

DON'T ANSWER BACK!

THE COMMUNITY LAND TRUST AND NARRATIVES OF URBAN RESISTANCE

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Abstract

A small part of the self-help housing campaign has been the slow emergence of the Community Land Trust (CLT) movement. CLTs are heterogeneous not only in terms of their scale and urban/rural contrast, but because the motivation behind their inception appear to be so different. In this paper we draw on the concepts of resistance put forward by those such as Ward (1996) and Scott (1985) and look specifically at two CLTs. In our two cases we find activists who work within the conditions and constraints under which home ownership ideology is generated. Both cases are located in major US cities, one in Boston and one in New York, and offer an insight into why a particular type of community organizing took place. We see a stand against gentrification in the heart of Manhattan, radical action to secure the ownership of land and to prevent displacement in a Lower East Side neighbourhood. In contrast, the second case shows a stand against the violence exerted in the degeneration of a South Boston neighbourhood. Here we see a community conversant with civil rights struggles who were able to secure the compliance of the local state through their direct action. Our work shows how narratives of resistance rely on activists and professionals who both share similar aims in resisting the hegemony of private capital and the state and in their resistance, highlight the contradiction between housing as commodity and housing as a process, something that is a central dialectical puzzle to the CLT movement.

1. Introduction

Since Engels wrote about the housing question, problems of cost and quality have remained and processes of gentrification in many major cities have intensified. Housing remains a contested terrain; a verb or a noun, the former describing housing as a process for instance the active behaviour of securing housing in a collective sense, while the latter is used to explain housing as a commodity. For Engels, housing was a class question. Contemporary reflection and investigation into housing is much more about the process or the product. The latter dominates with housing markets of such importance that they were central to the financial crisis of 2007/08 and the Great Recession that followed. In this paper we draw upon two case studies where the harshness of the market led to struggle against processes of clearance and gentrification in communities in the US cities of New York and Boston. We derive our main points from interviews that show how land was secured for housing in the form of a Community Land Trust (CLT). We purposefully use detail from the interviews to consider the roles of community activism and of professionals, of resistance and cooperation in struggles over the housing question today, asking whether, as Ward (2008) suggests, incorporation by the state is the inevitable outcome short of revolutionary change.

2. Ideology and Struggle

Engels' three pamphlets that constitute what we know as *The Housing Question* (1935) formed part of a debate about the cost and condition of urban housing during a period of rapid industrialisation on the European continent. However, while we might expect the capitalist's ownership of land and property to be central to Engels' analysis of housing, he is at pains to emphasise that simply passing ownership to individual workers is not the solution. The relationship between owner and tenant is not inherently exploitative, in that surplus value is not extracted from the tenant. Rather, the exchange is a commodity transaction that "proceeds according to the economic laws which govern the sale of commodities in general and in particular the sale of the commodity, land property" (Engels, 1935: 25). Transferring ownership to the worker would simply pass the burden of maintenance and replacement. Nor, in an industrial and urban context, is this practicable in the way proposed by the Proudhonists, with whom Engels was debating and for whom ownership is also associated with other idyllic visions of self-sufficiency and small-scale enterprise. The ideals that underpin ownership, including stewardship, independence and autonomy, are sometimes elevated to grand political theory of a conservative (Belloc, 1977, 2009) or radical (Ward, 1983, 1996) nature. They echo through cooperative and shared ownership movements, environmental activism and, indeed, in the discourse of economic recovery post financial crisis. As such, the ideas are ubiquitous, a prompt for critical reflection in itself.

In his response to Dr Sax, a Proudhonist who quickly accepts that ownership is not feasible in urban areas, Engels discusses the alternatives proposed: self-help or state assistance. Self-help referred to the extension of the UK model of Building Societies and other forms of mutual organisation intended to assist individuals in purchasing property. Engels quickly dismisses this as petite bourgeois and not fundamentally addressing the problems that confront the working class. State assistance, that is the regulation of buildings and rents, was ineffective in practice. Why should we expect the state, representing the interests of capital collectively, to regulate the behaviour of individual capitalists in the interests of the workers? Rather, he observed the state managing housing and land in the interests of capital. It is this bourgeois approach that has dominated responses to the housing question in North America and Western Europe since.

In the intervening years, the space for autonomous action and resistance has diminished in North America and Western Europe¹. Ward's work, tracing the history of cottagers and squatters (1983; 2000), is largely just that, a history. He does for example, speak supportively of the twentieth century new town movement in the UK seeing it as a success by providing employment for women, better living conditions and provision of services, while acknowledging impacts on previous communities and problems of bureaucratic system built housing led by constraints on public finance. He saw the potential in new towns for self-help community based initiatives and as means by which resources could be deployed in an efficient way for working class people (Ward, 1983). Beyond the new town however, Ward is consistent in searching for examples of struggle to wrest control of housing from developers and from urban planners. He poses here questions about what form of catalyst there is for types of community independence, how assets and liabilities can come under the control of the community in much the way that the CLT movement has sought land and buildings, and how these contrast to the powers of global capital. Drawing on this history, Ward (2008: 89-90) identifies the phases that, he argues, are followed in all direct action on housing issues: first there is *initiative* this the spark that starts the action; then there is *consolidation* and how the action undertaken (the initiative) grow to the point of becoming a threat to property rights and has reached a scale whereby the movement cannot be ignored; then comes *success* when the authorities must concede to the movement what has been won; and fourthly is *official action*, an important phase whereby the state acts to resolve any issues and may seek to co-opt the radical action, and so provide some form of legitimacy. From a radical perspective, then, he describes a cycle that leads inevitably to adoption and co-option. In the next section of this paper we consider the efforts of two marginalised communities each building a CLT, as they confronted the contemporary housing question using direct action, by exploring the narratives of resistance seen through the role of the activist and the professional.

3. Narratives of Resistance

Community Land Trusts (CLTs) have appeared as a means to achieve affordable housing and sustainable neighbourhoods. Their emergence has come from a radical starting point, a history of struggle that enable their advocates to take a stand as an alternative to the profit-driven approach of urban developers. Community organization against private capital and the state appear to be features of some CLTs in their efforts to secure land. They can also appear to be petite bourgeois with home ownership often central to their development and in the UK, linked to access for owner occupation in a number of rural communities. They appear to be paradoxical with an adherence to self-help, social ownership and individual home ownership in much the way advocated by Proudhon and his allies and identified latterly by commentators such as Turner (1978), Goetz and Sidney (1996), Stone (2006) and Hodgkinson (2012). Our cases here look at the development of two CLTs in US cities, one in Cooper Square located in the Lower East Side of Manhattan and a second in the Roxbury area of Boston, specifically in the Dudley Street Triangle. We use the formation of the two CLTs, the Cooper Square CLT and Dudley Neighbors Inc. [sic] to show examples of how Ward's (2008) four stages of direct action are relevant. While we can point elsewhere to detailed accounts of the research into the development of these CLTs (see Engelsman et al, forthcoming; Engelsman and Southern, 2010) here we draw from in-depth interviews with local activists and professionals, and use two such interviews in particular to examine narratives of urban resistance. We provide a brief description of the each neighbourhood

¹ We should note, as Ward did, that the situation in the global south is very different.

and then we use the four phases implied by Ward of initiative, consolidation, success and official action to explore narratives of resistance as each CLT became embedded.

DSNI, Boston MA

The Dudley Street neighbourhood is located less than two miles from downtown Boston. It has a multi-cultural population of approximately 23,000, of which 38% are African-American, 29% Latino, 25% Cape Verdean and 7% White (DSNI, 2010). Its history is one familiar to similar communities across the US in the first decades of the twentieth century, as segregated suburbanization became an official Federal policy in the 1930s. In 1968, a National Commission on Urban Problems “deplored the tacit agreement among all groups - lending institutions, fire insurance companies, and the FHA - to redline inner city neighbourhoods denying them credit and insurance” (Medoff & Sklar, 1994: 15). Anyone who could afford to left the area and, through the 1960s and 1970s, Latinos and Cape Verdean immigrants began to arrive. The loss of industry also had a devastating effect on the wider Roxbury neighbourhood, which included Dudley Street (Medoff and Sklar, 1994). Income levels in the area were well below median income. By 1989, only 38% of families earned the federally defined self-sufficiency income of \$37,591 (Dudley Neighborhood Profile, 2003). By 1999, the rate of owner occupancy was 27% and the unemployment rate was 13.6% (there were many more not seeking work and therefore not included in this statistic). These low income levels coincided with public disinvestment from the Boston authorities meaning conditions in the neighbourhood became quite unbearable during the early 1980s.

Figure 1 The first DSNI meeting in 1985



This decade saw the neighbourhood reach boiling point. Burglaries were common, with some homes being broken into continuously. Residents spoke of landlords committing atrocities, setting their houses on fire while the tenants were still inside. The neighbourhood became the dumping ground of the city, including reports of toxic waste: “The violators came and went without fear of the law, blighting the neighbourhood with toxic chemicals, auto carcasses, old refrigerators, rotten meat, and other refuse. Adding insult to injury, Dudley became an illegal dumping ground for debris from housing and other construction around Boston” (Medoff and Sklar, 1994:2).

Cooper Square, New York NY

It is the geography of Cooper Square that provides an important context to the development of the CLT. In this 'real estate capital of the world' the Lower East Side is sandwiched between Wall Street and midtown Manhattan, thereby overflowing with so-called development potential. On an early research visit we were informed that Cooper Square is "highly convenient for rich people but inconveniently occupied by poor people" (discussion with CLT professional, October 2007). This area has an industrial history, one associated with working class activism (the headquarters of the IWW sit adjacent to the Cooper Square Committee offices for example) in a city known for its community resistance to matters associated with housing.

Figure 2 Images of resistance, Cooper Square



One of the organisers explained that even with a long tale of immigrant workers arriving into the neighbourhood, it has never fitted the sociological model of a 'melting pot' and is a place where communities and people in those communities pursue their religion and politics, as they remain relevant to their culture. The Cooper Square Committee was formed in 1959 beginning the modern narrative of resistance to the plans then advocated by urban planner, Robert Moses. Moses had proposed to bulldoze an eleven-block area of the Lower East Side displacing 2400 mainly low-income tenants. The land would then be passed on to (ironically) a union-backed developer to build almost 3000 units of middle-income housing (Agnotti, 2008). It was only some years later, after the election of a sympathetic Mayor, David Dinkins who as the city's first African-American mayor was keen to raise the political argument for community control over vacant land that a catalyst for the formation of Cooper Square CLT was provided.

Figure 3 Cooper Square and the 'Real Estate Capital of the World'



3.1 Initiative

In Dudley Street, the deaths of young children in one house fire were, all too literally, the spark. The years of disinterest and disinvestment meant residents were suspicious of the municipality and instead coalesced as a community. DSNI was established in 1984 as a merger and coalition of churches, community, non-profit and charitable organisations (Tulloss, 1996). Luis Cruz, a one time president of the CLT Dudley Neighbors Inc. created by DSNI and an early activist also said that when they started they had some clear aims:

“We would start to clean up our community first...also, when we started it, the idea was to produce housing, at an affordable rate, to make sure that people in our community would not be displaced and that we were in fact insulated from gentrification” (Speech Dec 2008).

In Cooper Square, the spark was provided by the threat of slum clearance by more deliberate planning:

“He [Robert Moses] came to the Lower East Side. He looked at these tenements. They were a hundred years old. Then they were 80 years old but they were all ‘law tenements’ with toilets in the hall for eight people. Just a toilet. No sink, no room. A toilet for eight people. Five stories high, no elevators, no cross ventilation, poor. They jammed the immigrants into old law tenements and the City. And Robert Moses saw these tenements. And he walked from Cooper Square to Wall Street and it took him 20 minutes. So he thought “oh my God, we can tear down these rat traps, we can build more expensive housing, fill it with people who can walk to Wall Street”. He picked the wrong neighbourhood.” (Community organiser, Cooper Square, interview June 2013)

Scott (1998) would recognise this simple logic, the levelling gaze, the regularising of cities to serve simple rational plans and understand the instincts of the community organiser and other residents: to resist:

“The city never made plans for the people they are throwing out, only for the people who would come in who would be people of more income... Now, we have a book. It’s called *The Alternate Plan for Cooper Square* and there’s one guiding principle and this... we helped Walter [Thabit] do the best thing he ever did in his life which is *The Alternate Plan for Cooper Square*. It’s used all over the world. People really know it all over the world. He was a great professional and a perfectionist. That’s why he was so broke. And the guiding principle was urban renewal. The people who live in urban renewal areas must be the benefits... the beneficiaries and not the victim of the plan.”
(Community organiser, Cooper Square, interview June 2013)

Figure 4 ‘Holding the Ground’ logo of promotional video, Dudley Street



While the form of clearance that threatened Dudley Street was both more violent and less planned, the response was expressed in similar terms:

“Our motto from the beginning has been development without displacement and, at the same time, we’ve been looking to generate economic opportunities in housing opportunities... We wanted to do it in a way that the residents here benefited and that the people who really fought to make Dudley nicer more vital, vibrant neighbourhood are not then displaced by new families coming in.” (Community professional, Dudley Street, interview June 2013)

But the path to consolidation was very different.

3.2 Consolidation

At the time DSNI was set up, and because there were few incentives to invest, there were around 1300 vacant lots, more than 20% of the neighbourhood. Another third were owned by Federal, State and City authorities. The remainder were generally in private hands and in tax arrears (Plumer and Nesbitt, 1987; Tulloss, 1996). It became apparent that this complex pattern of land ownership meant the municipality would have to become enablers in the process, despite the community’s original distrust. Steven Coyle, the then director of the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA), suggested that DSNI apply for 121A status, which

would grant it eminent domain powers (that is the equivalent of the right to repossession and disposal of land) over the land at the heart of the neighbourhood. Mayor Flynn was supportive of the plan, but there was opposition to the granting of these powers to community groups, an unprecedented step, from within the BRA. Two board members ended up leaving the board over the issue. Medoff and Sklar (1994) show how it was difficult to convince people in Dudley Street that consolidation of the DSNI initiative was not threatening. Basically, locals were fearful of a collective group making decisions on securing land, through the award of eminent domain status (see Engelsman et al, forthcoming).²

For Cooper Square, the consolidation period was its most challenging. They had to fight for many years to avoid being 'snuffed out':

"It took us 54 fucking years... 54 years! So, if you are not in it for the long haul and you are dealing with the City, quit if you are not ready to devote yourself to winning."
(Community organiser, Cooper Square, interview June 2013)

When Moses unveiled his plan in 1959, the community organiser recalls the alternative that they put forward:

"we presented our plan which said the plan has to be for the benefit of the people who live there. The planners in the City said 'this is outrageous. We can't benefit the people that live there we will never get anything built'" (Community organiser, Cooper Square, interview June 2013).

These very different experiences of consolidation undermine the simple framework that Ward (2008) presents. What we see here is the way in which the localised experiences of consolidation are faced and sensed in very different ways. In one case we see the enthusiasm for being part of an activist cohort, part of political activism, while in the other we get the feel for the struggle to consolidate activism. In some respect the issue of time may be influential as one activist may reflect romantically on a period of struggle, while professionals may consider in a pragmatic way the need to maintain activists in the present tense. They may also reflect and affect the nature and character to subsequent developments as we consider below.

3.3 Success

Once the power of eminent domain was granted in 1988, DSNI needed funding to implement the first stage of its plan for the area. The significance of this success was that DSNI were the first community-based organisation to be awarded eminent domain status in the US, something that previously remained in the control of local agencies. The Ford Foundation, HUD, Massachusetts' Department of Environmental Management and the City of Boston have all offered financial and other support to the project (Tulloss, 1996). In part, Tulloss suggests this was because of the timing. In 1983, Mayor Flynn defeated Mel King on a populist platform. Both mayors, after years of disinvestment, spoke of a focus on the needs of neighbourhoods and not just the central business districts. As DSNI emerged, it was able to demonstrate it represented the community and spoke on behalf of people in Dudley St and developed a political strategy that was palatable. This enabled the organisation to move

² For the purpose of simplicity we can describe US eminent domain status as similar to Compulsory Purchase Orders in the UK.

beyond its initial formation period. DSNI's early achievements, especially receiving eminent domain powers, helped it establish a reputation as influential and trustworthy, which made it easier to gain the respect of local residents, professionals and political stakeholders. Once DSNI began developing its first affordable homes, completed in 1994 and consisting of 36 units of affordable homeownership, it had established itself as a respectable and competent community organisation.

In Cooper Square, the timing could not have been less fortuitous. Robert Moses' plan was only defeated after a prolonged battle that lasted from 1959 to 1971. In 1971, "we got the green light from the city that they would accept our plan which was *The Alternate Plan*. So, when they gave us the green light, that's when things fell apart because the Fed's had no more money. We had to go back to the drawing board" (Community organiser, Cooper Square, interview June 2013).

3.4 Official Action

In Dudley Street and since 1988, over 400 homes have been built and over 500 refurbished, all belonging to the community land trust and affordable in perpetuity. Dudley Neighbors Inc. (DNI) is the name of the community land trust that holds ownership of the land itself and it is a subsidiary of DSNI. The Director of DNI explains that the CLT is a 'gatekeeper' of development projects within Dudley St. neighbourhood:

"Where a project will come in and if it doesn't fit certain of our development principles we will say well this doesn't fit or that doesn't fit so whether that has to do with affordable housing whether that has to do with all the way down to bedroom sizes". (Community professional, Dudley Street, interview June 2013)

Whilst the CLT does focus on housing, it is also used to promote other opportunities:

"... to work with our residents and committees to look for economic development strategies especially around work force around jobs and around you know anything that can be done to boost the local economy still in a way that is benefitting the local residents and so we are involved in everything from coalitions to promote local food production and greenhouse and community farms". (Community professional, Dudley Street, interview June 2013)

DSNI's status as an established stakeholder has been challenged on occasion by other local stakeholders. On the few occasions where CLT properties were foreclosed, the banks claimed that they could sell the property on the open market. DNI responded by threatening to raise the ground lease from \$49 a month to \$649 a month.

"Because of the foreclosure we can knock off all the deed restriction that the city has and that we can say if you do that if you don't keep the restriction on, instead of the 49 dollars we were charging the homeowners we will charge you 649 dollars a month. So you can sell that unit for whatever you think you can but just tack on that amount and the bank says your crazy we can't do that and we say alright then the other alternative is keep the restrictions on let us help market the unit to another family who hits the income limits you get your mortgage". (Community professional, Dudley Street, interview June 2013)

As a result of DSNI's initial successes they became an entrenched and permanent part of the political process in the Dudley St. neighbourhood. This is confirmed with a meeting with a local councillor in Dunkin Donuts in nearby Blue Hill Avenue, part of the symbolic boundary of the Dudley Triangle, where the message is one of value creation by DSNI and how their intervention has led to neighbourhood stabilization and not least according to the politician, has provided a foundation that has overcome disenfranchisement and exclusion (interview, June 2013).

Figure 5 Growing your own activists, Dudley Street

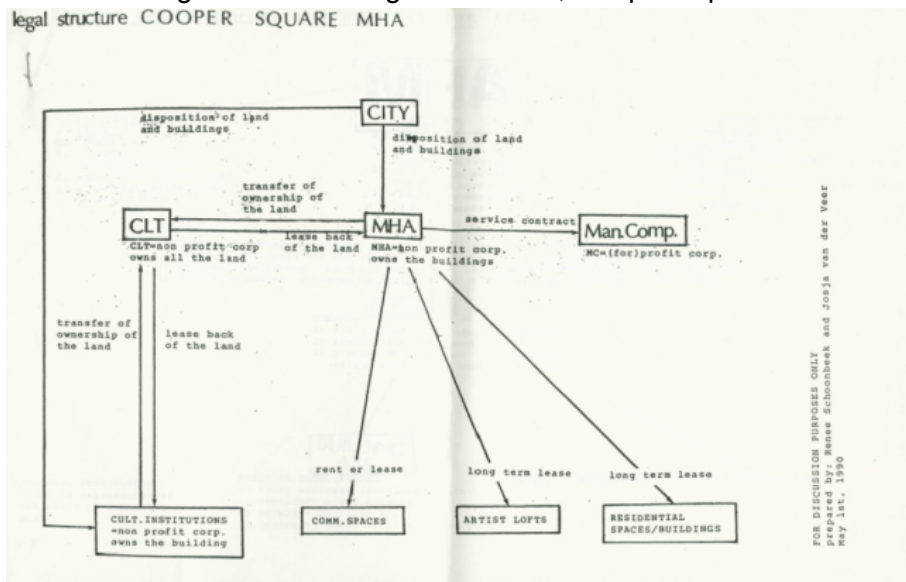


The formality of Cooper Square CLT can be traced back to the 1961 Alternate Plan and two principles in particular can be highlighted: the separation of the ownership of land and ownership of buildings. The reason behind this was because of the belief that “gentrification takes an insidious form” (interview with professional, March 2013) and that affordable housing can be subject to tenants selling on to those from a higher economic class. So, established in 1991, the CLT took ownership of the land holding 19 buildings that at the time had over 300 units of family rented housing, plus 23 commercial units. Importantly, these units were leased to and managed by the Cooper Square Mutual Housing Association (CSMHA), also established in 1991. This model of land and property separation was designed to inculcate in tenants the philosophy of cooperative ownership, with tenants becoming members who purchase a share worth \$250, with rights to resale of properties restricted.

The New York City (local) authority required CSMHA to secure two-thirds of residents vote for a move to cooperative ownership. This was secured with a vote of 82% demonstrating the political campaign behind the formality of ownership structure. On the ground, every building has a ‘Building Captain’ and a ‘Building Co-Captain’. While these meet on a regular basis as kernels in the reproduction of the ownership principles, the ageing demography of tenants (around 40% are over 55 years) it means thinking beyond the problems facing their

immediacy, the building they occupy, is difficult to stimulate. For one activist, the CSMHA provides the means by which the CLT can be institutionalized, and demonstrate beyond Cooper Square how the need for securing land and the need for community organizing become part of the same struggle (interview, March 2013). Land is acquired through struggle, and this struggle becomes the forerunner to securing levels of public investment into a structure such as a CLT.

Figure 6 Illustrating officialdom , Cooper Square



4. Resistance, activists and professionals

The strategies of activism and organizing used to secure resources for communities are consistent in our cases and maybe beyond. Yet they also raise for us questions concerning the formalized way in which activism is brought under legitimate processes, moving away from guerilla-style acts of resistance. The four phases suggested by Ward (1983) are useful in this respect and the evidence we put forward is interesting not least because our cases sit as they do in the world’s most wealthy nation. The four phases of initiative, consolidation, success and official action are deployed in our two cases as reactions to the political economy, to the forces of neoliberalism and the structures of inequality that are experienced by community members.

4.1 Acts of resistance

While Scott (1985) talks of acts of resistance and the weapons the peasants of South-East Asia deployed, nearby to the centre of the neoliberal financial powerhouse of Wall Street and Midtown Manhattan, the local activist explains the strategies used in the fight for ownership of land.

“Well if we said if we were going to have a picket line and we were going to have a lot of people at the picket line and we are each going to have a leaflet and we make it very colourful and we get the press, next month we can’t say we are going to have a picket line because we did that already. They could say we covered that so we said this time we are going to sleep in in the City office. We are going to sleep in at a city office so they said what do you mean you are going to sleep in? We mean we are going to lay on the ground then we are going to go to sleep. We are not going to leave, so they called

the cops and it happened to be a Director who was very afraid that it would be in a paper that we arrested all these people with their children and their diapers and stuff. So we upped the ante we always added something. Once Walter decided, 'put out a press release that we are going to build a building in 10 minutes, we are going to build a building on the site which is vacant, a vacant land in 10 minutes come to the erection of a building in 10 minutes'. Just to give an example so we went to the moving company and we got a 100 boxes which we had to assemble big boxes and he drew one letter on each box, one big letter on each box and it said 'Commissioner Lemon build on this site.' And he said OK 12 people go take one letter each and put it on the floor or ground and that was the bottom and then there were 10 people put boxes on top of that and then there were 8 people so we built a building that said Mr Lemon build for us here." (Community organiser, Cooper Square, interview June 2013)

Add to this the way in which it became clear that the narrative of resistance was discursive and gendered. Discursive in the sense that whenever possible efforts were made to exploit the local New York City media channels and newspapers, and then through creating new imagery when victories in the long running battle were secured.

"And the one of the things that we always did was any little victory we celebrated like crazy, little ones or big ones we celebrated because it gave us the energy to reach for the next win and the next prize so it was worth the struggle." (Community organiser, Cooper Square, interview June 2013)

And gendered because the role of women in the struggles in Lower East Side and housing in general in New York was well known.

"All housing movements are led by women... because they are in charge of the home, they are in charge of the children they are in charge of the roof they might not be earning the money although more and more women are working but home is a woman's responsibility throughout history housing movements have been run by women but there was something about Cooper Square like the fact that we wrote our own songs that it was a different kind of it was a very exciting struggle it was not boring." (Community organiser, Cooper Square, interview June 2013)

These acts of resistance bring those concerned to the attention of the authorities, outlining for instance how they were under scrutiny by the FBI and family members subject to forms of blacklisting. Undertaken as they were, within the framework of legal protest, the need is to recognise whether they can be managed in ways other than being deemed illegitimate.

4.2 Professionals and proletariat

As we have suggested, some of the points we can begin to draw from the interviews we held are themes that augment Ward's simple four-phase model of the development of direct action. On the one hand, we find narratives that describe the spark in terms that reveal class consciousness and explicitly identify with a wider struggle against the market or against racial segregation. On the other, we find professionals describing the ways in which they have used the levers of funding and power to mobilise resources around the central issue of housing. And we find in each a recognition of the value of the other. And we might exaggerate this point slightly to show how it is expressed in very different terms.

In our New York instance professionals are rarely welcomed and not often spoken of warmly as comrades:

“...so I became an organiser one of the first people who came to the first meeting was Walter Thabit who is a rare community planner because he only works for communities and not for the city and not for corporations.” (Community organiser, Cooper Square, interview June 2013)

More normally, they (the professionals) are regarded as necessary:

“I just got the name of my lawyer... that told us about the land trust, so he came to us with this idea, I mean if we didn't have him we wouldn't know there was a Community Land Trust. If we didn't have Walter we didn't know that we could plan for people and not for the corporations. So you need the professionals but they can't tell you how to do it, you have to tell them. We once had a picket line. We took a key and we dipped it in epoxy and we put it in the door of the City office and broke off the key so when they came to work and we were outside picketing and when they came to work they couldn't get in... This was in Stuyvesant Street right nearby. It wasn't Cooper Square 'cause City moved the office because we were doing too much damage to their office they moved it to Stuyvesant Street which was five blocks away. So we are outside picketing and they are trying to get in and they call the cops and we had a lawyer, a local lawyer, and they said and he talked with the cops and he said if you plead guilty I can get you off, and we said what do you mean guilty, we are not guilty, they are guilty. They are destroying us how can you say we are guilty? He said do you want to get out, no we want to win so we said go away we will get a different lawyer. He said, 'look I want to be your lawyer you do great work', you want to be our lawyer tell them we are innocent, tell them the City is at fault. If the door is locked don't blame us we have no idea how the door is locked. Go find out who locked the door but we are here to demand our rights as citizens. You do that or go away. So he did that, he won the case but we never let them tell us what to do. We didn't let Walter tell us what to do so you need an accountant you need your lawyer, you need a planner that does your bidding and if they don't do you're bidding tell them goodbye. Why am I blocking on the name of our lawyer?” (Community organiser, Cooper Square, interview June 2013)

However, activists had to keep a close eye on the professionals. While Thelma Burdick and Walter Thabit were exceptions, the majority proved the rule:

“We had a thanksgiving celebration on the site all this was on the site, the question was and then the City turned around and gave the site to the Catholic Church headed by one of our representatives who had supported our plan who was told by Robert Moses that he would get a Co-Op building that would make the San Gennaro Society millions of dollars most of which he would pocket so he didn't support us. He supported Robert Moses.... So we, it was Christmas and we put on red hats and scarfs and my daughter has a guitar and we re-wrote the Christmas carols and it was in front of his liquor store this Louis Desalvio had and we sang, Rudolph the... We changed Rudolph the Red Nose Reindeer to this guy. We wrote 'deck the halls with low rent housing fal la la la... that's the future we're espousing fal la la la...', we changed the Christmas carols to attack this guy and to make the plans for Cooper Square. He called the cops because people weren't going into the store to buy liquor and he said arrest them they are

stopping my business and the cop said Mr Desalvio if I arrest these people my wife will kill me. She wants an apartment in Cooper Square! So we had thanksgiving on the vacant land.” (Community organiser, Copper Square, interview June 2013)

Figure 7 The cluttered desk of an activist or overworked professional?



For professionals, their role was almost of translation:

“So we are a gatekeeper we had come up 1987/1988 come up with a large community process that ended up coming up with an alternative development plan to what the City had put out and then we’ve kept refining that vision over the years and so we do act as a gatekeeper where a project will come in and if it doesn’t fit certain of our development principles we will say well this doesn’t fit or that doesn’t fit so whether that has to do with affordable housing whether that has to do with all the way down to bedroom sizes and so we recently worked with a developer who was proposing some housing and the smallest bedrooms were really small and one of the principals of DS&I in the community come up with is that there are families in this community who want to have children who want to have the opportunity to have a desk in their room or have some opportunity to do homework not just big enough to stick a bed there and that’s it and so he agreed to increase the bedroom size in order to fit, be able to fit a desk those are the kinds of things gets down to the granule details of trying to promote a certain development, type of development in the neighbourhood and not just cramming in as many units as you can and not having them be high quality.” (Community professional, Dudley Street, interview June 2013)

But we also find the language of dependence, of doing for:

“Yes so my role here is both maintaining the Community Land Trust and looking for other opportunities to promote the Land Trust model both within the neighbourhood and

in other neighbourhoods in other areas of the city and beyond and then also to work with our residents and committees to look for economic development strategies especially around work force around jobs and around you know anything that can be done to boost the local economy still in a way that is benefitting the local residents and so we are involved in everything from coalitions to promote local food production and greenhouse and community farms which I will show you when we go out to and art place initiative where we are looking at the creative economy and how to create an arts kind of culture district using down the street we have the Strand Theatre which is an early 1900s theatre that has been restored and but still really doesn't do programming that is really reflective of the community as much and so it is an under-utilised resource so that so we are trying to figure out how we promote opportunities for employment whether it is in concessions or promotions or in the theatre etc so we are looking at from arts to food to health care to food services to child care you know every opportunity we can.”
(Community professional, Dudley Street, interview June 2013)

Adding

“But we also find the language of dependence, of doing for: “We have a lot of it falls on me we do have, we do have community organisers and partners so a lot of the DS&Is role is that we are not providing job training or work force development training but we are partnering with other groups to do and we hold them accountable and say you help design the programme.” (Community professional, Dudley Street, interview June 2013)

Thus we can begin to draw out the difference between activism and the organizing work of professionals in the pursuit of community resources. There are narratives of resistance in both; their activism and organizing are complementary and remain central to any likelihood of political and class consciousness being shifted in some way. Yet they are different. For instance, one seems to engage in struggle through pragmatism, fighting as it were for the very basic of needs, in this case housing. This contrasts to the element of choice that might be deployed by the other. We can see that one might remain in a romanticised and almost defeatist role without the deployment of expertise from the other. Perhaps this is the theory to match the practice. How, as this takes place, resistance moves towards a more reformist practice requires further examination. However, as our cases begin to indicate, there is a path to follow from resistance, activism and organizing towards securing public investment and creating the conditions for housing and in some instances, the petite bourgeois pursuit of home ownership. As with many studies of community struggle, this seems contradictory.

5. Conclusion

Resistance to gentrification confronts some central dilemmas. In seeking to control the use of housing, radical movements inevitably become engaged in debates about ownership, about property and about land. They may well travel through Ward's four phases as he described them. From the point of view of Engels, regardless of the radical credentials of these activists, the concerns they raise and actions they pursue must inherently be petite bourgeois in character. It is perhaps inevitable then that those radicals enter into alliances with housing professionals who are able to mobilise the resources needed to defend the terrain. On appearance this alliance may well be an uneasy and uncomfortable one, as we have illustrated but it may also represent aspects of praxis, of theory building, of raising class consciousness and practice. These are aspects to which we have devoted little time in this paper, but would be worthy of greater reflection. However what we might point to, not

entirely irrespective of the theory and practice dynamic, is that we have seen a catalyst for some form of community independence and the CLT by securing both assets and liabilities under their control, stand in contrast to the powers of the market. And in the sense of narratives of resistance, the communities in both Dudley St and Cooper Square have indeed answered back.

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