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Welcoming the world? Hospitality, homonationalism and the London 2012 Olympics

For inclusion in *World, City, Queer* special issue.

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Abstract In an era of intense 'entrepreneurial' city marketing, overt attempts to court LGBT consumers and investors have been made not solely through the promotion of lesbian and gay arts festivals, pride celebrations and 'specialised' cultural events, but also through 'mainstream' mega-events. This paper explores this with reference to London's 2012 Olympics, an event which welcomed LGBT spectators, volunteers and participants through a series of initiatives proclaiming the Games as distinctively 'gay-friendly'. Considering this in the light of queer critiques – particularly those concerning homonationalism – we suggest that this attempt to market London as sexually diverse relied on the effacement of certain sexual practices and spaces not easily accommodated within normative, Western models of sexual citizenship and equality. Here, a focus on the ways 'abject' sexualities were regulated in the run-up and hosting of the London Olympics is used to show that notions of welcome inevitably did not extend to encompass all sexual identities and practices. In conclusion, it is argued that the Olympics represented a moment when particular ideas of sexual cosmopolitanism were deployed to regulate, order and normalise the variegated sexual landscapes of the host city.

Keywords: sexuality, sex work, world cities, tolerance, homonormativity

Introduction

The Summer Olympics is a spectacular celebration of sporting achievement and cosmopolitan globalism. However, it is also an increasingly commodified spectacle which has become the world's greatest media and marketing event, with the International Olympic Committee acting as the hub through which a vast network of corporations capitalize upon the Olympics 'brand' (Guthman 2008; Boykoff 2011). Geographers add a significant element to this now-familiar leftist critique by suggesting that such mega-spectacles can also instigate deleterious spatial effects typified by displacement, removal and exclusion (Waitt 1999; Degan 2003; Kennelly and Watt 2011). Here, the development of Olympics stadia, and associated consumerist 'playscapes' catering to tourists, athletes and journalists, is accused of setting in motion new waves of corporate gentrification which ripple out from the epicentre of the Olympic stadia to take in adjacent neighbourhoods – ironically, often the

neighbourhoods depicted as most benefitting from the hosting of the Olympics. Given the boosterist promotion of the Olympics by the host city typically seeks to create what Sibley (1995: xi) terms the 'middle-class family ambience associated with international consumption style', a repeated outcome is the displacement of marginal groups from these newly remade spaces, with working class youth, ethnic minorities, and the homeless appearing particularly vulnerable (Tufts 2004; Silverstre and de Oliveria 2012).ⁱ

Such critical geographic interpretations conceptualise the Olympics not as a sporting event per se, but a project of urban regeneration aiming to transform 'problem places' and 'unproductive' people into sites of active consumption and responsible citizenship (see Paton et al 2012: 1470). Yet despite the existence of a substantial body of work on the class relations of such processes (see also Vanwynsberghe et al 2013), and some attention to questions of race and age (see Ruthesier 2001; Kennelly and Watt 2011; Watt 2013), the sexual landscapes bequeathed by the Olympics and other sporting mega-events remain under-theorised and understudied.ⁱⁱ This is surprising given the wider attention devoted to gay tourism and the mobilities of the 'global gay' (Binnie 2004), as well as emerging literatures on sexual consumption and business travel which hint at the importance of sexuality in the leisure and hospitality industries so integral to the Olympics (e.g. Collins 2012; Thurnell Read 2011).

In this paper we examine how specific ideas about the appropriate sexual identity (or identities) of London were deployed in the neoliberal politics of speculation and boosterism that underpinned the London 2012 summer Olympics. Here, the Olympics is understood as a moment in which the future trajectory of the city was at stake, with both the physical remaking of the city, and its discursive framing, becoming integral to a civic project constructing a neoliberal urban future. We argue that sexuality cannot be considered incidental to this process given it has been repeatedly shown that particular normative ideals of sexual behaviour 'shore up' politically and economically conservative processes of urban capital accumulation (Nast 2002; Hubbard

2004; Oswin 2007), and are implicated in selective process of gentrification and urban revanchism (Knopp 1995; Papayanis 2000; Doan and Higgs 2012). This involves more than a selective appropriation and promotion of particular sexual lifestyles, often entailing an active disciplining of sexuality and space in an attempt to engineer specific urban outcomes. In such instances, urban leaders seek to marginalize sites of 'perverse' sexuality, permitting visible expressions of sexuality only if they can be accommodated within the plenary geographies of capitalist accumulation (Brown 2000) and do not disturb the 'family-friendly' geographies of heteronormativity (Hubbard 2011).

Our analysis here pivots around the discourses of inclusion that were invoked by the London Olympic organisers, particularly with respect to sexual diversity. While this notion of welcome initially seemed unconditional, the impossibility of creating 'unity in diversity' became evident as some intolerant of sexual diversity were condemned. Conversely, it became clear that some forms of sexual diversity were also considered intolerable. In this sense, the 2012 London summer Olympics provides the basis for a discussion of the way an urban mega-event can invoke and institutionalize particular ideas of what types of sexuality, and what types of sex, rightly belong in a city – and which do not. Noting the ways in which the organizing committee of the London Olympics actively invoked particular ideas about the city's sexual diversity, the paper argues that the Olympics was important in consolidating London's international reputation as 'gay-friendly' at the same time as it encouraged the marginalization of other, non-normative sexualities. The paper accordingly concludes that specific gay identities and lifestyles were actively deployed in the marketing of the London Olympics only in so much that this created a sense of the city as hospitable to middle class forms of consumption, investment and business. While this alignment of middle class aesthetics, capital accumulation strategies and homonormativity has been noted previously (e.g. Bell and Binnie 2004; Duggan 2002), sporting mega-events have previously been considered in terms of their sexual dimensions only when those events specifically targeted LGBT communities (e.g. see Waitt 2006 on Sydney's gay games). In moving to consider the sexualities of an event rarely considered through the lens of queer theorization, we

demonstrate that sporting mega-events represent important moments both in the making of sexual normativities as well as in the worlding of cities.

London: unity in diversity

It has been widely argued that the key to London's successful Olympic bid was the city's claim to possess 'unity in diversity' and therefore 'represent the world' (as claimed by London 2012 chairman, Lord Coe, when presenting its bid for the Games in 2005): London was apparently chosen over Paris, Moscow, Madrid, or New York by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) precisely because its bid documents convinced voters that the city's diverse, multicultural, and cosmopolitan character would ensure that people of diverse cultural, ethnic, religious and sexual background would be welcomed to the Games (Evans 2007). London was frequently described in bid documents as 'one of the most multicultural cities in the world' (LOCOG 2012). Bulley and Lisle (2012: 187) note that this intertwining of diversity and hospitality was clearly set out in the official bid document that was submitted by the local organizing committee (LOCOG) to the IOC in 2004 when it stated: 'London has always been a place that welcomes people, ideas, information and goods from around the world. As a result London is notably diverse'. Here, London was also presented as a microcosm of the UK, with a key discourse underpinning the successful 2012 Olympics bid being that 'the UK is a creative, inclusive place to live'.ⁱⁱⁱ

Critical geographical perspectives have long suggested that such boosterist narratives of inclusivity, diversity and unity mask both historical and present day injustices and exclusions (see Kearns and Philo, 1993). The triumphant place-branding of London as one of the world's most multicultural cities papers over histories of violent colonial rule: the reason why present-day London is so 'diverse' is a story involving forcible displacements and dislocations. Add to this first world dominance, and the necessity of economic migration, and we might gain a different picture of one of the world's 'most multicultural cities'. Moreover, this narrative of diversity, inclusivity and unity

sits at odds with some the recent attempts taken by the UK state to project its borders overseas and to pre-empt, and prevent, specific forms of immigration and refugee migration (Vaughan-Williams 2010). Populist government rhetoric about the need to 'crack down' on 'illegal immigrants' highlights the clear limits of any portrayal of the UK as inclusive and welcoming to all given the state is becoming increasingly inhospitable to many.^{iv} Furthermore - as we describe below - these narratives around inclusivity clearly sit in profound contradiction to what took place in order for the Olympics to occur: the displacement of certain undesirable groups from the vicinity of the Olympic park.

From the outset, the local Olympic committee nonetheless presented a narrative stressing that *all* communities would benefit from the event. A key component of the London Olympic bid was the creation of a sustainable legacy, with the bid envisioned 'partly as an exercise in city marketing and partly as a longer-term statement of enduring principles' (Gold and Gold 2008: 302). As Evans (2007: 299) notes, London's bid document placed 'greatest emphasis... on the legacy and after-effects of the Olympic leverage opportunity, rather than the event, its content and purpose'. While notions of legacy are, as Patton et al (2012: 1483) note, nebulous and opaque, foremost here was the idea that the Games might have a transformative effect on the East End of London, an area long characterized by what Kennelly and Watt (2011: 767) described as an alterity 'indicated by a long-standing association with the city's immigrant and working-class populations'. Significantly, the London boroughs of Greenwich, Hackney, Newham, Tower Hamlets and Waltham Forest where the main Olympic Park and athletes' village were located have long been characterized by some of the most pronounced pockets of deprivation and disadvantage in the UK, with each falling within the top third of the most deprived boroughs in London (MacRury and Poynter 2009; Raco and Tunney 2010). Thus one of the key London 2012 legacy promises was to 'transform the heart of east London'.^v

This close association of the East End with the Olympics meant that this became a site whose diverse populations came under scrutiny from the outset, imagined as both the prime beneficiaries of the Olympics, but also a

problematic people existing on the margins of civilized society. In the words of Patton et al (2012: 1471) a mega-event like the Olympics can be viewed as inextricably linked to a wider project of neo-liberalisation concerned with creating a 'more active consumer in a moral and economic sense', following a long-standing government drive for community cohesion in this part of London (Newman 2007). Indeed an extensive and largely critical academic literature emerged following the award of the Olympics to London in July 2005, much of it providing a class-based critique of the potential impacts of the games on the local communities hosting it (MacRury and Poynter 2009). These issues of displacement, and revanchist urban policy, sit uncomfortably with the narrative told by the Olympic bid committee, which claimed that by 'staging the Games in this part of the city, the most enduring legacy of the Olympics will be the regeneration of an entire community for the direct benefit of everyone who lives there'.^{vi} As such, the local Olympic organizing committee claimed that the event would have an enduring beneficial impact for all in the East End yet, in so doing, they papered over the detrimental impact the Olympics could have on certain communities.

Taken together, this suggests a number of complex, and possibly contradictory, discourses underpinning the Olympic bid from the outset. Firstly, the organizing committee sought to make a claim to the 'unity in diversity' characteristic of London. This was to suggest that London is globally leading, more diverse, multicultural and welcoming than other world cities. Secondly, however, it was acknowledging a need to further foster this sense of inclusion and diversity by involving the varied communities of inner London in the hosting and running of the Olympics.^{vii} Here, it is worth noting that the 2009 Strategic Regeneration Framework recognised the 'embarrassing' levels of poverty evident in the East End of London, suggesting inequalities of this type were 'holding back the whole of London and the national economy too'.^{viii} A third, perhaps implicit, concern was that the Olympics would bring together and create unity within some of London's inner boroughs, areas described in the Framework document as 'challenging' communities characterized by

divergent life chances, 'violent' and 'gang crime', 'multiple disadvantage' and 'homelessness'.

The London Olympics: reinventing the (sexual) city?

While questions of sexuality were understandably muted in initial bid documents, it was nevertheless always made clear that the LOCOG diversity strategy encapsulated sexual diversity. Indeed, the LOCOG Diversity and Inclusion Strategy (2008) identified sexual orientation (alongside ethnicity, disability, gender, faith, and age) as one of the key dimensions of social diversity, considered fundamental to the creation of 'cultures of respect' around the Games. Likewise, while the Strategic Regeneration Framework 2009 stated 'there is very little evidence to show the impact of sexual orientation on life chances and experiences, and certainly nothing to note specific to the host boroughs'^{ix}, sexual orientation was identified as an 'equality characteristic' needing to be carefully monitored given evidence of 'discrimination in education and at work, as well as an increase fear of (hate) crime' among LGBT populations. The appointment of Stephen Frost as Head of Diversity and Inclusion for the Games in 2007 was significant here given his previous position as Head of workforce programmes at gay equality organization Stonewall. Visible inclusion in the opening and closing ceremonies, as well as in the accompanying cultural Olympiad, was hence promised to all the 'LGB stakeholders' involved in the organization of the games.

One important aspect of producing inclusion at the London Olympics was the deployment of volunteers to welcome visitors, steward the games and oversee the transport of games competitors and visitors. These 'front of house' volunteers (approximately 70,000 in number) were subject to intensive training and security clearance to ensure they managed visitors' comportment in line with ideals of diversity and hospitality. Recognising the importance of sexual diversity, LOCOG set a target of 7-10% volunteers from 'LGB

communities', ultimately achieving just 5% recruitment. Other failures around sexual diversity were noted: for example, following the lead of Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympics, a Pride House was proposed to act as an 'LGBT hub' for the Olympics on Clapham Common, a move supported by a number of prominent 'ambassadors':

I'm very proud and pleased to be an ambassador for Pride House London. All eyes will be on London for the 2012 Games and Pride House is an idea that brings together so many of the elements that makes London one of the greatest cities in the world and a beacon of tolerance, diversity and pride. Pride House is a symbol of how London remains one of the most truly cosmopolitan and accepting cities in the world (Stephen Fry, cited in *Pink News*, Dec 9, 2011).^x

The announcement of a programme of events to be held at Pride House over a 14-day period did, however, prompt some controversy, with the area's long-standing reputation as an area of gay male cruising prompting the Friends of Clapham Common group to claim Pride House 'is highly likely to become a magnet for undesirable elements of the gay community community'.^{xi} John Amaechi, resident of Clapham and openly gay former basketball player, claimed that this objection was based on 'archaic stereotypes and a complete misrepresentation of the facts'. He attempted to distance the gay community from 'undesirable' acts such public cruising, by instead presenting a homonormative narrative of sameness:

Today's LGBT community and their straight friends are as much about family and children, book clubs and Bikram yoga and indeed a fanatical support for the greatest sporting spectacle in our lifetime, as any other part of the community (cited in *Pink News*, Feb 1, 2012).^{xii}

Here the 'respectable gay' trumps the 'dangerous queer' (Smith, 1994), suggesting there were clear limits to who could be included in this new sexually diverse London. While the Friends of Clapham Common later apologized for their slight on the LGBT community, such publicity may have

been a factor in the failure to attract sponsorship, which ultimately led to the abandonment of Pride House in April 2012.^{xiii}

Despite such setbacks, representing the Games as gay-friendly was clearly important in the marketing of the London 2012, with the official organisers repeatedly emphasizing their commitment to sexual orientation diversity. For example, Paul Deighton, Chief Executive of LOCOG stated:

Our vision is as bold as it is simple – to use the power of the Games to inspire change. We want to reach out to all parts of the community and connect them with London 2012. We also want to leave a legacy of greater inclusion and understanding of diversity. Our diversity and inclusion pin badge range, starting with the LGBT pin badge, is one way of showing our support for a sporting environment built upon equality and inclusion.^{xiv}

Tellingly, one question posed in the training questionnaire presented to Olympic volunteers asked them how they might deal with a spectator who is uncomfortable sitting near two men holding hands. Among multiple-choice answers for volunteers are the options to 'politely ask the couple to stop holding hands' or to tell the spectator to 'stop being a homophobic idiot.'" The preferred answer was to explain to them that 'a huge diversity of people are at the London 2012 Games, which includes gay, lesbian and bisexual individuals and couples'.

All of this illustrates an awareness of, and sensitivity towards, questions of sexual diversity and equality. In the following sections of this paper, we nevertheless explore some of shortcomings and limits to LOCOG's promotion of sexual diversity. Specifically, we want to think about who was depicted as unwelcome in East London, and those who were ultimately displaced in order for the Olympics to take place. We do so by focusing on two figures. The first is the 'intolerant homophobe', a figure failing to conform to LOCOG's understanding of the 'good' hospitable cosmopolitan subject by virtue of their inability or unwillingness to extend a welcome to lesbian and gay people. In

considering this figure, we draw upon ongoing debates surrounding gay imperialism, homonationalism and Islamophobia, noting that gay rights have frequently been positioned as conflicting with the religious rights and values embraced by certain Muslims. Secondly, we turn to the figure of the sex worker in order to think about the sexual subjects who were depicted as offering the wrong sort of welcome. Both examples allow us to explore the question of who was, and was not, welcome at London 2012, and to identify the queer 'others' who fall outside the homonormative notions of lesbian and gay equality enshrined in conventional Western rights discourse.

(Neo)Imperialism: Britain's civilizing mission for global gay rights

While LOCOG and the London boroughs sought to use the games to create a particular sense of identity and belonging, the Olympics were inevitably caught up in the agendas of other groups, both in the UK and beyond. For example, the promotion of London as a lesbian and gay friendly world city by LOCOG often entwined with the arguments of those who wanted to use the Olympic movement as a way of promoting lesbian and gay rights worldwide. A prominent example here was human rights lawyer Mark Stephens, who gave a number of public lectures and media reports in 2012 arguing that the IOC ought to prevent any of the (then) 84 countries outlawing homosexuality from participating in the Olympics. Stephens claimed that competing nations should be made to comply with the non-discrimination clause in the Olympic Charter.^{xv} He also urged athletes to 'come out' in Britain and to seek asylum in the UK when they arrived for the Games^{xvi}. Thus Stephens argued that the London Olympics presented:

...a unique opportunity to put LGBT rights front and centre. London 2012 will be the world's biggest sporting event, and the city has an opportunity to leave a lasting humanitarian legacy for LGBT (Stephens, 2012).^{xvii}

Here it is interesting that it is the city of London itself that is spoken of as leaving this lasting legacy. In both the promotion of London of a diverse city, and in these broader discussions and global lesbian and gay rights, London therefore becomes positioned as a place of openness and acceptance, a place of sanctuary for lesbian and gay people. In turn, the UK was positioned as more advanced than nations that have laws prohibiting homosexuality.^{xviii}

In making his argument, Stephens drew obvious inspiration from those who have used past Olympics as a platform for civil rights and for gender equality. Indeed, Stephens argued it was now time for LGBT rights to take centre-stage, depicting past campaigns for civil rights as analogous with campaigns for lesbian and gay equality:

To distinguish between racial apartheid in South Africa...and the criminalization of consensual sex between adults of the same gender is artificial (Stephens, 2012)^{xix}

Yet it can be argued that there is an incredibly important distinction to be made between these two analogies. The condemnation of apartheid in South Africa is very different from positioning London as offering a universal model of lesbian and gay rights. By positioning these two examples as indistinguishable the complex and uneven geographies of colonization and power get papered over. Thus it is always important to take into consideration the varied complex power geometries at work in order to question who is condemning who, and who is mobilizing whom, in each of these campaigns. It is only once we have done so that we can understand the promotion of global gay rights to be a new form of British imperialism that a condemnation of apartheid or racial segregation never could be.

While we would not wish to deny that the Olympics is a suitable place to raise awareness around issues of lesbian and gay rights, the type of narrative surrounding campaigns for global gay rights can easily slip into a language of neo-colonialism. Indeed, a Eurocentric understanding of gay rights can also be seen in Stephens' encouragement to lesbian and gay athletes to visibly

'come out' at the Olympics, and show the world that they are proud to be part of the global 'LGB community'. In these narratives gay pride is seen as inherently positive. It overlooks the political potential of those who cannot be proud, or do not want to be proud, and those whose pride might be mixed with shame. Stephens, rightly, recognized that not everyone could be 'out and proud' and thus urged lesbian and gay athletes who don't feel safe 'coming out' in their home countries to apply for asylum while in Britain.^{xx} Yet, as Andrew Tucker (2009: 15) notes, these ideals of global sexual citizenship and universal rights fail 'to see the problems of very Western-centric legal rights – themselves located powerfully within ideas of Western sexual liberation tied to a 'closet' binary of openness/equality and secretiveness/inequality'. Those who remain closeted are positioned as oppressed, in denial (Hayes 2000). This presumed universal gay agenda of coming out and being proud, of embracing your 'true' sexual identity, of seeing same-sex desire as an identity rather than a practice, overlooks the multitude of ways in which same-sex desire is experienced and understood (Epprecht 2004). It is, in short, a neocolonial vision that normalises a western teleological notion of sexual citizenship (Binnie 2004).

Despite the IOC not taking steps to prohibit countries who discriminate against lesbian and gay people from taking part, London 2012 was still depicted as having a central role in 'civilizing' people from countries that discriminate against LGB people. For example, in one lecture Stephens urged students at Universities housing athletes from nations which criminalize homosexuality that 'institutions founded on free expression need to educate them on where they have gone wrong'.^{xxi} The UK hence became depicted as responsible for the promotion of lesbian and gay rights on a global scale. The Olympics were seen as a way to speak out on global-gay rights issues, a means to teach less 'developed' nations about the importance of lesbian and gay acceptance. Thus what is at work in these narratives is a notion of gay imperialism (Bracke 2012; Sabsay 2012): the Olympics were positioned as a kind of civilizing mission intent on disciplining 'less tolerant' nations. A new form of imperialism was thus (re)inscribed in the name of spreading diversity and tolerance. As Sara Ahmed notes:

Imperial narratives are those in which force is created as a gift, as if empire is what gives the other freedom, what brings the other modernity. The languages of freedom, equality, civility, diversity and light become associated with whiteness, as being what white subjects (queer or not queer) will give to others (Ahmed 2011: 123)

Within these narratives Britain is positioned as an exemplar of lesbian gay tolerance, positioned against the 'backwards' homophobic other. These narratives can hence be understood as part of a broader notion of homonationalism (e.g. Puar 2007; El Tayeb 2012; Davidson 2013), where lesbian and gay tolerance is seen as a source of national pride, and positioned against other seemingly less-tolerant nations. Here we see a repetition of missionary colonial fantasy of 'rescue'. The myth of UK civility and inclusivity becomes the basis on which a neo-colonial vision of the promotion of global gay rights is built. Histories of colonialism are not just are erased and papered over but also, in certain ways, repeated and (re)inscribed: Britain is both civilizer and savior.

One of the key promises of the London 2012 bid – that of promoting cultural and sexual diversity – thus became a part of nationalist discourse, promoting the UK as a tolerant and accepting nation and distinguishing it from the other nation-states who fail to live up to this ideal. This narrative thus distances Britain, and by implication, the Olympics, from the 'barbarism' of the state-sponsored homophobia found in certain parts of the world. Yet it does more than simply distance, as in many of these narratives Britain is clearly positioned as superior and world-leading, implying that other countries are in desperate need of British intervention to create more 'modern' values of diversity of tolerance. This type of reading relies on an interpretation of athletes, visitors and (even) Londoners of African or Islamic Asian origin as 'sexually oppressed [*people*] from less enlightened, pre-modern regimes' (Davidson 2013: 17). Here, the liberal Western gay nation is contrasted with the oppressed in a way that perpetuates established distinctions of sex, race, religion and gender, denying the possibility of what Douglas et al (2011) term

a 'genuinely queer anti-racist critique' that considers the inseparability of these identity categories.

Such observations on the 'pitting of sexual diversity as a sign of modern civility against the "backwardness" of certain forms of racialisation' (Douglas et al 2011: 111) are particularly revealing if we turn to consider the sexual landscapes of the East End boroughs where the Olympics unfolded. Here, in February 2011, stickers began to appear in some parts of Tower Hamlets proclaiming the area an 'anti-gay zone' in the name of Allah. In response, local populations began to cover over the stickers and an East End Gay Pride march was hastily organized (Zanghelli 2012). However, when links between the organisers of the march and the political extremist group, the English Defence League, became apparent, this march was cancelled. Subsequent debate questioned whether a march, in any form, would merely represent an attempt to project homophobia onto the Muslim community and to aggravate Islamophobia on grounds of lesbian and gay tolerance. In one well-publicised account, the homonational tendencies of any such action were presented as unequivocal, with the authors calling 'on gay, queer and trans people with race and class privileges...to refuse our/their role in politically correcting racist agendas of policing and gentrification' (Haritaworn et al 2011: np). As Zanghelli (2012: 361) argues, this accusation of the complicity of LGBT cultures and racism extended to the clientele of the *George and Dragon*, a gay bar in the East End that had 'been especially vocal in encouraging LGBT people living or partying in the area to work closely with the police and report any homophobia and transphobia, especially it seems where the 'phobic' person is non-white or migrant' (Haritaworn et al 2011: np). Such discourses highlight the, at times, uneasy relationship existing between different ethnicised, racialised and sexual groups in the East End, which clearly stood at odds with the tolerant reputation which was being endorsed by LOCOG.

This suggests clear limits to the LOCOG's ideal of 'unity in diversity', with intolerance towards lesbian and gay groups being used by some as a justification for Islamophobia (see Haritaworn et al, 2012). This underlines that the ideals of sexual diversity promoted by the Olympics' organisers

inevitability, albeit inadvertently, positioned certain nations, and certain populations, as backwards or intolerant. This reminds us that any notion of 'universal' welcome is fraught with contradiction. Hosting the Olympics necessitated extending a welcome to the world, yet as Lugosi (2007) suggests, participation or inclusion in hospitality is always conditional, and frequently exclusionary. For, as Dikeç (2002: 228) notes, hospitality is perhaps 'not always liberating and emancipatory, but may conceal an oppressive aspect beneath its welcoming surface.' The LOGOC notion of hospitality was indeed always underpinned by the prioritization of particular norms of inclusion and diversity that would exclude those intolerant of these norms. The welcoming diverse and tolerant image of the London Olympics failed to extend a welcome to those who do not uphold these same values, demanding an adoption to particular 'civilised' norms. Yet there were other exclusions that need to be noted: as we will describe in the next section, some groups were not excluded because they were *intolerant*, but because they were regarded as *intolerable*.

Sexual exclusions and abject presences

As we have outlined above, the marketing of the London Olympics as 'gay-friendly' was achieved through a variety of measures, including attempts to ensure 'front of house' hosts were offering the appropriate form of welcome (e.g. volunteers being recruited from diverse sexual groups and trained to be aware of sexual diversity). Yet beyond these groups there were what Bulley and Lisle term the 'behind the scenes' hosts for the Olympics, whom:

...allow London to 'welcome the world' cheaply and efficiently. Without the laundry, waste management, cleaning, and food preparation, hosting the Olympic Games would not be possible. Yet despite their necessity, these figures are rarely mentioned in the Olympic bid. Some, such as taxi drivers, are treated as a willing population of workers...while the majority of the hospitality industry in London - hotel

managers, maids, chefs, souvenir sellers, and sex workers to name but a few - are absent from the bid document (Bulley and Lisle 2012: 16).

The latter's inclusion in this list is particularly telling. All of these figures might, as Bulley and Lisle note, be significant in offering forms of hospitality that ensure that visitors, delegates and competitors feel welcomed. But unlike the bars, cafes and clubs of Soho and Vauxhall which the *Visit Britain* websites draw attention to as the 'twin hubs of LGBT life in London', nothing is said of the striptease clubs, saunas, burlesque theatres, sex shops or brothels which are also found in these areas (and elsewhere in the capital). Perhaps this is not surprising given the *Visit Britain 2010-13 and 2012 Games Strategy* identified five key campaign 'platforms', namely 'Classic Britain' ('castles, museums, gardens'), 'Dynamic Britain' (arts and shopping), 'Generation Y' (discerning young professionals born between 1978 and 1990) and 'Luxury Britain' (high net worth individuals) alongside 'Gay Britain', the latter based on promotion of 'gay friendly cities, pride events, food and drink, culture and sightseeing with a contemporary twist' – and not the consumption of sexual services.^{xxii} All this implies the targeting of what Duggan (2002: 179) terms 'a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption' and an idealized 'responsible' affluent white gay consumer.

Related issues of gay marketing and hospitality have been explored in case studies of the differentiated welcome encountered by gay and queer-identified tourists in 'gay villages'. These suggest that the welcome extended to LGBT groups often only encompasses affluent, white homonormative consumers: those typically imagined to be members of Richard Florida's (2003) fabled 'creative class'. Such villages have been described as exclusionary toward women (Doan and Higgs 2012), people of colour (Elder 2005), and working-class gays and lesbians (Lewis 2013). Elaborating, Binnie and Skeggs (2004) argue that the use of the white gay man to mark out cosmopolitanism has depended not only on them remaining in the position of the safe, usable Other, but also on a significant proportion of the remaining LGBT population being depicted as threatening or abject. As such, the promotion of white, gay,

male consumer spaces occurs at the expense of spaces associated with gay male cruising and 'perverse' sex.

Such observations resonate with Bell and Binnie's (2004) argument that when cities incorporate their 'gay village' into city marketing materials, this is a strategic move designed to show the city's openness to difference rather than a genuine acceptance of queer identities. While they admit the notion of authenticity is problematic, they assert that 'gay friendliness' has come to be used by cities as they jockey for position in the global urban hierarchy, and that this requires the marginalization of queer counter-publics. There are important parallels here with neoliberal critiques of gay and lesbian assimilation which suggest that gay villages are tools used by states to encourage 'homonormative' lifestyles anchored in consumption rather than offering genuine liberation for LGBT populations (Lewis 2013). In this sense, while an Olympic city might wish to promote itself as a 'sexy, funky and cool place in which to live, work, play and visit' (Tan 2003: 420) through a promotion of sexual permissiveness, the implication is that there will be clear limits to this imposed by city-states that remain predominantly normative in their sexual morality and target markets. Sex work hence enjoys only a precarious existence within the marketing of the sexually diverse city: the tolerance Florida (2003) speaks of is rarely extended to encompass commercial sexual services.

The idea that the sex workers contribute little to the vitality and vibrancy of urban life appears widespread among urban boosters and governors (Hubbard 2004; Sasajimi 2012), despite evidence that demand for sexual services increases during mega-events (Cunningham and Kendall 2011). In this sense, media stories about the possible 'flood' of 'trafficked' sex workers coming to London to profit from the Olympics immediately identified certain forms of sexuality as outwith the remit of hospitality:

Major sporting events always tend to precipitate a boom in the sex industry, with hundreds of thousands of visitors - including site workers, spectators and athletes - flooding an area. Sex trafficking almost

doubled during the 2004 Athens Olympics, and there were reports of sex attacks in the athletes' village at Sydney in 2000.^{xxiii}

Eastern European migrants are swarming into London in “unprecedented” numbers, flooding the capital with beggars, pickpockets and prostitutes ahead of the Olympics, officials say.^{xxiv}

An ‘utterly unprecedented’ number of eastern Europeans are being transported into the country with instructions to work a pre-allocated pitch. It is thought the largely Romanian groups are being lured to the capital by an organised crime ring on the ‘deluded belief’ London can offer a better future. Some are understood to have arrived with Google printouts of Marble Arch. About 50 women were shipped into the Sussex Gardens area of west London last weekend, while high-class prostitutes are thought to be working outside the Cumberland Hotel.^{xxv}

Here, hydraulic metaphors predicting a flood of trafficked women from Eastern Europe made a clear case for ‘closing up’ the leaky borders of the state.^{xxvi} This implies yet another racialised limit to the hospitality offered at the London Olympics whereby certain incomers from Eastern Europe were described as unwelcome, a sadly common trope observed in other studies where distinctions between ‘local’ sex workers and exploited ‘foreign’ prostitutes have been used to justify exclusionary actions (e.g. Kunkel 2012). As Mai (2013: 120) argues, the anti-trafficking paradigm ‘engenders a hierarchical and essentialist dis-identification with migrant sex workers reproducing the West as equal, moral and safe’. Such discourses again position the UK as savior and sanctuary. The ‘problem’ of sex work is depicted as primarily coming from Eastern Europe, with workers ‘flooding’ in from ‘other’ nation-states. This imperialist vision also strips agency from those who travel to the UK to work in the sex industry. Intervention was argued for to protect helpless trafficked victims, perpetuating similar neo-colonial discourses to the narratives at work in the promotion of global LGBT rights.

In the event, charities working with sex workers in the London boroughs closest to the Olympics Village actually reported little evidence of such influxes, replicating trends noted in Vancouver's 2010 Winter Olympics as well as South Africa's World Cup 2010 (Bird and Donaldson 2011; Matheson and Finkel 2013). Irrespective, talk of trafficking provided an unanswerable case for clamping down on the city's sex trade, placing all sex workers under considerable scrutiny. Efforts to remove street sex workers from the boroughs nearest to the Olympic park were pronounced (the number of arrests in the first six months of 2012 being double those for the entirety of 2011), with Diversion Schemes established in those areas where there were previously none, and threats of anti-social behavior orders being served on those who refuse to participate. A Dispersal Zone covering Stratford centre and other areas adjacent to the Olympics was announced by the police three months before the Olympics opening ceremony, providing the police with the means to order a group of two or more people to leave the area for a period of at least 24 hours or face up to three months' imprisonment. Nor has off-street sex work been immune: 80 brothels were raided in Newham in 2011-12 alone. A critical report by London Assembly member Andrew Boff (2012: 5) suggested that such raids had less than one percent success rate in identifying victims of trafficking, leading the author to argue that 'police have been proactively raiding sex establishments without complaint nor significant intelligence that exploitation is taking place'. Georgina Perry, worker with Open Doors, which provides outreach to sex workers in the east end of London, argued that the 'juggernaut' of publicity created a situation where 'women who have been working off-street, safely, are now on the street selling sex in a much less safe environment'.^{xxvii} Such raids on brothels and arbitrary arrests hence created new fears and vulnerabilities amongst sex workers in East London, with this large-scale 'clean up effort' creating an inhospitable climate for sex workers, significantly compromising their safety (with workers less likely to report abuse, exploitation, and other crimes). As the campaign group 'Stop the Arrests' noted, 'policing practices are putting sex workers in danger and undermining their rights'.^{xxviii}

The quest for a hospitable, safe and sanitized space of Olympic welcome hence led to the creation of inhospitable spaces for those within the sex industry in the east end of London. Hospitality and welcome were not extended to the figure of the sex worker. Instead sex work became (increasingly) depicted as the undesirable, abject, standing in the way of normative ideals of cosmopolitan hospitality and sexual inclusivity. Therefore whilst idealized lesbian and gay consumers were welcomed in London, the dangerous queer other (in the form of the sex worker) was displaced. This expulsion was clearly deemed necessary to protect the image of London as a prosperous and equal city: by attempting to keep sex work out of sight, an imperial vision of sex work as something that happen 'over there' could be maintained. The norms of regulation used to promote the city as a cosmopolitan gay-friendly space, were, at the same time, covering up, and moving on, undesirable aspects of sex in the city.

As is often the case, sex workers were hence caught between the position of guests and hosts, being (g)host workers important in running London and the Olympics, yet subject to forms of governance demanding they remain invisible within the city marketing which offered a promise of an inclusive welcome to all. The 'welcome' offered by the sex worker was not seen as part of an acceptable 'cosmopolitan' encounter. Questions clearly circulate about the place of sexual commerce in the hosting of the Olympics, an event that has repeatedly been a focus for debates around trafficking, hospitality and abject sexualities in the city (Finkel and Matheson 2012). The vision of hospitality and diversity that underpinned the London Olympics was clearly tied to consumption, but this welcome only extended to specific forms of consumption, with the illicit consumption of sex work condemned – even though corporate hospitality in the form of adult entertainment and gentleman's clubs prospered elsewhere in the neoliberal city (Hubbard 2004).

Conclusion

It has been frequently noted that the city has become an empty signifier,

circulating endlessly in a universe of signs and symbols. City branding is the process of populating this signifier with conceptual signifieds. In this play of signs, sexual diversity and gay-friendly imagery can be invoked as a way of signaling creativity, cosmopolitanism and competitiveness. This equation is significant, for as Carver (2007) argues, the invocation of gay imagery is as much a periodizing concept as it is a spatial referent: in promoting a city as gay friendly, city promoters are seeking to distance their city from traditional industries, cultures and class politics, and evoking a post-industrial, cosmopolitan future in which (sexual) tolerance and creativity are yoked together. Yet such claims can appear ill-founded in instances where a city's claims to offer hospitality to all are not matched by the experiences of the visitors and tourists hosted during these events. The staging of mega-events such as the Olympics thus requires a careful governance of hospitality in which the experience economy is influenced via imaginations of desirable and undesirable categories of sexuality, ethnicity, class and gender. As we have shown, the notions of inclusion and diversity underpinning the 'gay friendly' city have their limits, and require the exclusion of those who are intolerant of, and intolerable within, this idealization of LGBT cosmopolitanism.

This paper has explored such notions as they applied to the marketing of the London 2012 Olympics, moving beyond questions of representation to address the ways that LOCOG aimed to actively produce particular forms of welcome. In much the same way that the 'Gay Games' have served to define the parameters of an 'imagined queer world' (Burns 2012), we have argued that the Olympics 'proper' were also involved in a process which mediates particular bodies and spaces as sites of LGBT consumption, and which privileges particular sexualities over Others. A key notion underpinning the marketing of the London Olympics was that LGBT groups were led to expect particular forms of welcome. But what were the limits to this welcome? And what sort of sexual normativities did this imagine? In this paper we have argued that the gay-friendly welcome adopted during London 2012 was extended only so far as to encompass homonormative gay identities. Indeed, while Gandy (2013) notes that the geography of sexual subcultures in London is highly variegated, including anonymous sex in public spaces and cruising

grounds, these forms of sex stood at odds with the homonormative models embraced by the Olympic organizing committee, and were not accommodated within sexually normative, neoliberal notions of hospitality. Nor, we have suggested, was paid-for sex deemed to have a place within the Olympic city, with the idealization of the capital – and the nation – as civilized, tolerant, and safe requiring the elision of these forms of sex.

In drawing such conclusions, we suggest that a queer reading adds a significant dimension to class-dominated readings of the neoliberal politics of mega-events. Notions such as homonormativity and homonationalism are important in thinking through the ways that capital accumulation aligns with sexuality – and race – in important and powerful ways. Such notions hence give us purchase on questions of desire and corporeality that are sometimes lost in world city research (see Hubbard 2011). Thinking about the Olympics as the focus of a wider series of moves designed to reimagine London as a cosmopolitan and diverse world city has brought these issues into sharper focus, showing that sexuality was not incidental to the neoliberal politics of hype and speculation that surrounded this global mega-event. This required the policing and cleansing of the urban environment to maintain a ‘consistent image of a safe, fun and sanitary city’ (Kennelly and Watt 2011: 768) as well as the marginalization of those who refused to offer the forms of welcome that might be anticipated by those wanting to attend this global spectacle.

Ultimately then, this paper has sought to challenge the celebratory marketing of London as a diverse, inclusive and hospitable Olympic city by showing how this ideal of ‘unity in diversity’ played out in practice, with competing strands of diversity coming into conflict. It has challenged the idea of ‘universal hospitality’ and ‘universal welcome’, highlighting how a liberal Western notion of tolerance can itself become exclusionary. It was suggested that in the push to promote sexual diversity, intolerance was expressed towards those who did not embrace this ideal, with the notion of sexual diversity itself only extending to include homonormative gay and lesbian identities, and not queer practices. Furthermore, the paper has shown that notions of diversity can easily fall into a celebratory form of patriotism, with London and Britain being positioned a

'world leading' in terms of lesbian and gay equality. This homonationalist trope presented Britain as a champion for worldwide lesbian and gay rights, with other nations depicted as backwards, in need of civilizing, or in need of rescue. In the final analysis this shows that the promotion of sexual diversity cannot simply be about the identification of protected equality groups (e.g. lesbian and gay communities) but needs to consider the intersections between sexuality, religion and race to posit a more sensitive model of queer inclusion.

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Notes

ⁱ Evidence from previous Olympics - e.g. Atlanta 1996 (Ruthesier 1996), Sydney 2000 (Waitt 1999), Athens 2004 (Beriatos and Gospodini 2004) and Beijing 2008 (Brownell 2012) – clearly demonstrates such tendencies, with the benefits of the games rarely accumulating for those most in need.

ⁱⁱ There is however a sizeable literature on how the Olympics presents ideals of the gendered and sexed body both through the sporting events themselves as well as through athletes making product endorsements; the design of Olympics uniforms for athletes and officials; the theming and presentation of performers at the spectacular closing and opening ceremonies; the official iconography of the Games, and so on. See, for example, Brownell, 2011 on the Beijing Olympics' role in creating ideals of modern Chinese femininity and Ottomo, 2007 on bodily identities at the Tokyo Olympics of 1964, both of which were seen as pivotal moments in transforming national bodily identities.

ⁱⁱⁱ Department of Culture Media and Sport 'Our Promise for 2012 London: HMSO. See: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/our-promise-for-2012-how-the-uk-will-benefit-from-the-olympic-games-and-paralympic-games>

^{iv} For example, the 2013 Home Office 'go home or face arrest' campaign targeting 'illegal' immigrants: <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2013/jul/29/go-home-campaign-illegal-immigrants>

^v Department of Culture Media and Sport, 2008 *Before, during and after: making the most of the 2012 Olympic Games* London: HMSO.

<http://www.culture.gov.uk/images/publications/2012LegacyActionPlan.pdf>

^{vi} See <http://www.london2012.com/documents/candidate-files/theme-1-olympic-games-concept-and-legacy.pdf>

^{vii} For example, the five host boroughs signed a unique Multi Area Agreement underpinned by a £86 million investment programme designed to improve residents' lived: see <http://www.lgcplus.com/briefings/services/cultural-services/olympic-host-boroughs-sign-maa/5012725.article>

^{viii} See *Strategic Regeneration Framework Stage One – October 2009* London: London Boroughs of Hackney, Greenwich, Newham, Tower Hamlets and Waltham Forest.

^{ix} Ibid, p. 63.

^x See <http://www.pinknews.co.uk/2011/12/09/plans-for-london-2012-olympics-pride-house-london-to-be-unveiled-tonight/>

^{xi} See <http://www.pinknews.co.uk/2012/01/24/group-fears-undesirable-gays-at-olympics-event/>. The Friends of Clapham Common group later issued a public apology when its comments were widely interpreted as homophobic: see http://www.yourlocalguardian.co.uk/news/topstories/9503164.Author_brands_Clapham_Common_group_bigoted_and_outdated/

^{xii} See <http://www.pinknews.co.uk/2012/02/01/john-amaechi-london-can-see-through-undesirable-gays-rhetoric/>

^{xiii} A smaller scale Pride Tent did eventually take place at Limehouse Basin on the Thames, between 3rd – 7th August organized by Pride Sports UK, and with support from European Gay and Lesbian Sports Foundation.

^{xiv} Cited in <http://www.london2012.com/media-centre/media-releases/2010/06/london-2012-celebrates-diversity-and-inclusion-with-new-.html>.

^{xv} The campaign to ban countries who prohibit homosexuality from competing in the Olympics intensified in the run-up to the Winter Olympics to be held in Sochi (Russia) 2014, with the Russian legislation banning the public promotion of homosexuality also leading to calls to host the games elsewhere.

^{xvi} See <http://www.guardian.co.uk/law/2012/may/21/london-olympics-gay-rights>. These comments were echoed by gay rights activists in the UK, most notably prominent campaigner Peter Tatchell, see: <http://www.petertatchellfoundation.org/sport/olympic-chiefs-urged-ban-anti-gay-countries>

^{xvii} Cited in <http://www.theguardian.com/law/2012/may/21/london-olympics-gay-rights>

^{xviii} Reflecting on discourses that suggest the UK sets the agenda for global gay pride, it is important to note instances of local gay shame within Britain, and particularly in London. We do not necessarily need to look 'elsewhere' to discover shameful moments of homophobia or

the marginalization of certain sexual practices: the depiction of the UK as a place of safety and sanctuary overlooks the homophobia (and transphobia) that is still widespread.

^{xix} Ibid, np.

^{xx} While we do not want to deny the importance of campaigns for LGB survival within countries with strict anti-homophobic laws, nor the often benevolent intentions of such campaigns, we want to strongly challenge any attempt to position Britain at the centre stage of such mobilizations. We argue instead for the importance of localized, context specific campaigns for lesbian and gay rights, rather than a global lesbian and gay rights movement. Here, it has been well demonstrated a 'one-size fits all' approach may in fact bring more harm in a local context (e.g. witness the protests from some Russian LGBT groups that mooted boycotts of the Winter Olympics 2014 by some European nations would not be helpful in dealing with the issues faced there).

^{xxi} See <http://www.podium.ac.uk/news/view/800/uel-lecture-positions-london-2012-as-opportunity-for-international-lgbt-rights>

^{xxii} Here, it is worth noting that the key target markets for Olympics tourism included Spain, Italy, France, Netherlands, Belgium, the US, Canada and Australia, with another 25 nations being deemed as of lesser, though still significant, importance (the majority in Latin America and the Far East). See: http://www.visitbritain.org/Images/Project Update Nov2009_tcm139-181664.pdf

^{xxiii} Cited in <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-2165027/London-set-flooded-prostitutes-2012-Olympics.html>

^{xxiv} Cited in <http://www.thesun.co.uk/sol/homepage/news/4276482/Immigrants-flood-capital-ahead-of-Olympics.html>

^{xxv} Cited in <http://www.metro.co.uk/news/897160-prostitutes-and-beggars-flooding-london-ahead-of-2012-olympics>

^{xxvi} Tellingly, none of the Eastern European or ex-Soviet states are target markets for the campaign platforms associated with the *Visiting Britain Marketing Strategy 2010-13*.

^{xxvii} Cited in the *Silence on Violence: improving the safety of women*, 2012, available at: <http://glaconservatives.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2012/03/Report-on-the-Safety-of-Sex-Workers-Silence-on-Violence.pdf>. Latterly Georgina Perry has gone on record to suggest that the relationship between sex work projects and workers has been 'gravely damaged' by the Olympics, with outreach workers seen as 'do-gooders or enforcers' – see: <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/archives/29963>

^{xxviii} See <http://www.moratorium2012.org/press/press-release-wed-6-june/>