTs) and community development corporations (CDCs) – each of which, legally speaking, functions as a trust, holding land on behalf of a beneficiary community. Each offers the potential for decision-making control on a scale larger than the individual household, across all of the trust's holdings.

What distinguishes these models is a question of politics and organizational priorities – that is, the extent to which decision-making is decentralized from the organization to its constituent community members. What matters is the organization's commitment to empowering residents to exercise control over their land and housing.

Former Homeowners in Collective Stewardship

Despite the collective mission of the community land trust model, such organizations may remain a collection of individual households without concerted effort to create vehicles for democratic decision-making. The process of moving to a CLT model – the uphill climb away from individual property relations toward a sense of communal control, however limited – can reveal cracks and contradictions in the experiences of those individual households that illustrate the incomplete and ongoing work of changing resident subjectivity amidst changing property relations.

Following the 2008-09 financial collapse and foreclosure crisis, BNCLT's predecessor, the Coalition for Occupied Homes In Foreclosure (COHIF), organized residents to remain in their foreclosed homes while COHIF re-purchased their mortgages from the foreclosing bank. As a result of this process, COHIF became the owner of the homes – holding them under permanent deed restriction – meaning the residents, once homeowners, became tenants of COHIF. This shift from ownership to tenancy was further complicated when COHIF formally became the BNCLT in 2019, introducing an element of collective decision-making at a scale beyond the individual household.

Jumping about the "spectrum of ownership and control" in this way appears to have stressed these former homeowners and revealed tensions between them and the CLT. As BNCLT resident and board president put it, "Each resident dealt with [the transition to COHIF/BNCLT]

in different ways. Some were okay with it – some went along with it, some, you know, really pushed back on the process and didn't understand why they had to do this and had to do that – so it was a lot." Property owners, as discussed above, enjoy the right to shape their homes and land as they see fit; however, as tenants of BNCLT, some have chafed against the lack of control on the household scale. "One of the issues that we have is that they don't see themselves as tenants," Alma told me. "They still see themselves as the owners of the property, and that's creating a little friction: 'I don't like that color, why did you paint that color? I don't want that sink, I want this, that, and the other'…we had a lot of pushback there." These tensions illuminate the gap between the CLT's theoretical potential of appropriating land for community stability and control and the reality of residents desiring homeownership, or at least, direct control over what happens in their home. BNCLT operates as a rental-only land trust at this stage, but Alma shared that, in response to these resident concerns, the CLT board and membership have had conversations about implementing pathways toward homeownership, to "buy back property" through a rent-to-own program. However, she also explained that another approach she takes with these residents is to encourage them to get involved on the CLT board and exercise control over the land trust, even when the current legal arrangement leaves them unable to exercise full control over their home. Indeed, as discussed in-depth in the next chapter, the most successful example of community self-governance that BNCLT has yet seen was the collective, resident-led process of hiring a new property manager to be more responsive to residents' needs. In this way, residents – while unable to unilaterally make changes to their own homes – were able to exercise control over who maintains their collective property. CLT leadership, then, is seeking to ameliorate resident concerns about control over the individual household by exploring routes to homeownership on

the CLT while continuing to push residents to think about decision-making on a larger scale through the CLT.

The contradictions between control and homeownership revealed by the experience of residents on the land trust indicates that, though the CLT has created a form of social ownership over housing, the experience of exercising collective decision-making has not yet imparted the hoped-for sense of control over the CLT. The land trust is still relatively young, and this deep work of undoing hegemonic notions of property ownership takes time. As Meridith shared, this process "takes the work of building relationships, working slowly over time with residents to uncover new ideas for how to do this…It's not imposed simply when an organization becomes a land trust, it has to happen patiently, with residents at the lead." Without genuine collective control over community-owned land, however, the "triangle" described by CLVU's Steve Meacham lacks one of its legs: communal needs cannot be met through social ownership if there is not meaningful democratic control (see also Lebowitz 2009; Harnecker 2015, 77). Indeed, without the purposeful participation of residents in the process of shaping the CLT, the project risks alienating the very residents it seeks to serve. This points toward the need for continued organizing, including political and technical education, among CLT residents to help them understand the decisions to be made and arm them with the capacity to make them collectively. Without the meaningful participation of those most affected by the housing crisis, the technical acquisition of land for their good will not suffice. Meaningful appropriation cannot occur without the direct participation of residents. The following chapter discusses the practices of enacting participation – the second process in Purcell's conception of the right to the city – in detail.

Conclusion: On the Practice of Appropriation

This chapter explores the ways that two organizations that make up the housing justice movement in Boston – City Life/Vida Urbana and the Boston Neighborhood Community Land Trust – work with residents to build a world in which housing is treated as a human right, not as a tool for profit-making. Private property is foundational to the political economy of the United States and across the so-called developed world; in the analysis of my interlocutors, it is the never-ending pursuit of profit at root of this system that drives the crisis of housing affordability and displacement seen in our cities. Thus, CLVU and BNCLT do their part to work against that system and instead appropriate land and housing for use by people, not for profit.

The core tactical model of CLVU – "the sword, the shield, and the offer" – and the work of BNCLT collectively limits the influence of the market over housing and, in turn, increases tenants' control. The "sword" and "shield" work together to empower tenants facing down displacement, build a case against the landlord's unjust actions, defend the tenants in court, and – ultimately – buy time for tenants, organizers and lawyers to negotiate for the "offer," an agreement between the landlord and tenants for some form of long-term stability. The "offer" might take the form of a binding promise to make necessary repairs to housing; a long-term lease that offers year-over-year stability to the tenants; or, in the ultimate goal of the movement, the sale of the property to a nonprofit housing organization, a process that CLVU calls "community acquisition." The direct removal of property from the private market and into "permanent affordability" is a process that activists and tenants see as key to solving the housing crisis, as it gets at the speculative root of the problem and directly prioritizes the use value of housing – as a home – over its exchange value as a commodity for speculative profit-seeking. It is critical, however, that housing justice activists and affordable housing developers realize that the CLT

model isn't "inherently better" than other forms of nonprofit housing; like CDCs, CLTs might serve as part of the "double movement" of capital, a dialectical response that softens the impact of marketization even as it stabilizes and thus reproduces it. Only with ongoing commitment to organizing tenants into collectives of active subjects, engaged in decision-making processes about their homes and neighborhoods, can the more radical potential of CLTs be realized.

Putting appropriation into practice through the acquisition and preservation or development of permanently affordable housing requires experienced professionals with the technical real estate knowledge needed to secure the "offer." Nonprofit housing developers have the skills and capacity required to organize the capital and subsidies needed to acquire and sustainably maintain affordable housing, as well as the relationships with funders and municipal officials needed to acquire those resources. Despite the critical role that nonprofit professionals can play in the movement for housing justice, there is a justifiable skepticism among housing activists toward developers. Many developers maintain relationships with community organizations solely for the purpose of extracting their support through nominal, city-approved "community processes" that cede little if any decision-making power to those communities. However, as this and the following chapters show, members of the housing justice ecosystem in Boston are working closely with residents and activists to share the knowledge, skills, and resources needed to build community-controlled affordable housing through organized campaigns, community investment funds, and leadership positions such as CLT boards. In these ways, housing developers are meaningfully ceding resources and decision-making power to residents most impacted by housing instability and building accountability into the development process.

Educating and empowering residents is particularly important as they navigate the sometimes confusing and contradictory shift in property relations that can come with life on the community land trust. Especially for former homeowners, the transition to tenancy at BNCLT has come with frustrations about the lack of control over their home, as they now must go through property management to make repairs or changes. As CLVU activists explain, however, the CLT represents a vehicle for control at a larger scale and through a collective, rather than individual, approach. While tenants do have less immediate control over their homes than owners do, CLT residents – by serving on the organization's board of directors or participating in other decision-making processes – have a voice in the overall development of their neighborhoods at a scale that even private homeowners, with all their political heft, can't always claim.

Decommodification of land does not automatically lead to transformative change among residents' relationships to the land and each other, as these tensions demonstrate. The following chapter describes in detail how committed organizing is required and carried out to create the conditions in which residents can practice community control.

Chapter 3. Toward Collective Stewardship and Grassroots Participation

From "Participatory Planning" to Community Control

As discussed in the preceding chapter, appropriation of urban space – the collective claiming of land and housing for use by people instead of as a vehicle for profit – is a fundamental step toward creating a city in which residents can organize for control over development, and community land trusts are one vehicle through which appropriation can take place. However, as an interlocutor from the grassroots neighborhood organization Dorchester Not For Sale described it, "CLTs are not inherently better" than other housing organizations; "there's nothing sacred or pure about this model." Alma, a BNCLT resident and president of its board, shared a vivid quip to illustrate the crucial importance of building community at the CLT: "The CLT is basically the landlord at this point; community has to be there to make it a CLT. Otherwise, we're just an 'L-T' – landlord-tenant!" (Bull et al. 2021, 68). Community land trusts may create the opportunity for residents to exercise community control, but it will not automatically happen just because housing has been removed from the market. Community control – the creation of a collective of residents and the active participation of those residents in decision-making – requires organizing.

In this chapter, I examine how we get to "participation." How do actors in Boston's housing justice movement organize processes for the creation of active subjects – residents engaged in the governance of their homes and neighborhoods – and how do residents themselves experience the process of tenant organizing and control on the CLT? I open with the perspective of the professional organizers who seek to "create the containers" for such transformative

changes in residents, what they aim to accomplish through their work – and more importantly, *how*, by facilitating both community-building and the creation of processes for collective decision-making. The following section is a deep dive into the experience of residents as they navigate the journey from crisis to control, from individual tenants fearing eviction to members of a collective movement for housing justice. Here I examine how, through the rituals and transformative experience of CLVU's organizing, followed by the unmasking of that mystique through political and technical education garnered through experience, tenants become activists themselves and strive to "give back," as Alma put it, to the movement that helped save them and their housing. Through education and experience, tenants break through the hegemonic sense of individualism that neoliberalism imparts on us all, building a community needed to make collective decisions. It can be challenging for low-income tenants to make the time for housing activism, but this chapter demonstrates how the CLT's permanently affordable housing can be a factor that materially enables residents to make organizing a "second life," as it has with Alma. Through the work of tenant activists along with CLVU, BNCLT, and their allies, participation in the struggle to re-shape the world can transform not only the political and economic systems of housing, but also tenant subjectivities themselves.

Toward Participation and New Subjectivities: The Role of Community Organizers

Community organizers play a foundational role in building a base of engaged and active participants in any movement for social justice. In this work, organizers bring together formerly individualized subjects afflicted by some common ailment; build community among those individuals; share educational resources to raise the level of consciousness and analysis; and create structures and facilitate processes that enable participation in collective decision-making

practice. This section details the perspective of tenant organizers in Boston's housing justice movement by examining how they think about their work – taking an approach that enables residents to govern themselves, rather than a paternalistic service provision model – and how they go about the work of "creating containers" for the development of engaged tenant activists.

"Not a Service Provider": Organizers Aim for Tenant Agency

Most organizations in the community development industry do not simply create affordable housing, instead offering a wide-ranging set of services to residents including health and wellness programs, violence prevention, job and career resources, political engagement (e.g. "Get Out The Vote"), and much more. The aim of these services is to provide a holistic sense of development of the full individual; housing is only one facet of people's lives, after all. However, the "service provision" model, despite good intentions, can often serve to replicate existing systems of inequality. This inherently paternalistic model shares resources and education but does not shift who is in charge of those resources; it is not a transformative approach to community development.

My interlocutors at CLVU and BNCLT shared similar criticisms of the "service provision" model of community development and explained how their organizations take a different and agency-building approach through community organizing. Steve and Gaby, two organizers from City Life/Vida Urbana, each emphasized what makes their organization particularly effective compared to other nonprofits that assist unstably housed individuals. Gaby detailed, "While some organizations just focus on the community service front, some just focus on advocacy or just focus on organizing, we combine all three. Because we combine all three, sometimes our services are better than others that just focus on providing the service." The "service" that CLVU provides is legal guidance at the weekly Boston Tenant Association (BTA)

meetings, where tenants with eviction cases are paired with lawyers from Harvard Legal Aid Bureau or Greater Boston Legal Services for assistance, while City Life's advocacy for legislation at the local and state levels helps shift the political terrain on which their organizers operate. However, unlike other organizations which narrowly focus on service provision or policy advocacy, CLVU seeks to *empower* the tenants it works with through organizing. As Steve of CLVU put it, "BTA meetings aren't legal clinics, even though they provide legal services; they are community organizing meetings." Steve argued that while many nonprofit service providers believe that organizing is not worth investing in – because it diverts resources from the core mission of case work – "Our organizing methodology does case work really well – it produces good numbers, you know? Providing people the social backup for using their legal rights is really a critical part of winning, and providing that social backup is organizing." Rather than detracting from standard metrics of case work success, City Life's approach of promoting resident agency through organizing actually improves on the standard approach to legal aid and advocacy.

Service-provision nonprofit models may offer essential material aid to those in need – and the importance of that should not be overlooked – but that approach can also replicate existing systems of inequality. As Cole, an organizer with BNCLT, put it, "Organizations in the nonprofit industrial complex have this model of a very clear power dynamic where there's a service provider and service recipient, and transfer food or educational materials or whatever the product is to the recipient. And our model is not like that." BNCLT, like CLVU, seeks instead a *transformative* approach that creates empowered subjects willing to fight against injustice through struggle. Gaby contrasted CLVU with other organizations that might help tenants facing eviction find new housing, but "They're not going to tell them, 'You have rights and you can

fight this eviction'…But City Life, we're going to tell you: 'You can fight this eviction. You have the power to fight to this eviction and fight for the right to stay in your home.'" Steve confirmed that other organizations might consider City Life's demands for a collective bargaining contract or a sale to a nonprofit as "Impossible…But we do demand that, and we generally win it." By operating as more than a simple service provider and working instead to organize individual tenants into a collective movement, CLVU and BNCLT begin the process of creating politicized subjects willing to fight for their housing. The organizing tactics described throughout this chapter demonstrate how this approach is carried out.

"Creating the Container" for Popular Participation

The organizers I spoke to for this project identified two major roles they play in helping residents move toward community control: Building community among tenants and facilitating processes or creating structures through which residents can practice democratic decision-making. In describing their roles, my organizer interlocutors reinforced the notion that they seek to build resident agency through their work. "The organizer definitely supports in knitting together and facilitating the space for [resident] leaders to grow their leadership," CLVU's Gaby Cartagena shared. "The vision is for them to lead themselves at some point, right? We're kind of like the little baby walkers that guide people towards that path." Cole, BNCLT's organizer, echoed that point in our interview, saying that while they have been the primary convener and facilitator of resident meetings, "There's room for a lot of community building initiatives, and ideally that's led by the residents." Organizers hope that, with time, their role will be redundant and unnecessary; tenants ultimately should govern themselves. In the meantime, organizers "create the containers" through which residents can practice self-organizing.

Since formally becoming a land trust in 2019, the process of community building and leadership development at BNCLT has been a work in progress. Even in this short period, though, there have been notable improvements. BNCLT is a "scattered-site" land trust, meaning their properties are non-contiguous; instead, they are dispersed throughout the neighborhoods of Dorchester, Roxbury, and Mattapan. This increases the challenge of community-building, as the community of CLT residents are not necessarily neighbors. Those who do live next door to each other don't always get along, however; my interlocutors told me about two residents who "don't get along," who fight and "call the cops on each other." Staff and board members have attempted mediation processes between them, to mixed success, highlighting a very clear challenge to building community among CLT residents. Furthermore, Cole's calls for residents to organize their own buildings – facilitating relationship-building among residents in a shared space – have largely gone unheeded thus far.

Residents do come together each month at the CLT's virtual residents' meetings to build community and air concerns on issues such as property management and rent. Since Cole was hired as community organizer approximately a year ago, they have made important strides in "creating the container" for residents to come together over shared problems and get to know each other, despite the disruption presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. Virtual meetings held over Zoom have helped provide additional venues to participation and helped mitigate the challenge of the CLT's scattered-site geography. Part of "creating the container" has included establishing ground rules and group norms around participation, which were developed by Cole and Alma, a CLT resident and board member, and voted on by the residents at a meeting. As I witnessed at a monthly resident meeting, new norms included: "Be engaged: raise hand or physically raise hand to take turns speaking" and "Be respectful: follow the agenda and respect

meeting structure; share talk time; focus on collective concerns (bring up in-depth individual concerns with management directly, outside of meeting space).” The need for these norms became apparent after meetings were repeatedly disrupted and derailed by a particular resident who had numerous issues with his unit and tried to use the residents’ meeting as a venue to air his own grievances, rather than going through property management. Since these group norms were introduced, the meetings have had improved balance as more residents are able to participate. Josefina, a BNCLT tenant, spoke to the value of this regular community building and discussion: “This is very important, that the people know each other. They know the problem and they know the issue…The people working together, it's amazing and has made the group very powerful and very respectful.” This became apparent to Josefina during the process of hiring a new property manager, described below, “Because,” she said, “if we have a management company that’s supposed to take care of the property, and they see the tenants organized, they’re going to show more respect and the job can be done in better ways…That's not happening everywhere in this kind of housing group, you know?”

The community building that takes place at these regular residents’ meetings can form the basis for the identification of concerns shared by residents across the CLT, and the spark to take collective action about them. In response to these concerns, the organizer can collaborate with residents to create another container – this time, a process for residents to participate in decision-making about a matter of material concern to all CLT residents. The following story highlights the potential that such a process offers for residents to practice community control.

A Vehicle for Community Control

Issues with property management are the top concern among BNCLT residents and served as the basis for perhaps the most successful organizing campaign on the CLT thus far:

hiring BNCLT's new property management company. Since Cole was hired as organizer, BNCLT residents have expressed frustrations with the current property manager, from a lack of responsiveness to work requests to sloppy repair jobs. Under other housing organizations, residents may not have much say in selecting their property manager, but BNCLT's commitment to building community and listening to resident concerns opened an opportunity for residents to exercise community control over their property.

At a resident meeting a few years ago, BNCLT resident Josefina "started to advocate against the management company that we have," in her words. As soon as she opened her mouth, she said, other residents chimed in with similar concerns, and "we started the process right there; it started to grow, and it started to get people to be more engaged," demonstrating the importance of a venue – a "container" – like regular resident meetings where tenants can come together over shared concerns. As Alma, another resident and president of the CLT board, shared, "The management issue brought everybody together. We had more people at the meetings regarding the management company issue than we had for anything else - it was a catalyst." When the former property manager informed the BNCLT board that they were no longer able to serve in that role, a golden opportunity to organize residents for control was realized.

Alma, along with CLT staffers Cole and Meridith, designed a process where CLT residents would dictate the selection of a new property manager. Residents were involved in each stage of the hiring process, from providing input on the request for proposals, to drafting interview questions, to participating in interviews and asking candidates those questions. When candidates were vetted, residents deliberated and voted on their selection: a Roxbury-based, Black-owned management company that immediately recognized the importance of resident control in the CLT. "The democratic process was wonderful," Alma told me. "It was the best –

the smoothest way we were able to communicate with our residents and get them to do something that shows that they could govern or make a decision for themselves and for the better of their housing, and it was wonderful. Absolutely wonderful." Hiring their new property manager was an outstanding example of how the CLT can provide a vehicle for residents to rally together around a shared concern and have power over changing it.

It is worth reflecting on the conditions that enabled residents to make such an important decision democratically. As several interlocutors noted, the intense resident concern over property management might not have registered with the board or staff at other housing organizations that lack resident representation. Cole, BNCLT's organizer, observed:

> The board doesn't know about that [issue] unless the residents are there in the room to bring it up…[Resident board membership] affects the collective decision-making over what we do about the property management company. The residents feel frustrated, but our residents are organized; people have a collective voice and residents know that their concerns are being heard by the board – because our board members are actually residents.

Thus, the structure of the CLT board enabled resident concerns to be heard and acted upon – another structure, or "container," in which participation could take place. While other housing organizations have similar processes for soliciting and responding to resident concerns, BNCLT's approach here was unique in that residents themselves were empowered to control the process from start to finish.

Notably, the residents who spurred the process – Josefina, Alma, and Susan – have been involved with City Life/Vida Urbana for many years. The lessons that City Life imparts during its organizing – and which BNCLT strives to emulate – are evident in how these residents mobilized to hire a new property manager. Starting from the community built through regular meetings and events, residents were able to identify common concerns. Empowered by a refusal

to accept the status quo and an understanding of the technical and political dimensions of the problem, residents instead fought to change it through an empowering, organizing-based approach to change and a collective decision-making process. These are not characteristics that come naturally to most people; through engagement with CLVU's political education and leadership training, and their experience as CLVU and CLT leaders, these residents shepherded a participatory process for hiring a new property manager which Alma characterized as "our greatest triumph." It is critical to note that property management is a highly *material* reality in residents' lives, another factor that spurred involvement in the process: "It was the one thing that affected them all equally," Alma said. "Everybody had an issue [with management], so they said, 'You know what, I'm gonna take time out of my busy life and I'm going to deal with this.' And that's what happened."

Thus, through the numerous "containers" created by organizers, staff, and residents at the CLT – residents' meetings, participatory processes, and, indeed, the CLT itself – community-building and collective decision-making can continue apace. These structures and institutions are established by people – organizers and staff members – with a vested interest in developing the agency of low-income tenants, often in collaboration with those very tenants, but who are often not themselves of the population they seek to organize. The following section focuses on the perspective of the tenant as they move through the process of community organizing with City Life and the CLT to shed light on how organizing is experienced.

Table 1. List of community organizing terms

Term	Description
Community organizing	A multifaceted process of coordinating and empowering a base of people, such as tenants, toward a shared goal; may include the other processes listed here.
Community building	Building relationships among members of a community through informal or formal gatherings and exercises, which may include rituals.
Community control	An ongoing and dynamic process and condition in which members of a defined community have both ownership over a shared resource and meaningful participation in how that resource is used.
Political education	Education about how the world works, usually economically or politically, typically with an explicitly political goal; e.g., teaching tenants about the history of neoliberalism to help them understand their current context and identify where to fight back.
Technical education	Education about technical or professional processes, such as affordable housing development; often comes about through resident leadership experience, e.g., learning about budgeting on the CLT board of directors.
"Creating the container"	An approach to community organizing involving the establishment of processes or structures through which members can practice the steps of activism – community-building, political education, making decisions, etc.

From Fear and Instability to "Giving Back": The Tenant's Journey

The process of hiring a property manager was a successful example of organizing CLT residents into a "container" for collective planning and decision-making. Each of the details noted at the end of that story (and in Table 1) are fundamental parts of the process of community organizing, a process that is detailed in this section in order to understand how these resident leaders got to the place where they could facilitate such a collective process. The journey presented here is a construct of various stories shared by my interlocutors, following their experiences from individual tenant facing eviction, to joining with City Life in a campaign to stay in their home, to building a tenant association, joining a community land trust, and

participating in collective decision-making processes at the CLT. This journey, while never as perfectly linear as summarized here, does map neatly onto the three-fold rite of passage as elucidated by anthropologists Arnold van Gennep (1961) and Victor Turner (1969), in which a member of society leaves behind a previous way of being ("separation"), passes through an ambiguous "liminal period" of ritual initiation, and ultimately is "incorporated" into a new grouping, resolving the uncertainty of the liminal period and producing a new subjectivity. In this way, individual and precarious tenants facing eviction enter into CLVU's initially overwhelming and disorienting rituals and political education campaigns, fight amidst uncertainty to keep their home, and emerge through struggle as a part of a collective movement for housing justice. Though not all tenants remain engaged in activist work after their case is resolved, all who take any part in the fight for their homes are fighting for housing justice.

For the sake of organization this narrative is presented in a linear manner, but this process is rarely, if ever, experienced linearly; residents join and drop out of struggles and campaigns, attend political education classes or do not, live on a CLT and take leadership positions or tune them out entirely. By tending to the experience of residents throughout the organizing process, however, we can glean important lessons about the potential of organizing to transform both societal systems and subjectivities, an important reminder for professionals and policymakers to not leave out this essential dimension of affordable housing development and city-making.

Meeting Tenants Where They're At

For low-income tenants, the experience of renting housing is one of constant stress, of monthly concerns over making rent payments, and uncertainty about long-term housing tenure. Factors outside of residents' control dictate whether or not they will be able to stay in their home next month. Because of the profit motive inherent to housing as a commodity, landlords might

look to sell their buildings at any time, evicting the tenants therein in pursuit of a greater sale price, as was the case with 6 Humphreys Place. Or the mortgage market and global financial system might suddenly collapse, and the landlord might be foreclosed on, leaving his tenants without a home, as Alma and Susan experienced at 349 Park Street. The "moment of crisis" that residents face in the event of an eviction can be shattering, an ontological break with their existing ways of being. As such, many residents accept their fate – unless they receive a knock at the door from a tenant organizer.

Steve Meacham, co-lead organizer at City Life/Vida Urbana, was the one knocking on the door of 6 Humphreys Place after learning of the sudden and unjustifiable "no fault" eviction notice served by the landlord. In a "no fault" case, in which the landlord gives no reason for the eviction, Steve says tenants are at even more of a loss:

> As a tenant, you get an eviction notice from your landlord that says, "I want you out by a certain date – I don't want your money, you haven't done anything wrong, I just want you out." Then tenants kind of say "Well, there's nothing I can do." And so the landlord can often get people out, even before the notice to quit, or certainly before they ever file a court case, and that's what would have probably happened [at 6 Humphreys Place] had not we arrived.

Eric Boyd, the longest tenured resident of 6 Humphreys, spoke of the disrespect and insult he felt when the landlord's eviction notice was addressed to the generic "John and Jane Doe":

> [The initial landlord's] way of throwing us out was by naming us all "John Doe and Jane Doe." That, right there, meant to me that he did not care. We weren't worth it, we weren't like, people, to him…
>
> [The new landlord] McCarthy treated us the same way, like we were vagrants or squatters…That lack of compassion – it's just a total disregard of human life, and for him to be profiting off of our suffering was uncalled for and…he had to be stopped. You know, he had to be stopped.

Alma and Susan, current residents and board members of BNCLT, felt a similar experience of helplessness upon receiving word of their landlord's foreclosure and their imminent eviction. "I'd never heard of anyone getting out of a situation like this," Susan said. "And of course, the first thing I thought about was 'I gotta pack and move.'" Oftentimes, without the spur of an organizer, residents tend to do just that. At 349 Park Street, however, Alma showed the fighting spirit; she learned about CLVU online, she said, and insisted to Susan that they check out this organization and learn about their rights. Susan was skeptical, but went along with it: "I've never heard anybody being helped out of any situation like that. I did not know any organization that existed that sounded anything like that, but I took her word for it and went there." It takes a leap of faith to trust an unknown organizer with the fate of your housing, a step into the ambiguous and liminal phase of tenant organizing.

These entries into the housing justice movement, whether through direct, door-to-door outreach by organizers or by tenants actively seeking out CLVU's services, take place almost inherently at moments of crisis. Residents are facing the immediate disaster of losing their homes and time is of the essence. "We have won these major victories at 6 Humphreys," Steve told me, "but an interesting thing to look at is the fact that none of that would have been possible if we had gotten to the building one week later than we did." He continued:

> People fight when they know their rights; when they get support, people choose to fight back, usually. But it's a real problem having people find out about us at the moment that they're experiencing this crisis. If we don't get involved right away, by the time we do get involved, a lot of people have left, if not almost everybody. And so [6 Humphreys] was a case that we got there in time.

The "moment of crisis" is a pivotal one for the journey of tenants facing eviction, a moment of opportunity to join the fight for housing justice. Other liminal moments of transition or

resolution are similarly powerful portals at which residents, having resolved the immediate moment of crisis, may continue their journey in movement the housing justice – or not. After 6 Humphreys Place was purchased by BNCLT, Alma shared that as a member of the board and a fellow tenant activist, she was eager to onboard the residents of 6 Humphreys efficiently:

> If we do not meet them and get them on board with us, we lose them. Because life gets in the way and they get complacent, and when they're complacent they just want to pay their rent - they don't want to do anything else! And I think one of the things is that we have to educate them as to what the land trust is all about.

During these moments of crisis or transition, organizers can invite residents into the movement for housing justice by meeting them where they are at: identifying and understanding their problems and showing them how to fight back. The following subsection describes how passage through those liminal moments feels for residents.

The "Magic" of CLVU's Organizing

Ritual Initiation and Collective Effervescence

After the initial point of contact, whether through organizer door-knocking or through direct outreach from tenants, the next pivotal moment on the resident's journey into housing justice takes place at City Life's weekly Boston Tenant Association (BTA) meetings. Every Tuesday (for English speakers) and Wednesday (for Spanish speakers), CLVU staff, organizers, lawyers, and tenants seeking aid meet to build community, learn together, hear updates about CLVU's work, and get legal guidance. The back half of every meeting is reserved for tenants to meet with lawyers and organizers to plan their case. At the beginning of each BTA meeting, however, tenants who are facing new eviction cases are brought into an important CLVU ritual, a rite of initiation into the housing justice struggle, as they are invited to introduce themselves to the group of 50-60 strangers and describe their housing problems. Some of my interlocutors who

had experienced this practice expressed how nervous and overwhelmed they were during this introductory moment. Susan told me, "Of course, the first time I was scared – I had to come up front and, you know, do a testimony and it was – it was just very nerve wracking. I mean, I was literally, like, frozen." Eric had an amusing reflection on his first BTA meeting, sharing his thoughts on City Life's "sword and shield" anti-eviction tactics: "To be honest with you, the very first meeting that I attended, I sat in my chair and I said, 'What the hell did I get myself into?' I had no idea what they were talking about. I'm like, 'What the hell are you talking about, shields and swords? Am I in, like, Dungeons and Dragons or something?'" As detailed below, the vulnerability that tenants are invited to display during this initiation is an foundational step for establishing a feeling of solidarity among CLVU members.

After these vulnerable introductions, the meeting facilitator asks the new attendees – who invariably are facing threats of eviction – if they are willing to fight to stay in their home. When the tenant tentatively responds, "Yes," they are met with an enthusiastic chorus from the rest of the attendees: "WE WILL FIGHT WITH YOU!" This ritualistic call-and-response demonstrates to new CLVU members that they are not isolated in their struggle for better housing conditions; if they are willing to fight for themselves, they will be supported as part of a movement for housing justice. They will not fight alone. Here we see an example – not for the last time – of what French sociologist Émile Durkheim termed "collective effervescence," a social moment in which folks come together and communicate in the same thought and/or participate in the same action. In his study of religious life, Durkheim writes that this experience serves to unify a group of individuals and might "cause unheard-of actions…restrained by nothing" (1912, 216), after which "men believe themselves transported into an entirely different world form the one they have before their eyes" (1912, 226). In these quotations Durkheim is

describing a delirium which might result from religious effervescent experiences, but my interlocutors would appreciate the suggestion that CLVU's collective practice – in coordination with intentional political education – might open tenants up to new ways of seeing the world and unleash a willingness to fight for that vision.

According to CLVU's director of organizing, the weekly repetition of this ritual at each BTA meeting is "designed to overcome people's sense of isolation" and reinforce the organization's collective mission. Indeed, the residents I interviewed confirmed the notion that repeated exposure to CLVU's community rituals – and the political education that accompanies it – helped them come to understand the organization's mission and motivated them to get involved in leadership positions. As Alma shared, "We told our story and they listened to us and they all agreed to fight with us…We were scared, you know, close to tears and everything like that, but they made us feel so welcome. We believed that they were going to help us when we thought everything was bleak." After tenants experience a break with their existing way of being, this initiation – beginning with fear and uncertainty, proceeding through vulnerability and then a sudden and intense feeling of collective effervescence – brings residents into the "liminal period" (Turner 1969) where doors of opportunity are opened.

Building Belief Through Winning

Residents begin their initial buy-in to CLVU's organizing model through both practical and felt experiences. The BTA meeting serves multiple purposes: it is a site for ritual initiation and developing feelings of solidarity, a practice of collective political education on the housing system, and a venue for legal guidance. As described earlier in this chapter, it is CLVU's combination of these approaches that improves their success at "case work." For residents entering the movement through CLVU, the organization's track record of victories is a crucial, if

obvious factor in deepening their belief in the organizing model. The rallying cry common to CLVU and myriad other social justice activists is a succinct reflection of this belief: "WHEN WE FIGHT, WE WIN!"

After attending their first BTA meeting, Alma and Susan were elated at the feeling of support they experienced through both the introductory ritual and the direct legal advice, but they still worried about their impending eviction following their landlord's foreclosure. As the day of the foreclosure auction approached, CLVU organizers were busy at work planning a protest that ultimately directly disrupted the auction on their front steps, chasing off the auctioneer and ending the auction. Even after the foreclosure auction was interrupted, Susan went to housing court for her eviction hearing, expecting the worst, but "when my case came up, the judge said to me, 'City Life has taken care of everything - what are you doing here?' And that's when I believed it." The success of the "sword" – the direct action taken against the foreclosure auction – and the "shield" – legal defense utilized in housing court – were complemented with the ultimate housing justice goal of the "offer," as CLVU worked with Alma and Susan to keep them housed through securing the re-purchase of their now-former landlord's mortgage by the recently created Coalition for Occupied Homes in Foreclosure (COHIF), which would go on to become BNCLT. Now residents and board leaders of BNCLT, Alma and Susan have continued to volunteer with CLVU and sit on the organization's Leadership Team, co-chairing the CLT Subcommittee. Their series of victories – from direct action disrupting foreclosure, to legal victories preventing eviction, to COHIF stabilizing their home – helped to convince Alma and Susan of the value of staying committed to the housing justice movement.

The campaign of the 6 Humphreys Place tenant association is a model case in how early victories can give tenants the confidence needed to remain engaged in the struggle, building up

to larger wins. When their original landlord, Gabriel Lepe, issued a building-wide notice to quit in February 2018 in preparation for the sale of the building, the residents of 6 Humphreys Place sought help from City Life. They protested outside of 6 Humphreys to build pressure on the landlord, but ultimately the legal defense strategy led to a quick and early win. Because Lepe, in his ignorance and haste, had addressed the eviction notices to "John and Jane Doe," the residents were able to overturn the evictions in court. This victory, as Steve of City Life tells it, was a moment of realization for tenants: "When people saw, 'Oh my God, this [eviction] isn't a foregone conclusion…We went to court, and we won!'" The building was still ultimately sold to Greg McCarthy, but the residents were able to stay in their home, and with renewed confidence, they were now prepared to say: "Okay, let's fight this guy too." Against McCarthy, both the sword and shield were employed to great effect. The "sword" became a neighborhood-wide campaign against not only McCarthy's attempted clear-out of 6 Humphreys residents but also against his proposed development of luxury condos at the neighboring 706 Dudley Street, which included numerous protests at 6 Humphreys and the disruption of a public meeting about McCarthy's proposal. Meanwhile, the legal victories through the "shield" secured a court-ordered rental contract that contained conditions stipulating that the tenants could reserve rent payment until long-needed property improvements were made. This sequence of wins gave the tenant association the immediate material benefit of stability in their homes, but also the confidence needed to stay in the struggle for their building over four long years until the Boston Neighborhood CLT finally acquired the building. It's another fundamental tenet of organizing: secure smaller achievements early in order to build a sustained movement for larger victories later. The "magic" of the initiation rituals experienced by residents develops into a staid belief in what the movement can achieve through struggle.

"Behind the Curtain": Political and Technical Education in Tenant Organizing

The experience of facing eviction and joining the struggle for housing justice can be overwhelming for residents: the stress and uncertainty of an eviction filing is enormously unsettling, but joining a City Life meeting – where folks are talking about "swords and shields," inviting you to share your story in front of a crowd of strangers, and hollering that they will fight with you – can add to the confusion, at least at first; as referenced earlier, Eric's initial reaction to his first BTA meeting was, "What the hell did I get myself into?" Alma and Susan also described feeling scared and confused at their first meeting. Even after staving off eviction, the next stage of the City Life/BNCLT housing justice model – the "offer" – is accompanied by another wave of new and challenging concepts, changing property relations, and shifting community relationships. However, my resident interlocutors demonstrated how, through continued exposure and careful study through various political education programs with CLVU and BNCLT, they came to better understand the tactical skills of tenant organizing and the technical elements of housing development. The understanding brought about by this "democratization of knowledge" through political education and practice has helped residents develop into committed leaders in the movement for housing justice. In many ways this stage represents the resolution of Turner's rite of passage; residents have survived the initial and disorienting break, passed through the liminal and ambiguous phase of initiation, and come out the other side as politically engaged tenant activists. The "magic" of CLVU and BNCLT's work is revealed for the technical and political labor that it is, and an appreciation of that labor engenders even deeper feelings of appreciation in the residents who benefit from it, leading to a desire to "give back."

To sustain and deepen the process of tenant politicization, CLVU and BNCLT rely on political and popular education in many aspects of their operations: “There's political education in everything we do,” CLVU’s Steve Meacham told me. The final third of every Boston Tenants Association (BTA) meeting is reserved for some sort of political discussion – legislation, electoral strategy, upcoming campaigns – with the 50-80 people who attend those meetings. However, the in-depth education on organizing strategy and City Life’s theory of change come in the form of smaller programs of committed tenant leaders, including the “100 Cadre” curriculum on community organizing; a displacement defenders training; an anti-oppression course; and a series called radical organizing methods. City Life also developed a three-part series called the CLT Ambassador program, which Cole of BNCLT facilitated in their capacity as organizer, that focuses on educating residents and the broader public about the CLT model and details opportunities for community control. These education programs, in combination with direct and ongoing experience in leadership, appear to be essential to the development of committed activists among CLVU and the CLT’s base of tenants: Steve told me that “the people who are more likely to stay with City Life after their struggle is resolved are people who have been through those kinds of trainings and understand that there's a bigger picture.”

Susan and Alma are shining examples of the impact that the democratization of technical affordable housing knowledge can have on tenant leadership development. Two of BNCLT’s most engaged resident leaders, both spoke to the importance of their experiences with CLVU – including the CLT Ambassadors program and the 100 Cadre training – as formative reasons for their committed leadership, as these trainings taught them about displacement, foreclosures and evictions, and about the basics of community organizing. Through these trainings and their experiences as BNCLT board members, Alma and Susan have come to realize the sheer amount

of work that goes into fighting evictions and acquiring properties for affordable housing. When asked why other CLT residents aren't as engaged in leadership as she and Alma are, Susan said, "I think one of the reasons is that Alma and I were the first ones to go through this sort of eviction, that City Life had helped, in this group [of residents]…I don't know if the other neighbors don't realize the fight that went into getting this land trust established, you know?" Alma directly attributed her commitment to housing justice leadership to her realization of the collective effort that CLVU and BNCLT put into stabilizing her home: "Why I'm still here with City Life is because I did not realize how much went into saving our home, Josh. I didn't realize the hours of meetings, negotiating, money, time, people that went into it… I say this all the time and it's true: It really humbled me. And I said, you know what? I need to give back." Though they are not professional housing developers by training, Alma and Susan are constantly exposed to the technical considerations of property acquisition and development in their positions as BNCLT board members and, through that learning process, are more fully aware of the sheer amount of work that went into stabilizing their housing and creating the community land trust. "I didn't understand the deed restrictions, you know, how they bought the land and stuff like that – I do now, I understand how that happens," Alma said. "Involvement with BNCLT and City Life has helped me learn a lot," Susan added. "When the land trust was being explained to us, we did not have a grasp on it. We are only understanding it now that we are living in it and have that experience. All of that information is now making sense."

Because of that understanding, Alma and Susan are more motivated to "give back" to the CLT and CLVU by volunteering as board members and leadership team members. "Giving back" has a powerful connotation as a political subjectivity; while not explicitly political in nature, it points toward a feeling of mutuality and reciprocity that demonstrates the lasting

impact that City Life's organizing has had on tenants who were not politically active prior to their anti-eviction campaigns. For Susan, that activism has taken the form of supporting fellow tenants through their legal cases in court:

> I'd never wanted to see a courthouse again after the last day I had been there. But I knew how these people felt; I knew how people would come to court in the same situation where I was, where they did not believe that that City Life was going to help them and had to be convinced like no, you don't have to sign anything, and only the judge can have say in terms of whether you live in that house or you don't, or if you're evicted. Otherwise, nobody actually has the last say in that.

Despite emotional trauma associated with court, Susan was willing to show up in this way for tenants going through what she had previously experienced. Like Alma, Susan directly attributed her commitment to supporting fellow tenants – in court, in leadership, and in the streets – to her experiences with CLVU: "That's what City Life has brought me to do. Being on their leadership team, or when I go to the rallies or protests that we have…just getting involved and trying to give back to City Life how much they gave to me – which is just, you know, not measurable."

Thus, tenant leaders in the housing justice movement in Boston attribute their level of commitment to numerous factors: the direct experience of confronting eviction and being supported by City Life's community of organizers; the political education offered by CLVU and BNCLT which has helped them better understand the work of tenant organizing and the CLT model; and leadership experience on the CLT board which has helped them grapple with the technical challenges of property acquisition and housing development. These experiences have helped these tenants understand the sheer amount of labor that goes into an organizing campaign or a property acquisition, and that understanding – and their compassion for their fellow tenants – motivates them to "give back" to the movement that saved them. The democratization of knowledge and leadership helps expand CLVU and BNCLT's base of members, building

organizational capacity and putting control of the movement into the hands of those most affected by the housing crisis.

The Community Land Trust as a "Liberated Zone"?

Community organizers from City Life/Vida Urbana and Dorchester Not For Sale (DN4S) describe the community land trust as a place of potential for the continuation of the process of politicization and subject change that often begins with City Life's organizing and political education. "The nonprofit-owned housing should not be an island in the middle of a sea of sharks. It should be a kind of a liberated zone, a platform from which the struggle can be launched," as Steve of CLVU described it. The hope of these organizers is that the permanent housing stability and pathways to community control offered by the CLT should enable the continued construction of a collective of residents seeking to change the city around them, another "container" for practicing self-governance. Community control cannot be taken for granted, however; it must be constantly fought for through organizing and political education. Indeed, as Thaden and Lowe write,

> Sometimes CLTs act in partnership and service to the community, whereby the broader community and residents of CLT properties are governing the organization and deeply engaged in the work of the organization. Sometimes, however…"community control" is not much more than a symbolic message used by CLTs to explain their missions or intentions. Ultimately, the actualization of community control relies upon both the depth and breadth of resident and community participation and leadership within a CLT (2014, 1).

This section discusses the promise and potential limitations of the community land trust as a vehicle for community control in Boston.

Challenges in Enacting Community Control at BNCLT

The staff and resident leaders of BNCLT are committed to a vision of community control and practice many of the steps described in this chapter in pursuit of that goal: community building, political and technical education, and participatory processes are all features of the CLT. The priorities of the CLT are clearly reflected in their staffing decisions: the second staff person hired was Cole, a community organizer. However, while the process of enacting community control at BNCLT has come a long way in a short period of time, it has been uneven and marked by challenges.

Onboarding and Finding Common Problems

The resident-driven process of hiring a new property manager, as described in the introduction to this chapter, is the most laudable example of community control thus far for BNCLT. Its success, in part, was because property management was a problem common to nearly every resident of the trust: "Everybody had an issue [with property management]," as Alma told me. However, identifying common material concerns around which to build campaigns for community control appears to be a challenge for the organization. Alma noted how many tenants only remain engaged in residents' meetings when facing pressing material concerns: "Now that we picked [a new property manager], we ain't going to hear from anyone…That was a common issue that affected everybody, so they showed up. Next week, after we finished with that, we didn't get much people on the call." While not inherently a bad thing – residents have lives to lead outside of the CLT's organizational work – this phenomenon does present a challenge to the efforts of the board and staff to create a community of engaged residents.

One practice that could assist the organization in its goals to build resident camaraderie and ensure more consistent participation is the use of rituals. As discussed earlier in this chapter, Alma had an urgent concern about onboarding the residents of 6 Humphreys Place as the organization acquired their home, because "we might lose them" if they aren't initiated in a timely manner during their transition to the CLT. Her concern about onboarding demonstrates her concern for the residents and desire to welcome them to the community, but it also reflects a lack of regular initiation and other ritual practices on the trust. These rituals may seem like a band-aid over a lack of genuine community, but as Durkheim and Turner argue, they can in fact be a crucial step toward building both community and belief among residents in the project of community control on the land trust.

Democratizing Technical Knowledge

Outside of the tenant leaders on BNCLT's board and those who participate in processes such as hiring the property manager, many do not engage in CLT decision-making. Moreover, some residents actively question the CLT's strategy. To pursue its mission of stabilizing communities, BNCLT is constantly seeking to acquire more residential buildings, such as 6 Humphreys Place. Sometimes this comes at the chagrin of existing CLT residents, who take issue with the organization's decision to acquire new properties while they have ongoing problems with their own apartments. Why invest funds in acquiring new buildings rather than addressing problems with the existing ones? In response to these concerns, BNCLT's organizer and executive director planned a participatory budgeting workshop to help residents understand the organization's revenue streams and expenditures, offering a chance for residents to learn and give input on how to shift those cash flows. The CLT staff aimed to use a popular education

model for this workshop, but only four residents attended. Some reflection on why participation might be so low in this case is warranted.

Putting this workshop example in contrast with the property management hiring process illustrates a few important points about participation. For the latter, residents identified management as an issue common to them all, a structural problem against which they could struggle collectively. Residents were involved in the design of the interview process, took part in interviews themselves, and made a democratic decision after considering their options. This was a case where residents were intimately familiar with the needs and details at hand (i.e., management of their own apartments); the deeper knowledge of and stake in the issue resulted in residents more engaged in the process. The participatory budgeting workshop, on the other hand, felt more like an opportunity for the CLT to tell residents why and how the staff and board make decisions about expenditures. It was designed, at least nominally, to allow for input from residents, but their lack of familiarity with the topic meant that they could not make informed decisions about the budget and thus, perhaps, were less inclined to participate. While this was a laudable effort to "democratize knowledge" through popular education on a topic, it was not immediately relevant and accessible to residents' interests or needs, and participation suffered as a result. This comparison shows the importance of combining organizing and education in the process of participation; with longer-term and more intentional processes, as was the case with property management hiring, the CLT sees more success.

Activism as a "Second Life": Conditions of Everyday Life and Leadership Capacity

It is essential that CLT practitioners and their activist allies design processes and structures for residents to participate in meaningful decision-making about their housing. Regardless of those processes, however, the capacity of residents to respond and remain engaged

with housing justice activism is sometimes dictated by their material circumstances. All tenants who attend CLVU meetings receive some form of political education, and many already have a keen analysis of the housing system, but not all have the time and energy outside of work, childcare, elder care, and so on to put that education into practice through organizing. Activists strive to make participation more accessible through the provision of food and childcare during meetings; even during the pandemic, BNCLT leadership delivered food packages to residents for their virtual monthly meetings.

Regardless of these efforts, however, material conditions and life stages dictate one's capacity to participate. For instance, though Alma still works full-time, she is in a phase of her life with some capacity to take on leadership roles in the CLT and CLVU:

> I feel like this [work with CLVU and BNCLT] has given me another life, you know? I was a full-time working mom, a single mom, raising five kids. I was very involved in their extracurricular activities. And so that was my life, right? I raised my kids and what have you. So now I have a second life, if you will.

Alma's "second life" refers to the fact that she was very involved in community around her kids' lives – as a cheerleading coach and driver for Sunday school – but now centers her volunteer work "for others, for my community," instead of for her kids. This framing highlights the conditions of personal life that may dictate residents' capacity to commit to activist activities; if Alma still had all the responsibilities of raising children and volunteering around their activities, she might struggle to make time for CLT board and CLVU leadership meetings.

Other facets of these limitations are reflected in the experiences of other residents I spoke with, both of whom had engaged with CLVU and other organizations in the past but who simply did not have the time in their schedules to commit to sustained movement work. Eric, the 6 Humphreys resident who was initially overwhelmed by City Life's rituals and strategic theory,

soon came to understand the messaging and quickly stepped into leadership, before having to step down because of work:

> After a while, I started to see and started to understand what they meant…and I got involved: I joined the leadership team, I became part of the Boston Jobs Coalition, I got involved in the Dorchester Organizing Committee. But unfortunately, because of work I had to stop doing all that, because of the times that [CLVU] needed and now the times that I had to work – it just didn't come together.

Despite his full schedule, Eric maintained an interest in joining the board of directors of BNCLT throughout the process of the trust's acquisition of 6 Humphreys, and now sits on the board. Josefina, a current BNCLT resident, shared her similar experience with trying to make time for CLT activities despite a full work schedule:

> My schedule is very tough and a lot of times I wanna go to the [CLT] meeting but I don't have time to go. But I'm going every month to their [residents] meeting – now we have the Zoom so I don't have to go nowhere, so it's more accessible, more opportunity for the people participating, you know?

The pandemic-induced change to Zoom meetings has helped busy residents like Josefina join monthly residents' meetings and has served as an accessible way to build a sense of community for residents across the scattered-site CLT. However, the material conditions of the personal lives of residents like Eric and Josefina – who must work long hours to build up wealth for their families and their futures – can restrict their ability to consistently volunteer their time. Alma and Susan, meanwhile, are at a point in their lives – with fewer working hours and no kids at home – that enables them to step into leadership roles. All four have been shaped by processes of struggle, organizing, and education, and have developed sharp political analyses as a result; that they show up and maintain their commitment when able is a reflection of this, but their ability to

do so is shaped by personal material realities. Perhaps the CLT's affordable housing can be a balm to relieve some of that material stress.

Conclusion

The acquisition and development of permanently affordable housing, removed from the speculative market, is an essential step in creating an alternative form of property relations and new forms of political subjectivity. Without continued radical organizing and political education, however, residents might become content to "pay their rents and keep their heads down," and the community land trust may go the way of the community development corporation, so to speak – slotting into existing legal frameworks and not challenging private property relations themselves. This chapter documents the ways in which City Life/Vida Urbana and the Boston Neighborhood Community Land Trust work as individual organizations and together as part of a movement to shift how residents think about their relationships to each other, their housing, and their neighborhoods, with an aim toward building sustained resident engagement in the movement for housing justice in Boston.

The process of creating politically engaged residents capable of making decisions together about their land and housing is multifaceted and nonlinear. As this chapter discusses, this process – called community organizing – involves meeting tenants in their moment of crisis, building relationships among them, identifying common problems, learning about the political and technical dimensions of those problems, and fighting together to change them. In the process, residents are "initiated" into the movement for housing justice by ritual events at CLVU meetings and undergo a rite of passage that takes many from disoriented and disempowered individual tenants to informed and confident leaders of the movement. Participation in the process to change the world produces changed resident subjectivities in the process. A close

study of the journey of the resident through CLVU's organizing process, and the approach that organizers themselves take in shaping that journey, can help practitioners at other resident-facing organizations understand what makes an impactful organizing process.

City Life and BNCLT both favor an empowering, organizing-based approach to resident engagement, which their organizers contrast with the "service provision" model utilized by many community development corporations and other nonprofit organizations. "Service provision" can deliver material needs to residents but it does not challenge existing relations of power; it reinforces a patronizing and clientelist relationship between the nonprofit and residents and does not build tenant power. Material resources are essential, to be sure, but without ceding control over how those resources are distributed or developed by giving residents a way to make decisions about them, simple service provision is not transformative. In fact, by combining legal services, policy advocacy, and organizing, CLVU both effectively builds tenant power while improving standard metrics of success such as case load. As CLVU's organizer said, "Providing people the social backup for using their legal rights is really a critical part of winning, and providing that social backup is organizing." It's not simply a matter of bestowing rights or resources on a community; they need to be empowered to act in order to win.

To continue the development of resident leaders, housing justice organizers utilize rituals as well as political and technical education. The "sword, shield, and offer" tactical approach of CLVU helps the organization demonstrate its value to residents; as they accrue victories, they see the benefits of CLVU's approach and come to believe in the model. Pairing tactical success with "political education in everything we do" helps tenants understand why organizing is important and helps instill a desire in them to commit to supporting their fellow tenants. At BNCLT, their resident board members Alma and Susan committed themselves to leadership after

coming to understand just how much work went into stabilizing their housing through CLVU and COHIF (BNCLT's predecessor); this "democratization of knowledge" ensured their buy-in and commitment to "give back" to the movement that saved them.

My research also demonstrates, however, that these forms of political education and organizing must be materially relevant to tenants to ensure their engagement, while at the same time, residents' material lives will dictate their capacity to respond to these engagements. Tenants are engaged in anti-eviction activism not because they find it abstractly interesting, but rather because it is an immediately pressing material concern – they may lose their housing! By offering political education to supplement tenants' understanding of the structural reasons why evictions happen, CLVU hope to sustain their engagement through a political analysis that emphasizes the shared nature of this struggle. Once the immediate threat of eviction has receded, however, tenants sometimes "fall back" into everyday life and no longer attend CLVU's meetings. As low-income tenants, they have more pressing concerns to attend to: working long hours, often at multiple jobs, while tending to children or elders or maintaining a household. The hope of CLVU's organizers is that, in permanently affordable CLT housing, tenants would not need to work so hard to make rent. Steve aspired to the CLT as a "liberated zone" where tenants could continue and deepen their politicization due in part to their stable housing enabling further engagement.

BNCLT's record so far demonstrates the potential and the contradictions of this "liberated zone" model. Indeed, the CLT's experiences demonstrate how material needs are a critical motivating factor for engagement. Residents are understandably more engaged in meetings and processes that address immediate material concerns: The most laudable example of community control at the CLT thus far has been the process of hiring a new property

management company after residents had issues with the responsiveness and quality of the existing manager. Residents were deeply involved in the hiring process, from the drafting of criteria for a request for proposals, to writing and asking questions during interviews, to democratically deciding on their choice for a new management company. However, the CLT's resident leaders pointed out how after that process was resolved, there were far fewer attendees at their monthly residents meetings.

Those residents who sustain their leadership in the CLT demonstrate the importance of tenant organizing in the creation of new tenant subjectivities. Alma and Susan went through the process of organizing against eviction with CLVU and won the transfer of their home to the CLT. Through their experiences with CLVU and now the CLT, they have come to understand how much work went into saving their home; this "democratization" of the technical knowledge of organizing and housing acquisition has ensured their commitment to "giving back" to the housing justice movement. Notably, however, material conditions in their lives have also enabled them to stay engaged, as they no longer have children at home to take care of. The affordability of the CLT housing certainly helps as well, but it is not sufficient to ensure resident engagement. Continued organizing must accompany the material benefit of CLT housing.

Through these practices of community-building, political and technical education, and leadership development, City Life/Vida Urbana and the Boston Neighborhood Community Land Trust work together to not only provide stable housing to residents, but also the opportunity for residents to realize their own potential as agents of change in their community. A commitment to radical organizing – whether from CLVU or the CLT itself – ensures that nonprofit housing organizations like BNCLT will not lose their potential as a space to build new political subjectivities and alter property relations. This commitment does not simply "magically" happen

as the CLT removes property from the speculative market; it must be actively struggled for. Without this organizational commitment to radical participation, tenants might never come to exercise their right to the city.

Chapter 4. Constructive Resistance: Tenant Organizing and CLT Housing in the Struggle for Housing Justice

To better explain how City Life/Vida Urbana understands its relationship with CLTs and other forms of "social ownership," CLVU's co-lead organizer Steve Meacham sent me an essay by the sociologist scholar-activist Stellan Vinthagen introducing the idea of "constructive resistance." In this piece, Vinthagen elucidates a framework essential for understanding the importance of both the "resistance" work of CLVU's anti-eviction campaigns and the "constructive" task of creating new institutions such as CLTs, and how each is stronger for working to support the other. In this sense, constructive resistance can be viewed in the same vein as W.E.B DuBois's concept of "abolitionist democracy," which Angela Davis tells us "is not only, or not even primarily, about abolition as a negative process of tearing down, but it is also about building up, about creating new institutions." DuBois, she says, "pointed out that in order to fully abolish the oppressive conditions produced by slavery, new democratic institutions would have to be created" (A. Davis 2005, 73; quoted in House and Okafor 2020). This abolitionist framing can be applied to my analysis of appropriation and participation in the housing justice movement: activists seek to do away with the system of housing commodification that leads to eviction and instability, while creating "new democratic institutions," such as CLTs, to fulfill those goals.

The tensions within this dual pattern of practice are examined in an essay about community activism with and through community-controlled housing entitled "Land Power." Highlighting the Caño Martín Peña Community Land Trust in Puerto Rico, Cassim Shepard

writes “Organizers in the Caño neighborhoods often describe [a] dynamic…tension between *protesta* and *propuesta*, between protesting existing circumstances and proposing something new.” In the same piece, Jerry Maldonado, the former Director of the Cities & States program at the Ford Foundation, characterizes this tension as a balance between ‘“fighting back and fighting forward.” The move from protest to proposal, he told Shepard, “requires centering community and centering this aspiration for what self-determination actually means”’ (Shepard 2022). As Vinthagen argues, however, resistance and constructive work are not only in tension, but also are interdependent, and are each benefited by that interdependence. Speaking of the Brazilian grassroots Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (MST; the Landless Workers Movement), he observes:

> Their resistance creates the possibility of breaking the chains of the exploitative capitalist modernity that entraps them in poverty, injustice, repression and isolation from each other. Resistance is what makes the re-creation of communities possible, and the building of community is what makes resistance possible. It is an integrated form of “constructive resistance.” (Vinthagen 2022)

The MST’s twinned work of fighting against the commodifying forces of Brazilian capitalism through land occupations, while constructing new communities and institutions of care on occupied land, has led them to success as one of the largest social movements in the world. At a more local scale, MST’s constructive resistance serves as a model for the cooperative approach between CLVU’s activism and BNCLT’s housing acquisition to create a sustained and robust movement for housing justice.

To better understand the benefits gained from synthesizing construction and resistance, it is worth reflecting on Vinthagen’s observations of the limitations of each practice in isolation. “By combining resistance with constructive work, they avoid the fundamental weaknesses of each approach,” he writes. “For resistance, that weakness is to just be against, to protest, critique

and obstruct what is 'unjust' and 'wrong,' and to demand that others – often the state – correct it." Here, Vinthagen reinforces a point made by several of my interlocutors: Organizers from BNCLT and CLVU both discussed how they seek to avoid a "service model" approach to organizing, one that would reinforce a paternalistic relationship between residents and the organization (or in Vinthagen's example, the state), preferring instead an empowering, "protagonistic" approach that emphasizes resident agency (see e.g. Harnecker 2015). Resistance work that does not build independent political power is not transformative, Vinthagen argues. Additionally, I have observed how an exclusive focus on oppositional work can lead to burnout, as activists are so focused on fighting against a system of oppression that they can deprive themselves of the hopeful feeling that accompanies the visionary work of creating new institutions. By engaging in the construction of alternative systems, activists can sustain their resistance work through building both community and material structures – like permanently affordable housing – that can enable ongoing activism.

Turning to constructive work, Vinthagen writes, "[T]he fundamental weakness is to only build up what is already tolerated, legal and fits into the existing system, like adding new alternatives for us to choose from in a market." This concern reflects those criticisms of the non-profit industrial complex and of the professionalizing trends in community development organizations observed by many scholars and activists previously discussed in this thesis (e.g., INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence 2017; Piven and Cloward 1979; DeFilippis, Stromberg, and Williams 2018). Without the radical edge brought by activism rooted in resistance, newly constructed institutions tend to avoid "rocking the boat." New alternatives are created, yes, but only those which do not upend existing power relations; transformative

potential is quashed as these constructions are coopted into the existing system, following the path of Polanyi's "double movement" (2001).

Only together – construction and resistance explicitly working in tandem – can transformative progress be made and sustained:

> Resistance will always face repression if it is strong and poses a real challenge to the elites and the privileged. It will need resources and a community to survive and endure. Meanwhile, constructive work will always be co-opted if it becomes popular enough that corporations exploit and steal it to make a profit. Resolve and struggle are needed to maintain the foundational values and principles of constructive work, in order to push the limits and break the rules that otherwise force it to conform to existing systems. (Vinthagen 2022)

This quote highlights the two phenomena that resistance and construction must respectively fight against – repression and cooptation – and the ways that cooperation between organizations undertaking these types of work enables each to do so successfully.

Steve of CLVU considers partner housing nonprofits like BNCLT to be part of the constructive work of housing justice in Boston. As CLVU's co-director Mike Leyba put it, social housing work is a natural outgrowth of their organizing strategy, as they seek to build tenant power and keep residents in their homes. The relationship between the organizations that he and my other interlocutors describe fits into the frameworks offered by academics commenting on the role of community organizing among nonprofits like CDCs and CLTs – notably, that external groups might need to be the one doing the radical organizing (Stoecker 1997; Lenz 1988). In studying the model that CLVU and BNCLT present as a grassroots organizing group and a social housing nonprofit, I came to realize that many of the organizations that make up the Greater Boston Community Land Trust Network ("GBCLTN" n.d.) have followed a similar pattern: the organizing work of the Chinese Progress Association (CPA) was integral to the founding of the Chinatown Community Land Trust (CCLT), which now owns several of the neighborhood's

historic rowhouses ("About" n.d.), while the Chelsea-based environmental justice organization GreenRoots is in the beginning stages of supporting a new CLT, named Communidades Enraizadas ("Rooted Communities"), with its base of largely Latinx immigrant families ("2021 Accomplishments" n.d.). In fact, one of the national models for successful community-oriented development is Boston's Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI), a community group that created its land trust, Dudley Neighbors Inc. (DNI), back in the 1980s. Clearly, the model of constructive resistance has caught on among members of the Boston-area housing activists. The remainder of this chapter takes a close look at the ways that the relationship of resistance and construction is playing out through the work of City Life/Vida Urbana and BNCLT, including how the individuals who make up each organization strategically navigate around existing institutions as they seek to resist those and build others anew.

"Co-Conspiring" Across Organizations: Two Facets of the Same Movement

In Boston's housing justice movement, various community organizations and nonprofits are working together to prevent displacement of residents long marginalized by the City and by the private developers who dominate the process of urbanization here, while building with those residents the power necessary to create an alternative system. The tactics adapted by housing justice activists and allied social housing developers disrupt existing capitalist city-making practices at the same time as they open space for the construction of new collectives and new political subjects in the city. In this section, I examine two vivid examples of how City Life/Vida Urbana and the Boston Neighborhood Community Land Trust "co-conspire," with an explicit recognition of the other's role and limitations, to support each other's operations – and by extension the housing justice movement more broadly. The land trust – an example of the new

construction described above – cannot be built without the resistance work of community organizing and activism. Constructive resistance is the way forward for housing justice, and my interlocutors demonstrate how it is practiced – through relationships, a recognition of roles and restrictions on action, and a strategic navigating of the existing system.

While organizations such as City Life/Vida Urbana and the Boston Neighborhood Community Land Trust have unique roles and specialties – and certain operational limitations – they often move together toward common goals as different facets of the same movement for housing justice. City Life's tactic of the "offer" most clearly links these two organizations together through the ultimate aim of appropriating land for community use through the CLT's purchase of housing where CLVU has been organizing tenants against eviction. CLVU's tenant organizing – including building community through rituals and tenant associations, political and technical education – also serves to prepare residents for collective management of their housing as part of the CLT. Indeed, two of BNCLT's resident leaders and several residents of 6 Humphreys Place have gone through the CLT Ambassador program and served on the Leadership Team of CLVU and, perhaps because of those experiences, are now members of the board of BNCLT. Community building and leadership development should continue – and, indeed, deepen – after residents join the CLT. This is the radical vision of the activists who conceive of the CLT as a "liberated zone."

Each organization faces constraints on its operations as part of this coalition, however. The Boston Neighborhood Community Land Trust, as a property owner and developer, "does have assets to protect," which can "complicate things," as a few organizers told me. Like all nonprofit affordable housing developers, CLTs need support from the City of Boston and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts for zoning and other housing permitting, as well as for the

public subsidies essential to providing the deep affordability that BNCLT aims for. The CLT also relies on private parties such as banks, philanthropic institutions, and property owners for its operations and acquisitions through loans, grants, and land sales. Staff at the CLT and City Life both recognize the importance of these structural relationships in the success of the CLT, and by extension, the housing justice movement. They understand that the CLT cannot afford to alienate funders and policymakers. As Steve Meacham of CLVU described,

> Certainly, we recognize that a building owner and a building buyer – which, bottom line, is what a land trust does – they're going to play a different role in the movement than we do. And we kind of want them to play a different role in the movement! We want them to be able to buy [property], we want them to have good credentials with other development institutions so that when they decide to buy something, they can!

The intentional navigation of construction and resistance between CLVU and BNCLT is apparent in their strategy surrounding protests, including a notable protest campaign against 6 Humphreys Place landlord Greg McCarthy. In the midst of his efforts to evict the residents of 6 Humphreys, McCarthy proposed a new five-story mixed-use building right down the street from the building at 706 Dudley Street. Of the proposed building's 26 condominiums, only three would be affordable, per the City's inclusionary development policy. Residents and activists in the area were outraged at the landlord's temerity to clear out low-income tenants at 6 Humphreys with one hand while proposing a new building, unaffordable to the neighborhood, with the other. City Life and Dorchester Not 4 Sale organized protests with 6 Humphreys residents at their building and disrupted a BPDA hearing about the development, ultimately managing to indefinitely forestall the proposal.

Notably absent from this string of protests were the staff of the organization that would ultimately come to acquire 6 Humphreys Place: the Boston Neighborhood Community Land

Trust. Because they were in ongoing negotiations with McCarthy over 6 Humphreys Place, CLT staffers felt that they should not actively and publicly antagonize him. However, both BNCLT and CLVU staff recognize those limitations and operate with an understanding of the other's role. BNCLT's community organizer Cole shared their reflections:

> Sometimes we play a very particular role – like for example, we couldn't make a stink about 6 Humphreys, because we're prospective buyers…When they were organizing protests, I couldn't go because I'm a staff member of the CLT. But we play a really critical role – so even if we're not the boots-on-the-ground organizing, like at protests against what's going on with the BPDA, we play the critical role of acquiring these really hard to rehab properties, really tough properties.

An interlocutor from CLVU shared a similar perspective from their partnership with BNCLT's predecessor, the Coalition for Occupied Homes In Foreclosure (COHIF), saying that "there were certain times when COHIF would say, 'We really can't go to that protest,' and make a strategic decision to have that little bit of separation… If they were trying to buy from a certain landlord and we were protesting that landlord that they would deliberately stay away from that from that." Meridith of BNCLT later clarified that they do not avoid public direct action per se, but strategically opt out of protest in the midst of transactions as with 6 Humphreys. In these cases, CLVU and BNCLT consciously performed the roles of resistance and construction, fully cognizant of the other's part to play in the dynamic movement for housing justice. An outside observer might critically note that the staff of the housing developer were conspicuously absent from these protests, but in reality the CLT staff, as part of a strategy to preserve their role as a property buyer, intentionally refrained from attending. BNCLT could thus negotiate with the landlord, confident that CLVU and other grassroots groups were handling the more confrontational, "activist" arm of the movement – a form of resistance that not only secured stability for residents in the short-term, but ultimately enabled the successful acquisition of 6

Humphreys through constructive resistance, as discussed later. Each organization has its own part to play, and each is made stronger because of the work of the other.

Funding is another operational area where CLVU and BNCLT have "co-conspired." In my interview with CLVU's grant writer Irene Glassman, she shared her perspective on how certain philanthropic foundations may be preferential in the activities or organizations that they fund and offered a glimpse into how CLVU and BNCLT work creatively around those preferences. "There are funders who would not necessarily be interested – or might even be a little averse – to funding City Life," she told me. "Because of the kind of organizing that we do – the direct actions, the more confrontational, controversial elements inherent in organizing – they see community development, even CLTs, as easier to think about funding." It's a common refrain in literature about organizing and community development that "bricks and mortar" projects are much preferred by mainstream foundations and other funders (Bratt 2006; Stoecker 2003), possibly because it is simply easier to measure and track impact on investments in buildings rather than people, but perhaps also because of political preferences; it is less threatening to capital, even philanthropic capital, to build affordable homes than it is to create politically active residents through organizing. Perhaps even well-intentioned philanthropists also feel a need to "perform" for the capitalist system and support certain elements of the housing movement over others. Regardless, the impact is that housing developers tend to receive more in funding than organizers.

Through relationships among their staff people, CLVU and BNCLT manage to navigate around these institutional constraints as well. As Irene told me, "There have been a couple of times when we've flagged funders to the land trust, saying, 'Oh, you know, we applied to this funder and we were definitely too radical for them. Maybe they'd fund BNCLT' – and that was

successful, actually." In a nod to the behind-the-scenes collaboration between City Life and the CLT, Irene shared how BNCLT's status as a nonprofit affordable housing developer can provide cover for their more radical political aims as a part of the housing justice movement. "There's something that, as radical as a community land trust is, maybe in actuality it has the appearance of – and I use this very tongue-in-cheek – respectability, you know? Because it's not closely associated with the more, I don't know, 'controversial' elements of organizing, the more in-your-face direct action." As with their performance around protests and property acquisition, BNCLT and CLVU strategically coordinate to access resources from a system that prefers a constructive form of action over the resistance form. Only one organization is on the grant, but their coordination brings more total funds into the movement for housing justice. By incorporating subterfuge into constructive resistance in these ways, CLVU and BNCLT "co-conspire", to borrow a phrase from a Dorchester Not For Sale activist, toward the goals of organizing for development without displacement.

Constructive Resistance in Boston's Housing Justice Movement

The pairing of City Life's tenant organizing and BNCLT's social housing development is a clear model of constructive resistance: how organizing against unjust systems enables the establishment of alternative structures, and how those new constructions can sustain resistance work. This section describes a remarkable example of the former, as the tenant power-building work CLVU and other neighborhood organizations has enabled BNCLT to acquire properties while the lack of popular agitation around other opportunities has left the CLT unsuccessful in those efforts. I also take a look at how the longer-term organizing work of the housing justice movement has resulted in institutional changes at the municipal and state levels that have shifted the balance of power – ever so slightly – toward tenants. As these examples in Boston

demonstrate, constructive resistance is a powerful framework for understanding how affordable housing developers can find technical success through organizing for community control and how the tenant power built through such an approach can reinforce itself through systemic changes in housing governance.

For the Boston Neighborhood Community Land Trust, organizing residents to fight for housing justice is not just a high-minded aspiration; in many cases, it is a practical necessity for the organization's success in preserving and creating permanently affordable housing. The story of the 6 Humphreys Place tenant association began as one of resistance, as residents banded together to fight against the no cause evictions unjustly leveled by their landlord, and to protest the terrible conditions of their apartments. Resistance has value on its own; these residents won the right to stay in their homes, and the court ordered their landlord to stop collecting rent until the apartments were brought up to code. Those repairs did not happen until BNCLT purchased the property, however. Meaningful housing justice – not just the right to housing, but control over a clean, safe, and healthy home – was only realized when the alternative approach of the CLT was introduced.

The CLT's approach to housing – permanently affordable and community-controlled – is an alternative to the market and thus represents the construction of a new institutional form of urban living. It is clear, however, that the success of the CLT's alternative model would not be possible without the committed organizing work of residents and activists. Organizing can build political pressure on funders and policymakers; the 6 Humphreys campaign, for instance, received substantial local media coverage (Morales 2018; Trojano 2019a; 2019b; 2020; 2021; Lovett 2021; Daniel 2022) and became an important issue among not just organizers and residents, but also housing officials in the City of Boston. Because of the committed work of

City Life, Dorchester Not For Sale, and the 6 Humphreys tenants themselves, the attention brought to this case meant that city officials were engaged in the negotiations between BNCLT and the owner and were willing to provide significant public funding to help subsidize the acquisition through the City's Acquisition Opportunity Program (AOP) – a funding program established as a result of years of sustained activism.

To further emphasize the importance of tenant organizing to the success of the CLT, BNCLT's executive director Meridith Levy contrasted the 6 Humphreys Place campaign with another acquisition opportunity that the CLT was negotiating around the same time. This other building should have been an "easy" case, with minimal repairs required and a "friendly" landlord open to negotiation, in contrast to the antagonistic McCarthy. Despite these conditions – or perhaps, as the story above might indicate, because of them – the City was not willing to offer nearly as much in public subsidy to BNCLT for the property in question. Meridith suggested that the insufficient City support for this "easy" case may result from the lack of an active organizing campaign around it. "Would the outcome have been different if more community members were directly involved?", she wondered. This comparison illustrates the essential role that tenant organizing has in the process of community acquisition of property. "Community acquisition is a political battle," Meridith told me. "Persuading [the landlord and City officials] is important, yes, but that comes out of political power, arrived at by organizing." Resident power must be built in order to build the CLT.

By building the resident power needed to expand the CLT as described above, the movement can enter into a positive feedback loop: expanding the CLT enables broader movement-building activity, which enables further expansion of the CLT, and so on. In this way, the CLT can act as the basis for an *urban polity*, described by Tony Samara as a social space

through which alternative political subjectivities can be revealed: “Physical housing anchors people and peoples’ lives in specific places, from which polities can grow” (2013, 197). The emergence of these new polities – a new *demos*, a people democratically participating in decisions that shape their lives – can serve as the base of continued political mobilization, as Steve hopes for in his call for “liberated zones.” This island of stability would be a place where community ties can be re-forged and, perhaps, where political education and grassroots organizing might result in new political formations. A recent blog post titled “Advancing Housing Justice” offered a helpful summary of the political dynamics that the creation of a new community of CLT residents might portend:

> Community landowners [and CLT tenants] also become new political players and can change the existing political economy. They form a new political flank—critically, one with an interest in permanent housing affordability, rather than constantly rising land values. As direct agents of community development within a democratically run community-based organization, CLT participants can collectively act to pursue this interest (Sabonis 2022).

The resistance work of the housing justice movement, expanded and enhanced by the construction of new polities on the CLT, has resulted in larger-scale construction of institutions, funding sources, and policies at the legislative level that tilt the balance of forces slowly toward tenant power building, enabling the continued expansion of the positive feedback loop.

The sustained work of City Life and its allies to not just keep residents in their homes but also to organize them into political activists has enabled the housing justice movement of Boston to win some substantial victories in regard to how the City of Boston governs housing development. The Office of Housing Stability, for example, was created by the City in 2016 in order to coordinate and consolidate tenant resources and support; prior to the creation of this office, there was no designated agency responsible for collecting eviction data (Lynds 2016). As

Steve of CLVU put it, the institution of this office was the result of years of advocacy by housing justice activists. At the urging of housing activists and the professional CLT industry, the City has also established the Acquisition Opportunity Program (AOP), a fund dedicated to helping small nonprofits close the gap in the acquisition of existing housing in order to preserve affordability. As described earlier, AOP funding was a major reason that BNCLT could purchase 6 Humphreys Place. The Greater Boston Community Land Trust Network (GBCLTN) continues to advocate for dedicated CLT funding sources at the municipal and state levels, most recently securing $2 million from the City of Boston to create a loan fund for its member CLTs to flexibly leverage in property acquisition. The housing justice movement also continues to push for the Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act (TOPA), which would gives tenants the right of first refusal to buy their home when the landlord puts it up for sale; this bill would facilitate community acquisition of property by enabling tenant associations to partner with nonprofit organizations to buy the home, easing the lengthy and challenging process that BNCLT and the residents of 6 Humphreys had to struggle through ("Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act" 2021; www.topa4ma.org). As they relayed in interviews, several of my resident interlocutors actively campaigned for the passage of TOPA.

The long-term organizing of the housing justice movement has slowly shifted institutional power in the City, as reflected in these new funds and agencies, while short-term campaigns create the pressure needed to get those new institutional powers in motion in support of the tenants of 6 Humphreys. In so doing, this resistance – both short- and long-term – has enabled both the construction of alternative property models like the BNCLT and of changes in institutional power at higher levels.

Residence and Leadership: Tenants in Constructive Resistance

In implementing CLVU's vision of the CLT as a "liberated zone," BNCLT has met with uneven success. It has certainly, however, provided a strong base for its residents to participate in decision-making processes and, moreover, to live more stable and full lives. To understand this reality, I modify the notion of "resistance" into a broader concept of "residence," a sense of a fuller and easier life for the residents of Boston. In so doing, I echo Lefebvre's framing of *habitat* – a sterile and isolated home – and *to inhabit*, a way of being in and engaging with the city (1996). Indeed, a synthesis between this dialectical tension can be found in Lecoq's (2020) and Turok and Sheba's (2019) readings of Lefebvre, in which they identify a third practice of the right to the city (in addition to appropriation and participation): that of habitation, of the living of everyday life. I explore how the CLT enables residence in terms of both individual economic mobility and the construction of community bonds. Without the permanently affordable housing of the CLT, even this most basal of urban rights could not be fulfilled. In closing, I emphasize the important role that tenant leaders at the CLT and CLVU play at the intersection of construction and resistance, embodying both the tension and the synthesis between these two fundamental practices.

Resistance – and Residence – Through the "Liberated Zone"

Through the provision of both permanently affordable housing and intentional community building, the community land trust model offers a chance for low-income tenants to live in a stable community with housing security, perhaps for the first time in their adult lives. It may not quite be the radical vision of the "liberated zone" put forth by CLVU's Steve Meacham, but the importance of everyday habitation – of *residence*, if not quite resistance – should not be overlooked. In my conception of "residence," I intend to capture how the CLT enables residents

to stay put, set down roots, and build a flourishing life for themselves and their families while establishing community relationships. In distinguishing between the notion of habitat and habitation, Lefebvre "criticizes the right to housing for reducing the creative act of 'inhabiting' to a bureaucratically conceived 'habitat,'" Skrabut writes (2021). My research, however, demonstrates the need for a tweaking of Lefebvre; indeed, *habitation* – his fuller sense of everyday life – is only possible once residents secure a stable home, a *habitat*. Stable habitat and everyday habitation through both individual and community development are both prerequisites to deepened activism, as Steve envisions, but also are fundamental goods in their own right. This section describes how residents are empowered to truly inhabit their lives and neighborhoods through the CLT and assesses how these building blocks may enable further tenant leadership in the housing justice movement.

Individual Economic Development

The experiences of CLT residents reflect how the stability of the CLT's affordable housing has enabled the success of their households in a more traditionally economic, even neoliberal, sense. While not necessarily a radical political outcome, upward economic mobility and the accumulation of some capital for low-income tenants long deprived of both is a notable benefit of the CLT model. BNCLT's housing costs are typically capped at 30% of resident income, the border of what is considered "rent burden." As a team of Tufts University students (including myself) modeled in a project for BNCLT, the average family renting on the CLT versus on the free market can expect to save nearly $10,000 a year in rent alone, "money that can be spent on food, professional development, and recreation, supporting local economies and allowing residents to attain a higher quality of life" (Bull et al. 2021, 52). Alma, a BNCLT resident and president of the board, told us how she was able to help pay her children's college

loan debt thanks in part to the CLT's affordable rent. Her former neighbor Susan, also a CLT resident and board member, told us that CLT housing has "been affordable" and described what that has unlocked for her:

> I was probably paying twice as much when I first moved in. That's how serious this is. It's just helped me. I'm into designing and I fund myself to get materials. I can do things comfortably without the fear for rent. I have the security, I don't fear that I will get evicted…
>
> It's helped me [professionally] because I've taken two courses, [including] a medical assistant course for 10 months. I was able to do that comfortably with the money I put aside. Anything I was interested in, I wasn't held back from fear of not having enough money for rent or utilities. I can really branch out. I never got into a situation where I couldn't pay for rent (Bull et al. 2021, 63).

The instability of precarious housing bleeds into most other aspects of the lives of low-income tenants; before her life on the CLT, Susan could not save up for more stable housing because she couldn't train for a higher-paying job, while at the same time she couldn't afford professional development because she was spending so much on rent. The "vicious cycle of poverty" can be broken through interventions such as permanently affordable housing.

The Importance of Community

As described in my chapter on development without displacement, the CLT achieves affordable housing by removing property from the speculative market. The benefits accrued to the individual household are a success as measured by the standards of the existing political economy – and that should not be overlooked – but as I argue in Chapter 2, the CLT will not transform the system that created those inequities without a commitment to organizing. At BNCLT, organizing, education and mobilization of CLT residents has been an uneven process, but residents have nonetheless found value in the (re)construction of community ties that the CLT has enabled. The loss of community in space – as neighbors are forcibly displaced by

eviction, physically disrupting community – and time – as the pressure to pay rent forces low-income tenants to take on multiple jobs, thus depriving them of the chance to build relationships with neighbors – both stem from the commodity nature of housing under neoliberalism. Thus, even without a radical political project accompanying it, the CLT serves as a place of refuge for community-building amidst the storm of the market.

The work of CLT's residents and staff organizer have demonstrably resulted in improved community ties, not only among CLT residents – who despite the scattered-site nature of the land trust, meet regularly in monthly Zoom meetings – but also with residents of neighboring, non-CLT buildings. One of the most notable community developments has been the activation of a vacant lot adjacent to Susan's home on Park Street. In July 2021, the CLT successfully petitioned the City of Boston for a license to activate a vacant, city-owned lot sitting adjacent to one of the CLT's properties on Park Street in Dorchester. The vision of the CLT's organizer, Cole, was to use the vacant lot as an opportunity for organizing CLT residents and their neighbors in a participatory process on what they wanted to use the lot for. Through door-knocking and flyering along Park Street, Cole and CLT board members turned out residents and neighbors for a community visioning event in late July. The following month, the CLT put that vision into action, planting a community garden from which they later harvested vegetables and herbs. "We've surprisingly had a lot of response from our neighbors who have come out for our events," Cole told me. "Our neighbors have been so, so eager, and we've actually got one of our neighbors taking care of the garden and making sure it's watered and so forth. And these are just neighbors, so this is building up and there they're curious, they ask questions about the land trust and want to know more about it." Later that fall the CLT hosted a Halloween party and installed a "little free library" donated by a local artist. Neighbors demonstrated their longstanding

knowledge of the lot, which previously housed a mechanic's garage and housing, but which mostly had been a place to accumulate trash (Winchell 2022; "Park Street Residents Share History of Vacant Lots" 2022). Now, through the CLT, residents are empowered to participate in its appropriation for community use and construct community ties in the process.

Tenant Leaders as the Synthesis

As discussed above, the ability of the CLT to stabilize low-income households is a laudable improvement over housing on the free market, but as Chapter 2 of this thesis warns, the CLT might simply serve to stabilize the capitalist housing market unless it pairs accountably with grassroots activism. Constructive resistance theory tells us that alternative models are strengthened through engaged relationships with agitational organizing, enabling the CLT to avoid getting lost in the technical morass of property acquisition, financing, and development. The experiences of some of the residents of BNCLT during the 6 Humphreys saga, as described here, can help illustrate the tensions that emerge in pursuit of those paired goals. However, practicing resistance-oriented organizing can also prime residents for constructive leadership on the CLT. Participation in the construction of a new and potentially liberatory system by resisting the old and oppressive one can be an experience through which residents change the world and transform themselves in the process. Alma and Susan, as both residents and members of the BNCLT board, embody the synthesis between the dialectical concerns I describe in this thesis: the technical expertise and resources needed to create and steward affordable housing, and the grassroots activism needed to push for a transformative approach to the housing system. They show us how to navigate the tensions of construction and resistance and the benefits that can accrue to residents and the organizations that they make up by doing so.

In our interview, Alma described how she navigated these tensions as both a radicalized tenant, eager to expand the CLT model and stabilize as many households as possible, and as a member of the CLT board of directors, tasked with the fiduciary responsibility to sustain the CLT over time. She demonstrated the technical awareness she's developed as a member of the board in describing her concerns about the pending acquisition: "6 Humphreys comes with a lot of baggage," she told me:

> As a board member, I have some concerns…The cost analysis that I sat through…It's not gonna be like, "We bought this building, we're gonna lease up these residents and they're gonna be all set." It's not going to be like that. I love the fact that we're going to keep these people in their homes, but we're gonna have to rehab it and lease them, you know, get them situated. So how we gonna do all that part?

Alma elaborated on her concerns about the financial feasibility of 6 Humphreys, noting that its current residents can legally withhold rent until the owner makes repairs under the court-ordered arrangement that the tenant association won against the previous landlord, an agreement inherited by BNCLT. She also shared how current BNCLT residents have questioned the CLT's strategy to acquire new property rather than addressing the concerns of existing residents: "Some of the other residents have voiced this concern: 'We have other issues that need to be addressed, why are we spending all this money on 6 Humphreys?'" Alma's response to these concerns demonstrates her commitment to the mission of housing justice. "Well, we're in the process of helping people who are being displaced. They're in partnership with City Life and they, you know, advocate for [their] housing, we buy it, and put them on our land trust for security." This is the mission of BNCLT, after all. She acknowledges the need for a balance between addressing the concerns of current residents and investing in new acquisition but does not lose sight of either concern. In the same interview, she expressed her excitement at bringing these new tenants onto

the CLT, despite the fiscal concerns with 6 Humphreys: “But as a person that’s on the land trust, I wanna onboard them really smoothly…I want to meet them and get them on board.”

In navigating the complex and dynamic tensions between expanding the CLT, meeting the needs of current residents, and maintaining the financial success of the organization, the CLT’s resident leaders embody the synthesis of constructive resistance. Because they have the lived experience of facing down eviction; organizing collectively with the support of City Life; joining the land trust; and learning both political and technical education in the process of their leadership development, Alma, Susan and the other resident leaders of Boston’s housing justice movement are able to balance the concerns of fiduciary responsibility and of resident empowerment. They are essential in shepherding the construction of a new model like the CLT through the challenges of housing acquisition and development, balancing the technical concerns of experts like executive director Meridith Levy with the needs and demands of tenants resisting against the oppressive constraints of the housing system as it exists. By sitting on the boards of both BNCLT and CLVU, Alma and Susan give embodied form to the dialectical relationship between organizing and development, spreading awareness of the CLT model among the tenant community while maintaining the CLT’s connection to that movement. Constructive resistance requires both technical housing experts and seasoned organizers. By participating in the movement for housing justice, residents can develop into leaders who embody the synthesis of both.

Conclusion: Lessons from the Movement

Constructive resistance theory explains how the two nominally separate processes of participation and appropriation strengthen each other through their interrelationship: the CLT’s appropriation of urban space provides stability and sustainability to the housing justice activism

of CLVU, while CLVU's grassroots empowerment and political education keep the CLT focused on its mission of community control, preventing it from assimilating as a part of the "nonprofit industrial complex." A close assessment of how constructive resistance is practiced in Boston's housing justice movement provides important lessons for organizers, nonprofit staff, policymakers, and funders.

I opened this chapter by discussing the ways that staff at CLVU and BNCLT collaborate across organizational boundaries toward common goals. The staff at each organization have a clear understanding of the roles of, and restrictions on, the other's place in the movement for housing justice and actively encourages their counterparts to play their part; this is evident in how BNCLT's organizer avoided a conflict of interest by not attending rallies against 6 Humphreys' landlord while the CLT was in negotiations with him about acquiring the property. Cole could rest assured that CLVU and other activist organizations were holding it down, while CLVU staff understood the need for the land trust, as a property buyer, to avoid taking an openly oppositional stance against the landlord. Staff at the two organizations similarly coordinate around funding opportunities, such as grants from foundations who might not want to fund organizing but would be eager to support affordable housing acquisition. This strategic partnership between CLVU and BNCLT can serve as a model for other housing developers and activist organizations which share political goals: by finding a partner engaged in another part of the work of housing justice, such organizations can more flexibly strategize around advocacy, funding, and even protest where necessary. From the perspective of a philanthropic grant maker, perhaps one sympathetic to the transformative work of activism but feeling held back by the institutional restraints of their industry, one might seek out such activist-developer partnerships in order to identify funding opportunities that will be palatable to the philanthropic industry as a

whole – i.e., the "brick-and-mortar" developer – while indirectly delivering much-needed resources to movement work. This misdirection and performance enable staff across the housing justice ecosystem to operate within the capitalist system as it exists while planting the seeds for an alternative to grow.

I then proceeded to examine the material benefits and institutional changes that accrue to the movement through a prioritization of grassroots activism. These new "constructions" are built at organizational, institutional (municipal), and legislative levels as a result of long-term resistance, and sustain that resistance work in turn. At the organizational level, BNCLT's executive director shared how the technical success of the organization – the acquisition and preservation of tenant-occupied affordable housing – is simply not possible without the power-building work of tenant organizing; the CLT only received the deep subsidies necessary for the acquisition of 6 Humphreys Place because of the political pressure put on city officials by sustained activism in favor of the tenants. This example demonstrates the importance of building toward change from the bottom up: Without the sustained movement in support of the 6 Humphreys Place tenant association, the CLT would not have acquired the building. This is evidenced by a counter-example that Meridith shared in which the CLT could not close on an "easy" building, with minimal repair needs and a friendly seller, in part because they could not get the subsidy needed from the city due to a lack of political pressure. Technocratic expertise can often be meaningless without the political power needed to exercise it.

For construction at higher levels, my interlocutors spoke to how the constant work of housing justice over years has slowly shifted the balance of power at the city and state levels through institutional changes – the creation of new agencies such as the City of Boston's Office of Housing Stability – and new policy and funding programs, such as the Acquisition

Opportunity Program used to purchase 6 Humphreys. These examples can provide a key lesson to policymakers and legislators: look to activist movements for policy ideas that are rooted in the needs and demands of the working class. We see here the benefits that new construction bestows upon resistance work: the novel development of the CLT and of the City's agencies, policies, and funding streams are positive feedback loops that enable further work toward the movement's goals. These sorts of victories – "non-reformist reforms" that shift the balance of power and open terrain for deepening activism – are important in avoiding the burnout so common among social justice activists, thus sustaining the movement. Resistance enables construction, and construction sustains resistance.

Finally, I closed this chapter by returning to the perspective of the tenants who are the core agents of this ecosystem of constructive resistance. Here I re-examined the notion of the CLT as a "liberated zone," first offered to me by CLVU's director of organizing; his vision was for the CLT to "not be an island in the middle of a sea of sharks," but rather a "platform from which the struggle can be launched." While my research has found some examples of democratic participation at the CLT – the process of hiring a new property manager is the most notable of these – BNCLT has not quite been a hotbed of radical activism for its tenants. It has, however, offered a place of stability and refuge for low-income tenants who have not been afforded even that victory in previous housing tenures. Here I took Lefebvre's framework of "habitat" – a home to simply live in, a notion he dismissed as reductive and insufficient – and "to inhabit" – his more romantic and fuller sense of a life well-lived, engaging in the world both in the home and around it – and inverted it, somewhat. I found that for my tenant interlocutors, habitat is not merely a side benefit of life on the CLT – rather, it is a fundamental change in their level of stability and confidence, one that is a prerequisite for Lefebvre's broader sense of habitation and

Steve's vision of resistance in the liberated zone, but also which is a positive good on its own. Thanks to the CLT's permanently affordable housing, residents have found stability and success for both the individual household – seeing economic mobility in a strictly economic sense – and for the broader community, where in the absence of the displacing forces of the market, meaningful communal ties can be forged and maintained. The activation of the vacant lot on Park Street is a shining example of the community-building made possible through the CLT. Stable residency and community ties are not necessarily radical political outcomes, but they are both good outcomes in their own right and necessary prerequisites for any deeper activism to come.

The tenant leaders of CLVU and BNCLT best embody both the tensions and the synthesis between construction and resistance; appropriately so, as the aspiration of the right to the city is for working class urban residents like Alma and Susan to exercise democratic control over development of their homes and neighborhoods. As board president of BNCLT, Alma has come to understand the technical challenges of acquiring and sustaining healthy and permanently affordable housing on the CLT; her trepidations about the acquisition of 6 Humphreys Place reflect that understanding. However, because of her experience as a tenant – facing down her own eviction and organizing with CLVU to win the sale of her home to BNCLT – Alma insists on pursuing 6 Humphreys out of a sense of solidarity with its residents. Without politicized tenant leaders like Alma, and the broader instinct of resistance that CLVU imbues and embodies, BNCLT might lose sight of its mission of community stability and democratic control of housing, giving up on struggles like that of the 6 Humphreys tenant association. Together, CLVU and BNCLT sustain and strengthen each other – constructive resistance in the fight for housing justice in Boston.

Chapter 5. Conclusions

Struggle for a Building, Struggle for a Neighborhood

The struggle for 6 Humphreys Place has implications beyond the walls of that building. Around the block, at the corner of Humphreys Street and Dudley Street, is a vacant lot owned by Greg McCarthy. Amidst his struggles with the 6 Humphreys tenants, he submitted to the Boston Planning and Development Agency (BPDA) a development plan for the lot that would create a five-story mixed-use building at 706 Dudley Street, with 26 residential units – only three of which would be income-restricted. When the BPDA held a public hearing about the plan, the event was flooded with residents organized by Dorchester Not For Sale, CLVU, and Dudley Square Neighborhood Initiative, over 50 voices united in opposition to McCarthy's proposal because of his neglectful treatment of 6 Humphreys Place and its tenants (Trojano 2019a). As one resident said during a later public hearing: "Why would the city allow a developer who has treated his tenants at 6 Humphreys terribly, who is dragging his feet and barely complying with court orders to repair that building, who is doing everything he can to avoid the law and maltreat the neighborhood, to develop a new property in the neighborhood?" (Trojano 2020). The BPDA's website still lists the 706 Dudley St. plan as "under review" (BPDA n.d.), but housing justice activists have continued to rally against McCarthy (Trojano 2021) and the last public update from McCarthy was that they have "hit the reset button" (Trojano 2020). While official approval is still a possibility, the story of 706 Dudley Street demonstrates how an organized community can mobilize in defense of its neglected neighbors against a property owner they perceive as extractive and harmful – one front in the broader fight for housing to be built for working people, not for profit.

Figure 7. A satellite view of the corner of Dudley St. and Humphreys St., with 6 Humphreys Place (marked by an arrow) tucked behind the large Leon building on the corner. Opposite the Leon building is the vacant lot at 706 Dudley St. Screenshot via Google Maps.

Ultimately, the battle for the control of 6 Humphreys Place may result in substantive control over the development of the entire Upham's Corner neighborhood. The 18-bed, 6-bath rooming house is a building of considerable size at approximately 10,000 square feet, but it is dwarfed by its neighbor: the hulking, 55,000 square foot Leon Electric Building. The abandoned eyesore dominates the stretch of Dudley Street directly abutting the Upham's Corner commuter rail station and has been the subject of consternation from neighbors and city officials dating back at least to the 2013 mayoral campaign (Forry 2013). As the city has moved over the past decade or so toward developing the Fairmount Line of the MBTA, a "Boston Redevelopment Authority working advisory group has identified the Leon Building as one of the top targets for redevelopment along the entire rail corridor," as a local news article (referencing the BPDA's predecessor) described. But, "[t]he Leon family has resisted earlier attempts by city and

community development officials to engage them in redevelopment talks over the years" (Forry 2013). Numerous interlocutors for this study echoed the sentiment that the Leon building is key to unlocking the development of the broader Upham's Corner neighborhood in the coming years, "especially with the biomedical industry entering Dorchester," and emphasized the strategic importance that the owner of 6 Humphreys Place, as an abutter, might play in that process: "Whoever owns 6 Humphreys really has sway over the Leon building" – and thus, over development plans for the entire neighborhood. By bringing 6 Humphreys Place into community control, this coalition – tenants, CLVU, DN4S, and BNCLT – are building the power of the people of Dorchester over the development of their neighborhood.

Insights from the Movement

The housing justice movement in Boston has shown me that housing should not be treated as a commodity but should rather be treated as a human right – something that is used as a home rather than something to be speculated on. This, they argue, is the root cause of the housing crisis. As practitioners, policymakers, and activists, we should thus be working together to remove housing from the speculative market in order to get at the root cause of the crisis. One way that this can be done is through the acquisition of land and housing by nonprofit organizations such as community land trusts or community development corporations. As my research shows, housing justice actors such as City Life/Vida Urbana actively work to organize tenants to fight against the market, through their sword and shield strategies, but it is ultimately the "offer" of housing acquisition by an allied nonprofit, such as a community land trust, that achieves the primary goal of decommodifying housing.

Nonprofit organizations are complicated. The nonprofit movement has become an industry, in and for itself, and there are many critiques of the nonprofit industry as a

contradictory and self-interested field. Nonprofits often claim to serve "community" but are frequently undemocratic in practice – an outcome of this past half-century-plus of privatization and decentralization that has marked the neoliberal period of capitalism. Given the context of neoliberal governance – the divestment from public housing and the decentralization of funding into private institutions – however, there is something notable about the ability of nonprofits as private actors to work independently of the state and organize communities to exercise control over their land and housing. A critical resource that these nonprofits have to offer is the technical expertise needed to achieve the goal of decommodification of housing. At the end of the day, the "offer" that City Life pursues is a real estate transaction, and real estate is a complicated field which requires a lot of resources and technical knowledge that the staff of nonprofit housing organizations can offer. Thus, despite the lack of trust that many activists might justifiably have for nonprofits and for real estate developers generally, these organizations are important allies in the struggle for housing justice - specifically, in the process of community acquisition of land and housing.

How can we safeguard against the cooptation of nonprofits into the neoliberal system? Karl Polanyi, for instance, refers to the double movement of capitalism, a phenomenon in which free market capitalism continues unabated, generating harms and collateral damage that threaten to undermine its very existence. In turn, the state (and/or private actors, as in this case) essentially work to serve as a brake on capitalism's worst impulses through the provision, for instance, of social welfare programs. Such programs serve as a counter to capitalism's own worst impulses, essentially saving the system from itself. A concern of housing activists is that nonprofit organizations which may appear to be radical, such as community land trusts, may in fact be a part of this double movement; rather than being sites of transformation and openings to

a potential overturning of the capitalist system, they may in fact slot into the system and serve to stabilize it, rounding out its worst edges. The question thus becomes: How can activists and tenants work to push community land trusts to maintain their more radical goals, as reflected in their roots in the Civil Rights era demand for community control, and avoid the fate that many other organizations in the so-called nonprofit industrial complex have met?

My interlocutors in the housing justice movement show us that tenant organizing is at the root of the answer. Tenant organizing is a process that brings tenants together, from initially facing their problems alone – conditioned with the sense of individualism prevalent in neoliberal capitalism, which also forecloses on alternatives to the status quo - and transforming these individuals into a collective movement. The work that City Life organizers carry out is to help tenants understand that the problems they face are structural and that the solutions to those problems must be found through popular education and experience and achieved by building power. Achieving the "offer" is only possible through the action of an organized base of tenants who, along with allies in nonprofit housing organizations, can understand the housing system as it exists and work together to build the new world that they want to see. As such, it is critical that housing organizations like community land trusts continue to invest in community organizing work in addition to the technical work of real estate management and acquisition.

Besides organizing their own residents, it is also important for such organizations to be in accountable relationships with grassroots groups like City Life/Vida Urbana which can serve as the radical edge of the housing justice movement and hold such nonprofit housing developers to account to achieve the goals of the movement. This is the framework that was introduced to me by activists at City Life: constructive resistance. The resistance work of City Life fights against the world as it exists by attempting to stabilize residents and keep them in their homes, while the

constructive work of CLTs is the creation of alternatives to the existing system - transformations toward the world that we want to see. My research demonstrates how the organizations which comprise the housing justice movement embody this theory of constructive resistance. Each arm of the movement - the construction work and the resistance work - is in fact strengthened by its collaboration with the other. The goals of community land trusts – the construction of alternative systems - is only made possible through the work of activists at City Life and other organizations; as shown by my research, the Boston Neighborhood Community Land Trust's acquisition of 6 Humphreys Place would not have been possible without the years-long campaign by City Life and the tenants at 6 Humphreys. The community land trust, meanwhile, enables a form of resistance to continue for tenants outside of the moment of crisis that CLVU meets them in; this act of "residence," as I've termed it, means that residents can live stable lives, rebuild community, and participate in processes which give them more say over their everyday lives.

My research demonstrates the limitations of top-down technocratic approaches to policymaking and community development. While it also clearly shows the importance of technical expertise, the experience of the Boston Neighborhood Community Land Trust's acquisition of 6 Humphreys clearly shows that technical expertise only goes so far without the popular backing – arrived at through organizing – needed to put it into practice for the movement. This approach to development is echoed in the way that my interlocutors describe their organizing work as "not a service provider"; it is crucial to provide legal aid and other services to tenants facing hardship, but they need the capacity and willingness to put that aid into action, which is only done through organizing. These technical and professional processes would not have been possible without the political power built by the housing justice movement.

In a similar vein, we should look to the grassroots for policy solutions to the crisis and not simply consult technical experts in the fields of housing and real estate. The primary policy demand from the housing justice movement is for rent control, which countless economists will tell you is not an efficient solution to the housing question – because they understand the housing system as a market and use neoclassical economics to analyze it. The work of the housing justice movement demonstrates, however, that we can remove housing from the market – through the collective effort of tenants and other residents. That collective power cannot be built if tenants are continually being displaced by skyrocketing rents, so policies such as rent control, while not fundamentally solving the housing crisis, will at least stabilize the market to the extent that residents will be able to stay in their homes and build community with their neighbors. These basic building blocks of community development are also fundamental prerequisites to building the sort of collective power that can be a step toward more transformative goals.

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