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Reversal of Fortunes: Tracking Capital and Empire through the Neocolonial Geographies of East London

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ABSTRACT:

During the Victorian era the Royal Docks emerged as the hub of Britain's imperial trade, the final destination as it were for the plundered wealth of Empire. It had closed in the 1960s when the Empire dissolved. Recently it has been earmarked for commercial redevelopment by Mayor Boris Johnson to become nothing less than London's third financial district, and likely its most powerful in the twenty-first century. Accommodated there presumably will be an equally powerful class of global individual whose lauded occupancy signals the future of commercial expansion, wherein luxury emerges alongside technology and industry as the drivers of cultural and economic progress. The borough of Newham, where the Royal Docks are situated, is the most ethnically diverse borough in London with white Britons composing only 17 percent of the population. The budget priority for Newham Council is to subsidise private developers to construct blocks of luxury flats, and as a result they are effectively promoting the abandonment and demolition of social housing schemes that formerly served the needs of the multiethnic area's working classes. Once they are forced out of the borough based on this lack of housing, it is anticipated that prominent foreign property buyers and investors from Russia, China and the Gulf will come to occupy it in their place. This situation is creating a kind of diasporic hierarchy within the Royal Docks where once more it becomes the destination of flight capital homed toward London.

Keywords: *London Olympics 2012, Newham, Regeneration, Migration, Diaspora*

During the Victorian era London's Royal Docks emerged as the hub of Britain's imperial trade, the final destination as it were for the plundered wealth of Empire. It had closed in the 1960s when the Empire formally dissolved. Recently, it has been earmarked for commercial redevelopment by Mayor Boris Johnson to become nothing less than London's "third financial district" and likely its most powerful in the twenty-first century (Pickford and Hammond). Accommodated there presumably will be an equally powerful class of global individual whose lauded occupancy signals the future of commercial expansion wherein luxury emerges alongside technology and industry as the drivers of cultural and economic progress. The ambition of Mayor Boris Johnson "to squeeze out every drop of potential" from this debt-burdened London borough, comes in anticipation of the arrival of prominent foreign buyers and investors from Russia, China and the Gulf drawn into the area by the prestige associated with London's great imperial past ("Mayor and Chancellor Announce Commitment"). The regeneration of East London as a preferred destination for flight capital from the world's emerging economies "says a great deal about the rugged persistence of the Empire in the postmodern, post-imperial imagination as a financial beacon for plundered wealth" (Mirsa).

The borough of Newham, where the Royal Docks are situated, is the most ethnically diverse borough in London with white Britons composing only 17 percent of the population (Mackintosh). It is also London's poorest borough where few wish to put down permanent roots. Rather it is a place of transit and transience, little more than a step on a journey elsewhere for its overwhelmingly poor inhabitants striving to better their situations. Newham suffers from a shortage of decent public housing which is frequently regarded as an 'immigration issue.' However, the intolerable living conditions in which many of its working class residents are forced to dwell comes as a direct result of the radical shift in Newham

Council's budget priority. It has gone from formerly serving the needs of the area's most economically vulnerable inhabitants to subsidising private developers to construct blocks of luxury flats which effectively required the abandonment and demolition of social housing schemes that once plentifully existed in the borough. This local government policy decision reflects a more general upsurge in disregard for the fortunes of working class and economic migrant communities throughout Britain. At the same time there has been a spectacular resurgence of admiration for the aristocracy in the popular imagination, the likes of which have not been seen since Britain stood at the height of its imperial power in the late Victorian era. Similar to that era, we are witnessing a powerful aggrandizement of finance capitalism where the rentier class positions itself to determine domestic tastes by "stirring appetites for grandeur and intriguing lives," set amidst subterranean basement extensions in Kensington and Chelsea and newly built luxury urban high rises in Tower Hamlets and Newham (Mirsa). Over the past two decades such elites have taken on an international cast largely made up of Britain's former colonial and semi-colonial subjects who remain besotted with an English aristocratic culture "which rather tellingly is as much part of Britain's national brand now as it was in the 1890s" (Mirsa). Something remarkably similar is happening in the recent attempts to raise Britain's post-imperial status through the 2002 Queen's Golden Jubilee procession, the staging of 2012 Olympics games, the post-games construction of an Olympic neighbourhood, and the forthcoming construction of the Olympicopolis complex. All of these events feature as evidence of Britain's attempt to re-launch itself as economically viable cultural and geographical franchise within a framework of postcolonial global capitalism.

Once able to convincingly dominate a global geography founded upon fundamental divisions of race, class and ethnicity, Britain remains able to generate frames of reference that make way for new orders of power to emerge in her wake that are established along similar lines of

selective belonging, structural inequality, free market fundamentalism and territorial invasion. This trajectory has its beginnings in 1952 when Queen Elizabeth first came to the throne in Britain when there was a national desire to convey a continued imperial mastery. Then the country seemed, if anything, socialist in its political and popular bearing and yet we can trace the reappearance of a Victorian imperialist impulse as the Queen became Head of the Commonwealth and Queen to seven independent Commonwealth countries: the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Pakistan and Ceylon. Attendant to the revival of that impulse in the twenty-first century is Britain's willingness to act as a handmaiden to the rise of a new Chinese empire, in much the same way as it did for the Americans and Middle Eastern oil sheikhs in the previous century. It is unclear whether the current makeup of Londoners is prepared however for this latest bout of an imperial reversal of fortunes, or whether indeed its population can withstand the resulting pronounced inequality and economic instability without incurring widespread popular revolt.

What we are witnessing today is a complete reversal of Britain's historic relationship with member states of its formal and informal commercial Empire. Whereas Britain's imperial dominance in world trade once enabled it to effectively control the economies of numerous nation states, today, an indebted, weakened postcolonial Britain has to submit to the financial imperialism of its former territories. Sovereign nations such as Qatar, Dubai, and China are vying to purchase its landholdings and infrastructure regarding its commercial assets, as though they were on display in a massive retail emporium. What the Government likes to describe as an investment is in reality an increasing surrender of ownership of the territory of the country to the designs and aspirations of elite foreign capital. London, as an abiding locus of wealth still manages to uniquely beguile "the dreams of men, the seed of commonwealth, the germs of empires" (Hunt).

Despite the fact that Empire is long gone and the last ships left the Royal Docks in the 1980s, Chinese real-estate developer Advanced Business Park plans to retrofit the original ingress of Britain's colonial wealth, the Royal Albert Dock, to become the European headquarters of China's twenty-first century commercial empire. A similar logic around where to situate one's imperial returns may have prevailed in The Bank of China's decision to position its luxurious new offices around the old Royal Exchange, a mere stone's throw away from where "the East India Company once asset-stripped the Empire" (Wilkinson). Further evidence of this can be witnessed in London's second post-imperial financial district, Canary Wharf which is "now resourced by Eastern sovereign wealth funds with China Investment Corporation (CIC) owning the third-largest stake in the wharf's landlord, Songbird Estates" (Wilkinson). Chinese investors have also recently taken part ownership of one of London's defining icons, the black cab, which is now manufactured "by Manganese Bronze, which is part-owned by Geely, a Shanghai-based car-maker" (Hunt). It would seem that even the once preferred mode of transportation of London's gentlemanly capitalists now requires foreign investment to sustain its grandiose connotation.

Most literal of all of China's projects to re-substantiate London's imperial geography is the ZhongRong Group's plan to rebuild the Crystal Palace on the very same parkland on Sydenham Hill where it burned down in 1936. The edifice which housed the Great Exhibition of 1851 in many ways functioned as a structural precursor to the department store where people would congregate to window shop and to gaze upon marvels of contemporary design and technology made available as the product of Britain's expanding imperial might. The emerging Chinese commercial empire of the twenty-first century will no doubt aim to achieve a similar purpose following the structure's heavily symbolic rebuilding.

The English no longer hold the centre of those dealings, but rather now form part of the multitude of semi-aristocratic hirelings prepared to apply their knowledge and networks to shelter and aid these ultra high net worth individuals. Drawn from Britain's premier educational institutions including Eton, Harrow, Oxford and Cambridge; these children of the Establishment, now graciously apply their knowledge and networks to portray a cosmopolitan London for the pleasure of international elites. On the other end of the financial spectrum, Britain positions itself to draw in the global proletariat left destitute and displaced in the wake of the massive flight of capital from their homelands; a condition made possible by the dubious financial transactions of their class superiors who ironically, one might say, also chose to come here to better their fortunes. Britain's indigenous working classes for their part are forced to compete with these poor recent arrivals for race to the bottom wages. Such are the effects of disaster capitalism, when paired with what Jules Boykoff has termed "celebration capitalism" (Boykoff 3). In the years leading up to the financial crisis of 2008, celebration capitalism was on something of a spending spree. During that time, corporate cohorts actively courted "state actors as partners, pushing us towards [an] economics rooted in so-called public-private partnerships" (3). All too often these public-private partnerships were grossly unbalanced: "the public paid and the private profited" (3). There are obvious risks associated with perpetuating such a model and when disaster struck, it was public money that came to secure the fortunes of these corporations at the expense of fiscal budgets.

Politicians around the world soon found that they could use the global financial crisis to push through policies that they would not dream of under normal political conditions. Britain was no exception. In 2010, the new Conservative lead Coalition

government called for a range of economic sobrieties to be imposed upon the general public, that cohered with "the dictates of neoliberalism" which required "the privatisation of public services, the further deregulation of industry and the massive reduction of state welfare expenditure in the name of fiscal exigency" (Boykoff 6) At the beginning few were fully cognisant of how such austerity measures would generate widespread social trauma and give license to the evisceration of the state;" thereby forcing British society to adhere to the principles of "free-market fundamentalism" (6). Public-private partners thrived under this new economic directive, even as and perhaps because, the average individual faltered.

Britain's hosting of the Olympics in 2012 ushered in yet another series of lucrative private-public partnerships. This time around they would seek to capitalise off of the recent economic catastrophe. The public were told by that the games would bring much needed international revenue into the whole of the country and in particular, stimulate urban regeneration in the poorest parts of London. The games were also sold as a global celebration wherein 'Team Great Britain', as its host, would have pride of place. Various forms of propaganda would emerge to convince the British public that they could engage in this event regardless of their regional location, political persuasion or social class. Everyone could unite together to contribute symbolically to London 2012 as 'Games Makers', displaying themselves wherever they dwelt as honourable members of a still great nation. If Britain could achieve observable success on the world stage in this, its latest cultural franchise, it was believed that it could gain access to any number of international commercial opportunities in the wake of the games.

What is happening in London's Olympic neighbourhood is not something limited to the local area. Across the capital "property that was once seized from rich landlords

and distributed to the poor is now being taken from the poor and being passed onto developers and enterprising local governments" (Broudehoux 97-98). Londoners are promised a new dazzling city, poised to emerge from behind the cranes and construction fences that presently dominate its landscape. In the case of Newham, the spectacular buzz around this new Eastern metropolis has largely succeeded in diverting public attention from the human costs being extracted in its wake. As whole communities are being sacrificed to serve individualist desires, little attention is being paid to the long-term implications of this predatory form of capitalism, nor the brutality inherent to its progression.

Historically, it has been the case that "violence is required to build the new urban world on the wreckage of the old" (Harvey 33). In the nineteenth century such a process was referred to as slum clearance. Today that same process is euphemistically referred to as "urban regeneration". In both eras, housing reformers and entrepreneurs have made sweeping promises that their designs will vastly improve the quality of life for poor residents and rid their neighbourhoods of unseemly social elements through their development schemes. In practise, they have ripped down substandard housing before providing adequate replacements for the poor, with the foreseeable result of displacing scores of local residents, or forcing them into conditions of further overcrowding within the dwellings that remain. In the nineteenth century the acceleration of these schemes were devoted to any number of functions apart from the improvement of low-income housing stock. Slum clearance in effect meant the demolition of hundreds of homes. This wide scale destruction was undertaken in tandem with the construction "of railways, docks, warehouses, and office blocks" all of which competed for valuable urban space (Allen 118). "Demolition of housing was especially concentrated in the City of London, where throughout the century commercial interests were literally gaining more and more ground" (118).

In a similar fashion to what we are experiencing now, it made little difference to the poor if their homes were demolished at the hands of local reformers or private developers. Neither party were particularly concerned with providing "replacement housing while new buildings were being erected" (Landow). They "usually left replacement housing to investors, who had to make a return on their funds, and "the new homes often ended up too costly for the poor and housed those higher up the economic scale" (Landow). This pattern of urban redevelopment "has given rise to numerous conflicts over the capture of valuable land from low-income populations that may have lived there for many years" (Harvey 34). In the twenty-first century, this paradigm of what David Harvey refers to as "accumulation by dispossession" has taken on a slightly different cast, insofar as the architects of modern day slum clearance need a spectacular event like the Olympics, to function as "a hegemonic device to reconfigure the rights, spatial relations and self-determination of the city's working class, [and] to reconstitute for whom and for what purpose the city exists" (Kumar).

Unlike any other event, the Olympics provided the necessary justification, to "fast track the dispossession of the poor and marginalised as part of the larger machinations of capital accumulation" devoted to transforming London into one vast gated community for the rich (Kumar). Boris Johnson, following New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg to the letter, has been consistently reshaping London along lines favourable to "transnational capitalist-class elements, and promoting the city as an optimal location for high-value businesses and a fantastic destination for tourists" (Harvey 38). The most sought after class of such individuals are drawn "from a small political and economic elite who are in a position to shape cities more and more after their own desires" (38).

The realisation of that ambition can be observed in the transformation of the Olympic Park itself, into a post-fordist style Disneyland, wherein Britain can display its wealth of culture, knowledge and commercial acumen in a style reminiscent of its Victorian imperial zenith. Any number of extraordinary developments heralds the era's re-enlivenment. Boris Johnson claims his plans to transform the Olympic sites into the centre of a cultural district modelled on "Albertopolis" in Kensington; the "Olympicopolis," were founded upon "a 'simple' idea, which drew on the 'extraordinary foresight' of Britain's Victorian ancestors" (Parker and Warrell). That extraordinary foresight was of course purely and predatorily commercial in nature. The great contemporary emporiums to be featured in the new "Olympicopolis" complex include the Victoria & Albert Museum, University College London, Sadler's Wells and the Smithsonian Institution. The Olympicopolis complex will be part-funded by a "£141 million contribution from the Treasury" and part-funded through foreign investment, much of it derived from the proceeds of slavery and oil (Pickford). Those tasked with the actual construction and upkeep of the commercially transformed Olympic Park are likely to be subject to zero-hours contracts, poverty-level wages, and substandard accommodation. This is perhaps where the typical Newham resident figures into realising its ultimate design.

Docking Fortunes

The Royal Docks were constructed from 1870 to 1914 amidst a previous age "that saw finance triumph over industry as the country's pre-eminent economic interest, setting the scene for the accelerating inequality and plutocracy that would reach its apogee in the finance-led boom of the Edwardian era" (Misra). The mass migration of the 1880s would critically underpin the cosmopolitanism of that imperial era, as poor Jews from Eastern

Europe made the dilapidated sublets of the East End their home, in polar opposition to the financial elites that made theirs in the elaborate red-brick baroque mansion-houses of the West End. These economically and racially founded Victorian geographies stubbornly persisted well into the twentieth century in London. "The modern history of European capital cities is a story of competition and exchange" and in this respect London is no exception (Gilbert and Driver 23). In the late nineteenth century, Royal Docks were as much as seat of imperial power as was the City of London. The 1899 edition of Baedeker's guide to London promoted the docks as an unmissable spectacle, the "centre from which the commerce of England radiates all over the globe" (Gilbert and Driver 30). What was reflected back to England was no less than the livelihoods of thousands of its working-class people. For many the Royal Docks constituted their first glimpse of London. It would shortly thereafter constitute their new workplace through its many casual job opportunities proffered to those prepared to toil for their suppers. While the docks drew modest numbers of workers from rural England and Wales, the mainstay of the workforce was comprised of not quite white enough Jewish and Irish immigrants, who together made up the bulk of the working and informal labouring classes in East London during the Victorian colonial period. The docks also attracted workers from much farther afield their local appearance exhibiting the reach of the Empire. Individuals from India, China, Malaysia, West Africa, Somalia and Yemen all made their way here with the desire to improve their prospects by relocating to this, the world's industrial Mecca.

The Docks would begin to lose their industrial pride of place after World War One, as the shipping and rail industries declined bringing mass unemployment to the surrounding area of Newham and later a mass exodus of its residents to more thriving areas of the capital. World War Two further compromised the area when the Germans heavily

bombed it, devastating the southern part of the borough. In the post-war period a wave of new immigrants came into Newham from Asia and the Caribbean, who were recruited to help with London's post-War reconstruction. In recent years it has continued to attract immigrants from these areas as well as parts of Africa, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe. Newham bears within itself the fundamental dimensions of its imperial history whose after-life can be sensed everywhere in the present borough, influencing contemporary economic realities, racial politics and cultural formations that are deeply resonant with its complicated, pluralistic past.

At present Newham finds itself at the epicentre of post-Olympic-related development. Throughout the borough, "a construction programme is under way on a scale that has not been seen in the capital since the aftermath of the Luftwaffe-inflicted bomb damage of World War Two. Including the on-going Thames Gateway project and developments around the Royal Docks, over 40,000 new homes are scheduled to be completed in Newham by the end of the current decade" (Fussey et al 272). Few of these new homes will be pegged as affordable housing; such commitments have been "repeatedly downgraded since the initial announcement that these would be situated within the post-Games Olympic Village" (272). The emphasis instead will be firmly on the sale of expensive flats and attracting affluent outsiders to take advantage of its new and plentiful venues of consumption.

These new high end enclaves in the Olympic neighbourhood, replete with their security fortified signature developments, contrast sharply with Newham's other housing trend, the rapid proliferation of "supersheds" dwellings; "gerry-built constructions housing migrant labourers" (Fussey et al 272). Newham is primarily a residential area consisting of

Victorian terraced housing interspersed with higher density post-War social housing. The pressure for cheap private rental accommodation in Newham has led to a return of Victorian conditions of poor sanitation and dangerous overcrowding.

The living conditions experienced by both types of local residents bear the mark of the entrepreneurial city where residential enclosures mirror the new values of a neoliberal symbolic economy that envelops them, which privileges wealth and censures poverty. The Olympic neighbourhood therefore in some sense must be built as an island within an island, whose elevated status in the form of exclusive residential, cultural and retail developments, sustains itself through the buffering of its borders to keep out the appearance of an otherwise dangerously imagined periphery. Anna Minton refers to this environment as one of "extreme capitalism which produces a divided landscape of privately owned, disconnected, high security gated enclaves, side by side with enclaves of poverty which remain untouched by the wealth around them. The stark segregation and highly visible differences create a climate of fear and mistrust between people, which together with the undemocratic nature of these new private places, erodes civil society" (xii).

The stated ambition of London's Olympic games was to enact a lasting regional legacy, rather than solely promote an international competition. The contours of that legacy quickly come to light when we examine what took place before, during and after, the previous Olympic games held in Beijing in 2008. Soon after winning the right to stage the Games, the Chinese government set up public private partnerships to fund construction of the venues, with the understanding that despite the use of taxpayer's money, the facilities would be fully privatised and commercialised after the Games. From the onset of construction it was explicitly understood that these venues would be built to serve profit driven post-Olympic

functions. What had previously been public land was to be repurposed, not for the benefit of the general public, but rather to service the needs of China's emerging bourgeoisie. Conversely, the legacy of the 2008 Games in Beijing for the average Chinese citizen has been one of "tax increases, inflation, soaring rents, and an enormous debt that could undermine future welfare investments. As in previous Olympic cities, the benefits from public investment will likely be enjoyed by private entrepreneurs, while Olympic costs, both social and financial, will be born by those at the bottom of the economic ladder" (Broudehoux 91).

Just as was witnessed in Beijing, Newham's new affluence is being generated at "the direct expense of the poor, as local governments evict residents and endeavour to "sell off their land for private development projects" (Broudehoux 94). This was the case when University College London initially wanted to establish a satellite campus on the former Olympic site, which would have "required the demolition of a 23-acre council estate known as 'Carpenters' on the edge of the park" (Parker and Warrell). The university was prepared to offer Newham council £1bn to buy the estate. During the struggle to obtain the estate local government officials portrayed Newham's longstanding residents as socially backward, and unduly hostile to the redevelopment of their community. Nonetheless, it was their sustained, vocal opposition campaign against the plans of both the council and the university that eventually scuppered the deal.

These residents had won a battle. The war, however, threatens to usher in much more radical, irreversible changes to hasten the exile of Newham's poorer inhabitants. Successive neoliberal governments, both Labour and Conservative, have proudly displayed their aversion to both intervention and regulation of the housing market, and thus have perpetuated the asymmetry of this war. Under their authority, property developers have been

given a free hand to distort the concept of affordable housing, which has in recent years come to be defined as 80% of the going market rate. They have also successfully lobbied for the "Right to Buy" to be extended to housing association properties in order to attract their desired clientele of financially solvent young professionals; to showcase as it were their preferred brand of 'diversity'. The average rent for a two-bedroom flat in Newham in 2014 was £1,497 (Bloomfield and Gray). The maximum local housing allowance for a two-bedroom flat in Newham is at present £918 (www.newham.gov.uk). For the 40% of Newham's residents claiming housing benefit this further move to marketise housing in the area essentially equates with their eviction as even so-called affordable rents skyrocket beyond their means. This phenomenon, now commonly referred to as 'social cleansing,' offers few avenues of resistance as social polarisation becomes increasingly normative. Newham council's mantra for the borough is "A Place to Live Work and Stay," and yet, it was fully prepared to uproot residents from their homes, schools, jobs and services in favour of the import of a well-healed transient student population drawn from the ranks of the global bourgeoisie. Scores of imported dreamscapes are now being rapidly constructed to allow them to isolate these affluent would-be inhabitants from the harsh economic realities of the surrounding area. At the same time, Newham's local reputation for class and ethnic diversity furnishes them with the opportunity to partake in an "imagined cosmopolitanism" (Broudehoux 96).

What we are witnessing today is a type of urban neocolonialism wherein a plutocratic global diaspora brings its capital and class privilege with them to establish a settler sovereignty on site, displacing and dispossessing the indigenous sovereignty they have encountered. These new arrivals have little interest in articulating to the existing society but rather concern themselves with creating their own, separate sovereignty within the local

territories they encounter. This process is undertaken largely through elaborate settlement construction, which literally entails a demolition of what came before it. The confiscation of publicly owned lands is fundamental to this process, which is engineered to make sure that indigenous peoples find they have no right of place inside settler societies and their surrounding infrastructures, which are now held in the domain of private ownership.

Patrick Wolfe writes that "settler colonialism destroys to replace" and insists that expropriation in settler colonial contexts, is "a structure, not an event" (388). This power of sovereignty is what distinguishes these settlers from other classes of migrants to the degree that they are able to economically displace the native population. "The geographical spread of gentrification over the last twenty years has been reminiscent of earlier waves of colonialism and mercantile expansion, itself predicated on gaps in development on the national scale" (Atkinson and Bridge 2). At the neighbourhood level, "the poor and vulnerable often experience gentrification as a process of colonisation by the more privileged classes", who have come to occupy the position of a colonial elite as they set up residence in desirable central metropolitan locations (Atkinson and Bridge 2). Gentrification itself may be understood as a response to the radical unevenness of the global labour market, the unprecedented liquidity of global finance and the profound insecurities of identity brought about through the acceleration of capital flows.

This has generated a situation where "the new-found victims of employment restructuring instigated some years back" suddenly find themselves competing against the cosmopolitan professional class for territory (Atkinson and Bridge 8). New neighbourhoods are rapidly being developed for the express purpose of providing these elite professionals with an innate sense of kinship and security. They enable their inhabitants to "exist insulated

from local poverty, wider systemic inequalities and public squalor and shielded in the company of 'like-minded people" (Atkinson and Bridge 8). This model of gentrification is the physical manifestation of a neoliberal economics. At one level, it facilitates the rising rents, evictions, demolition and cut-rate sale of council and housing association owned properties that in tandem to one another efficiently expel "working class communities from large swaths of London's inner core" (Seymour). At another, it helps "the privileged negotiate the necessarily precarious nature of unmitigated capitalism" toward safe harbour in exclusive residential enclaves offering a universal homogeneity of services and a desirable urban 'feel' (Seymour).

Neoliberal economics thrive by embracing the appearance of cosmopolitan global elites, while eliding that of the poor and marginalised. The diasporic class made proper to this environment must necessarily be one that is comfortable residing within a permanent celebratory space and one that thrives in an atmosphere of extravagant consumption. As such these cosmopolitan global elites find themselves exclusively poised to govern a post-Olympic landscape. Through their seemingly unlimited capital they are able to acquire "the rights of citizenship" whilst at the same time comfortably dwell within this transnational built environment. Through acquisition they are able at once to establish their selective belonging and to be exceptionally served by the capital space. "The uneasy juxtaposition between those served by 'capital space' and those either servile to, or shunned by, its over-determining consumerist logics suggests that London 2012 contributed to on-going processes," through which those native to Britain, as well as transient migrant populations, must be brutally distinguished from one another according to their ability, or lack thereof, to contribute to the nation's fortunes (Manley and Silk 365).

Portending Victorian Futures

On 9 May 2002, the London borough of Newham had cause to host a remarkable occasion: Queen Elizabeth's Golden Jubilee. During her procession through the borough an audience of predominantly Asian and Afro-Caribbean onlookers were greeted by the appearance of a gigantic 10-foot high mechanical elephant, which was positioned at the forefront of the Asian carnival held in her honour, replete with Bollywood band. The Queen followed behind the elephant, discreetly transported in the royal car. It was noted by *The Telegraph*, that the crowd assembled was composed of "people of all races and creeds" united in the act of "waving the Union flag" as a mark of their allegiance to the crown (Davies). "Thousands" of such loyal individuals lined Green Street, which the Telegraph proudly acknowledged as "the Oxford Street of Asian fashion" (Davies). What was carefully omitted from the description of its surrounding was the borough of Newham itself, which acts as home to one of the most ethnically diverse communities in Europe, as well as one of it's most economically deprived.

The focus was not on furthering their viable progress, but that of a huge tower on wheels paraded before them, "from which red roses were strewn across the road - the Indian equivalent of red carpet treatment" put on not for their ethnically rich community's elevation, but rather to smooth the way for a consummately British monarch to proceed (Davies). Adding further to this hierarchical and geographical confusion of the event, was the appearance of not one but two local mayors, "the ceremonial mayor, Sukhdev Singh Marway, whose term of office [would end] shortly, and Newham's first directly elected Mayor, Sir Robin Wales", who was elected just days prior to this event (Davies).

The focus on the elephant at the 2002 celebration, as the centrepiece of the borough's carnivalesque demonstrations on behalf of the Queen, was meant to draw attention to the idea that there is a fundamental connection between loyalty to the monarchy, and acquiescence to imperialism. Newham's ceremonial mayor Sukhdev Singh Marway, attributed the event's positive reception to the fact that "'many of our people came from other Commonwealth countries, so the monarchy means something to them'" (Koenigsburger 4). Equally, it may be argued, that the continued relevance of the monarchy, functions as an endorsement of postcolonial Britain's enduring global power.

If monarchy continues to capture the attention of a multiethnic, postcolonial crowd drawn into contemporary Britain, it does so in part through the lure of a distant and exotic representation of British imperialism, drawing on a vast variety of material dating back centuries to stimulate their imaginations. The mechanics at play, in choosing that elephant in the room to lead the charge of this parade, is replete with such knowledge. It is perhaps most directly evocative of the three Durbars of the British Raj held in 1877, 1903 and 1911 in Delhi, the former capital of the deposed Mughal empire. "Each of these durbars marked an important occasion of British history, assembling all sixty to seventy princes from different parts of India to pay homage to the occasion being celebrated. In doing so the durbar sought to establish direct connections between the [London] metropole and the [Indian] periphery through what was considered a form of spectacle particularly appealing to the Indians" (Rajamannar 163).

Instituted by the Viceroys of India - Lytton, Curzon and Hardinge - the Durbars were the first examples of the inscription of the Raj in a celebratory history, which served to legitimate Britain's colonial presence. "In the late 1850s, the British held many durbars,

inventing titles and bestowing gifts, monetary rewards and land in return for allegiance during the Munity of 1857-1858" (Codell 1). The first durbar in 1877 was intended to celebrate the Queen's new role as Empress of India, and perhaps equally significantly "to bring closure to residual feelings and tensions remaining from the 1857-58 Mutiny" (Codell 1). In her research, Julie Codell makes a case that durbars "anticipated modern fascist rallies in their scale and staging of imperial politics" (1). Their success as a compelling format was questionable, because the durbars were reactive and provisional in their arrangement. While on one hand "each viceroy faced new problems that provoked" the laying on of these "ceremonial accommodations," in the end these increasingly lavish spectacles, became the source of a growing resentment amongst the ruled over population; one that over time incited resistance and triggered the advent of organized forms of resistance evident in the rise of "Indian nationalism and Muslim politicization" (Codell 6).

When the first durbar was staged in India in 1877, the Viceroy of India, Lord Lytton, grasped the considerable political and cultural capital to be gained through its undertaking. In a letter then to the Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli he wrote vividly of the powerful sensual impact the event was intended to have upon the governed Indian population: "'I am afraid I may have seemed fussy or frivolous about the decorative details of the Delhi assemblage… The decorative details of an Indian pageant are like those part of the animal which are of no use at for the butcher's meat, and are even unfit for scientific dissection, but from what augurs draw the omens that move armies and influence princes'" (Barringer 172). Portended there was the mark of the permanence of British rule and the wealth of the British Empire, which could afford to be profligate in its public display. Even the poor and illiterate could read the signs presented here of the presence of their new handlers.

Lytton's choice of metaphor was one of significant connotation insofar as the durbars as well as other ceremonial occasions sought to prominently highlight the animal presence within the British Empire, their appearance whether presented in tact or dismembered into their body parts formed part of the ordinary iconography of imperial domination. The "countless heads, horns, antlers, and skins that served as decorations, as well as the furs and feathers used to embellish the human form, also functioned as an important means through which the human enacted its control of other species, dismembering them and fashioning them for use" (Rajamannar 165). This could be perceived as a metaphor for the administration of British India, as something defined by its ostensible purity of intent, and in a manner that implied ease and plenitude. Therefore the aesthetic of superfluity that came to be associated with the trophies and fashion accessories common to British rule bore, not simply the marks of luxury, but also of raw power. The Britons constant display of the animal body for human use was there to carry a larger message to the Indian people, one of home domination.

The elephant was the largest and most prominent of all the beasts in England's extensive cache of imperial trophies and emblems. It "had strong associations first with India and then with Africa, the most important imperial landscapes described by mid- and late Victorian exhibitionary maps of the world" (Koenigsberger 9). In the twenty-first century version of the durbar this mighty imperial beast has been transformed from flesh to metal, but is no less a potent symbol. Rather its post-imperial embodiment speaks of the need for its defensive redeployment in light of the fact that so much red had disappeared from the globe, and Britain herself re-orientated in the mid twentieth century to accommodate the load of newer imperial masters. This new model of elephant therefore stands in for a dual

enunciation, of the sturdy older establishment whose power and brilliance still manages its hold over a global imaginary, and its regal authority that expands and consolidates its symbolic importance even as the Commonwealth matures. That commonality of wealth refers not only the inheritance of English language, but also equally a set of symbols and traditions that continue to flatter a geographically diverse rule, despite the fact that her various people's sociopolitical and cultural integration has seldom been achieved in this United Kingdom.

The Queen's Golden Jubilee, however is not for contemplating the geopolitical significance of their immediate appearance, but rather for celebrating Elizabeth herself, whose curious semi-visibility on this marginal stage, uncomfortably reveals the appearance of other recent insufficiencies; including the loss of English influence in the cultural and political mechanisms of statecraft, which for Britain were always tightly bound up with its overseas holdings; in particular from the late nineteenth century onwards. Unbounded from these holdings a lesser vehicle has emerged through which to carry out the duties of English life. Following the Second World War, there has been a long process of disintegration for this most unnatural of creatures, the British Empire, whose final resting place must be marked, naturally, by a ceremonious homecoming.

Those subjects hailing from her former colonies will be the last to gain their psychic independence from the notion of a resplendent Empire, while those born here are forced to grapple with a more intimate feeling of estrangement from the concept of a Great Britain, in which their cultural capital is always made to compete against the backdrop of a fundamental division. Such a division is born of an account of Englishness that seldom pertains in its contemporary political and popular cultural landscapes. Those that dwell in the shadow of the Queen now do so amidst a disintegrating United Kingdom, the line of fracture

between competing national loyalties, can only be temporarily blurred through framing the Golden Jubilee as an event central to Englishness.

The Golden Jubilee itself marks out a concern that a certain form of Englishness is itself an endangered species of rule were it ever to lose honour in the world. The Queen herself is often perceived as a curious rarefied figure, whose exemplary appearance could only be 'Made in Britain' her formidable image cast largely, though not exclusively, for export abroad. She stands as an emblem of the imperial past, in which an elephantine Great Britain stood as the gravitational centerpiece of an empire. Pointedly observed as an integrated and indissoluble whole, such an England is mighty enough to persist across the twenty-first century. It has a memory formidable enough to still be able to drive imperial attitudes and generate frames of reference in the political and cultural environment of a postcolonial, contemporary London cityscape. The "splendidly bearded and turbaned figures" that gather around her in Newham on route to all of this enable the Queen to arrive in the style she has become accustomed to, allowing her to be forgiven by the adoring, multiethnic crowd for the prevalence of an official version of white imperialism, used ostentatiously to craft the hallmarks of this contemporary occasion. As for the black Britons around her, their function as a group is to once again act in passive admiration of the vainglorious appearance of the main spectacle. They are nonetheless crucial in furnishing the human and financial capital for many regally inspired futures to come awkwardly played out through imperial distortion.

Retooling the Imperial Brand

The opening ceremony of the Olympics depicted the development of a teenage relationship between two mixed-race protagonists, Frankie and June, displayed as emblematic of Britain's contemporary era of inclusive 'multiculturalist nationalism'; an enlightened tolerance of otherness based on the notion of shared belonging and a togetherness situated along the lines of a common language and cultural identity. This portrayal carefully omits the tensions, ambiguities and antagonisms of a multi-ethnic, postcolonial British society. Rather, this budding romance between cultures is represented as one being embarked upon without struggle or contestation, or indeed, without reference to colonisation, or empire. We as the audience are led to believe this celebratory activity is taking place in an ordinary house, the kind in which most British people live, despite conditions on the ground just outside the stadium, which disrupt this staging of a unified nation. All this pageantry is staged in order to send the message to those from a range of racial and ethnic backgrounds that their participation in a legitimate British way of life "is predicated on the rejection of one's extremist ideas, swearing loyalty to a defined set of national values and mythologies, tests of values acquisition, and erasure of one's own experience and history in favour of the public celebration of [a common] national history" (Manley and Silk 367). Indeed, they must aspire to live in ordinary households that are conspicuously free of cultural opposition and insensible to the nation's structural inequalities.

In order to comfortably inhabit such quarters, these individuals must be willing to ignore their spatial concentration into certain areas of the country. They must pay no attention to the social injustices meted out upon them, such as disproportionate levels of unemployment, as a consequence of racism, class antagonisms and gender politics. They must dissociate from their feelings of cultural alienation, denying its negative impact on their health as well as spurring the disproportionate rates of poverty and drug abuse present in their

communities, constituting a local surrounding that might rationally contribute to feelings of disillusionment and resentment. Phenomenon such as "'Islamophobia", differential immigration statuses and the concomitant restrictions of rights, links between foreign and domestic policy" that overwhelmingly have their basis in Britain's imperial past, similarly must go unacknowledged to readily gain enclosure (Manley and Silk 367). Through this arrangement, Britain is able to "quite literally rework people already categorised as available for exploitation under colonial economies" and re-interpolate them as post-colonial British subjects and citizens (Jacobs 24).

Even so, these diasporic communities continue to maintain distant investments within the context of their British homes. More often than not their sense of belonging is constituted through multiple nationalities that present them with competing loyalties at the individual and community level. This imprecise locality sits anxiously amongst an old, nostalgic mapping of a Greater Britain. As a consequence of this, "xenophobic fears and gentler fantasies of a sure imperial might manifest as a politics of racism, domination and displacement, which is not enacted on a distance shore but within the borders of a nation home" (Jacobs 24). It is only amidst such an atmosphere that the Royal Docks can appear as an island onto itself, a newly formed colony conjured up to exclusively contain a population of rich, multiethnic economic migrants within some luxury version of a territorial settlement. "The CGI projections for what the area might look like feature – as always – white people drinking coffee at outdoor tables, talking on mobile phones, sheltering in the shade of trees" (Hancox). It would seem that even "the pixelated ghosts of future commercial expansion" bear within themselves these past imperial, racialised hierarchies of belonging (Hancox).

The cachet of London's imperial brand is at an all time high as the wheel of Empire turns eastwards in the twenty-first century. As the former metropole of the world, London now functions as a global entity that at once protects a system of entrenched private privilege largely built on the spoils of its former Empire, and simultaneously promotes the transfer of the nation's commercial resources into the hands of a global elite of nouveau riche billionaires. The regeneration of the Royal Docks heralds the triumph of international capital and the gross expansion of related neocolonial emissaries; including banks, security agencies and multinational corporations. There is little that is productive about this reworking of Newham's housing landscape, as its poorer residents increasingly find themselves in a position of local exile within London's new rentier economy, which has warped the fabric of the city to bend to its will.

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