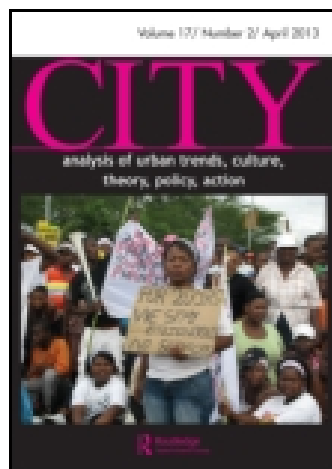


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# **‘It’s not for us’**

## **Regeneration, the 2012 Olympics and the gentrification of East London**

Paul Watt

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*This paper examines the much-hyped 2012 Olympic Games ‘legacy’ in relation to the displacement experiences of lower-income East Londoners. The paper begins by outlining the overall context of housing-related regeneration including the reduced role for social housing, especially council (public) housing in London. It then sets out a framework for understanding how regeneration, state-led gentrification and displacement are intertwined, as well as how such processes have been contested. The paper examines these issues in greater depth with reference to case studies of the inhabitants of two working-class spaces in the London Borough of Newham, an Olympics host borough. The first study is based on the Carpenters Estate, a council housing estate in Stratford that is facing potential demolition, and the second focuses on young people living in a temporary supported housing unit. These studies illustrate how the 2012 Olympics, alongside other regeneration schemes, is changing the nature of space and place from the perspective of existing East London residents and how gentrification is implicated in such transformations. Neither the Carpenters Estate residents nor the young people think that the Olympics and other regeneration schemes in Newham are primarily occurring, if at all, for their benefit—indeed, displacement processes may well mean that they are no longer able to live in their current neighbourhood. The Olympics legacy is for others, not for them.*

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**Key words:** regeneration, state-led gentrification, displacement, social housing, council estate, working class, Olympic Games legacy

### **Introduction: the Olympic Games and ‘the dark side of events’**

Residential displacement forms part of what Smith (2012, 120) refers to as ‘the dark side of events’ whereby existing residents, as well as businesses, are removed to make way for the staging of the Olympic Games and other sporting mega-events (Porter et al. 2009). London’s 2012 Olympic Games promoters have claimed that they will be different, making promises regarding the physical, economic

and social ‘legacy’ that the Games will bequeath to the deprived six East London host boroughs (Sadd 2010). This legacy of improving the lives of East London residents is encapsulated by the host boroughs’ aim of ‘Convergence’, ‘which stated that within 20 years the communities who host the 2012 Games will have the same social and economic chances as their neighbours across London’ (Wales 2012, 318–319).

Given such large-scale ambitions as well as the massive scale of public finance (£9.3 billion) involved in staging the London

Games, 'legacy' is unsurprisingly much debated. One recent report concluded that 'admirable efforts have been made to optimise the chances of a positive regeneration legacy from the 2012 Games [... and] London is in a good position compared to previous host cities', although 'complete success is not guaranteed' (Smith, Stevenson, and Edmundson 2011, 8). This 'good news' story has been picked up by *East Magazine* (2011, 5), a regeneration publication: 'London on Track for Olympics Legacy'. Less well reported are the report's critical comments regarding the accessibility of new jobs for local populations (Smith, Stevenson, and Edmundson 2011, 46).

Other evidence also suggests that the 2012 Games legacy is questionable in terms of enhanced employment, training and housing opportunities for *existing* East London residents (NEF 2008; Bernstock 2009; London Assembly 2010; Raco and Tunney 2010). Gentrification and displacement are integral to this critical narrative:

'these legacy impacts are forming a pattern that unless London takes the initiative now, will follow previous games where the area of the Olympic Park and surrounding area will become revitalized for the benefit of only middle class communities as opposed to true regeneration for the existing working class and immigrant communities'. (Sadd 2010, 273)

This paper examines the 2012 Olympics legacy in relation to housing and regeneration in East London. It begins by sketching the current gentrification debate regarding London and then proceeds to provide a framework for understanding how changes in social rental housing (that includes provision both by public local authorities—councils—and quasi-private housing associations who also provide intermediate and market properties) are connected to third-wave, state-led gentrification (Glynn 2009; Watt 2009a). It turns to examine the history of urban regeneration in East London against the backdrop of housing deprivation in the host boroughs,

notably the chronic shortage of social rental housing. It proceeds to analyze displacement in London in relation to regeneration programmes, including the 2012 Olympic Games, many of which have been contested by local campaigning groups. The paper then examines these issues with reference to two housing-related case studies located in the London Borough of Newham, an Olympics host borough that contained 60% of the Olympic sites. The first study is the Carpenters council estate while the second study focuses on young people living in a temporary supported housing unit. The emphasis in these sections is on offering an account of how the Olympics and related regeneration programmes are being experienced from the perspective of lower-income, multi-ethnic residents who inhabit the working-class spaces of council estates and temporary housing units, a perspective that is all too often absent from accounts of gentrification in London and elsewhere (Slater 2006; Watt 2008a).

## Gentrification and displacement in London

While gentrification and displacement are vital issues in relation to providing a critical account of the 2012 Games, it is also the case that the broader nature, causes and impacts of gentrification in London and other global cities are subject to intense debate (Lees, Slater, and Wylie 2008), not least in this journal. Putting this debate overly schematically, Hamnett and Butler (see *inter alia* Hamnett 2003, 2009a, 2010; Butler and Hamnett 2009) have put forward the notion that processes of de-industrialization and professionalization have meant that London's 'old' traditional, industrial manual working class is being *replaced* not *displaced* by professional and managerial groups with the concomitant effect that 'the middle class is the biggest (but not the only) class in town' (Butler and Hamnett 2009, 226).

Others, including Slater (2006, 2009, 2010), Davidson (2008) and Watt (2008a), have

challenged this evolutionary and un-dialectical narrative of urban socio-spatial change by 'documenting the dynamics of direct and indirect displacement and attacking the way "professionalization" downplays ongoing social and political struggles over space in contemporary London' (Davidson and Wyly 2012, 404). London remains a city with extensive multi-ethnic, working-class areas and populations, while class struggles over the uses and appropriation of space in London continue, even if the notion of an ethnically homogenous, manual working class is anachronistic: 'we should not mistake the changing appearance of class structure with the disappearance of class antagonism' (Davidson and Wyly 2012, 396). Davidson and Wyly (2012) identify continuities in London's social geography of class in that the old divide between the West End and East End still resonates in the 21st century. The most professionalized boroughs continue to be Westminster, Kensington and Chelsea, Camden and Islington, while East London, with its long-standing working-class history and manifold social housing estates, remains far less professionalized (Gunter and Watt 2009). Gentrification is however increasingly noticeable in East London, partly caused via the 'collective social action' of clusters of middle-class gentrifiers in areas such as London Fields in Hackney (Butler and Robson 2003), but also via large-scale capitalist processes of new-build developments connected to rounds of regeneration, as in London Docklands (Foster 1999; Butler and Robson 2003; Bernstock 2009; Minton 2012).

Rather than engage in the debate regarding the shape of London's class structure, this paper argues that in order to advance a critical urbanist account of how contemporary gentrification occurs vis-à-vis *class relations*, one has to emphasize the significance of two analytical points. The first, as Slater (2009, 2010) rightly suggests, is a recognition of Peter Marcuse's seminal contribution to the understanding of the diverse nature of displacement, that is, how lower-income

residents are pressurized *out* of their homes and neighbourhoods. According to Marcuse (1986), displacement can take several forms, for example, 'direct', either via physical coercion through housing demolitions and landlord evictions, or economic via rent increases, but also in an 'indirect' form that Marcuse refers to as 'displacement pressure' which occurs,

'when a family sees its neighborhood changing dramatically, when all their friends are leaving, when stores are going out of business and new stores for other clientele are taking their place [...], when changes in public facilities, transportation patterns, support services, are all making the area less and less livable'. (157)

The second analytical point which needs emphasizing is that contemporary processes of gentrification increasingly take a third-wave, 'state-led' form (see, *inter alia*, Hackworth and Smith 2001; Porter and Barber 2006; Lees, Slater, and Wyly 2008; Glynn 2009; Watt 2009a), which also means that policy issues are brought to the fore. By contrast, Hamnett (2009a, 481) has argued that housing stock transfers and the demolition of council estates (see below) are, 'important issues which have a major impact on the availability of social housing to low-income groups but they are a result of central and local government policy rather than gentrification as such'. This argument fails to acknowledge the important historical role public housing has played as a key 'buffer' against gentrification in London (Watt 2009a), as in New York City (Newman and Wyly 2006), so therefore its reduction is highly significant for marking out gentrification's shifting frontier.

As sketched out elsewhere (Watt 2009a), there are two underlying mechanisms bringing state-led gentrification about in London, mechanisms that can be characterized as the blades in a pair of scissors simultaneously creating rent gaps and cutting out the last vestiges of Keynesian welfare state (KWS) public council housing and associated land

ownership (Glynn 2009; Hodkinson 2011; Hodkinson and Robbins, forthcoming). The first blade is formed by rising land values in London predicated on its long-term privileged position in the UK residential market, one that is boosted by private foreign investors including those looking for a 'safe haven' in the current financial storms (Hamnett 2003; Heywood 2012). The absolute gap between central London house prices and those in the lowest priced boroughs widened from 1995 to 2006 (Hamnett 2009b), such that central and West London remain the epicentre of the still relatively buoyant London housing market (Heywood 2012). At the same time, Hamnett (2009b, 309) also shows that the lowest priced boroughs 'particularly those in East London [Newham, Hackney, Tower Hamlets and Waltham Forest] have seen prices increase more rapidly in percentage terms than those at the top' in the 1995–2006 period. Such *relative* price changes help to underpin the eastwards turning of speculative property investors with East London areas such as Stratford becoming a 'golden opportunity' for developers, not least as a result of the Olympics (*East Magazine* 2011, 11–14; also Davis and Thornley 2010).

The second blade is constituted by the long-term running down of council housing both in terms of numbers and quality. The total stock has shrunk in both absolute and relative terms since the 1970s as a result of a lack of new building, Right-to-Buy sales and stock transfers to quasi-private housing associations (Watt 2009a, 2009c). The decline in quality occurred both in absolute and relative terms as funding for building and maintenance shrank during the 1980s and 1990s under Conservative governments. The shrinkage of council housing provision was not reversed during the 2000s under New Labour, although there was some rectification of the decline in quality as a result of Labour's Decent Homes programme, which was concerned with raising the internal standards of social rental dwellings in relation to repairs and facilities (House of Commons 2010).

This programme was predicated on local authorities having three 'options' (stock transfer, Private Finance Initiative or outsourcing the management functions to an ALMO—Arm's Length Management Organization)—these amounted to a demunicipalization/privatization strategy (Wilks-Heeg 2009; Hodkinson 2011; Hodkinson and Robbins, forthcoming). London contained many local authorities with high proportions of non-decent council homes to begin with (HM Government 2012). Several London councils retained their housing stock, or at least parts of it, which subsequently made it more difficult for them to fund the Decent Homes improvements; 'many councils that were unable to follow the ALMO model or to transfer stock have languished, inadequately funded' (House of Commons 2010, 3). The differential nature of the funding regimes for those authorities that transferred their stock to housing associations is illustrated by the fact that whereas 40% of London's council rented stock fell below the Decent Homes standard in 2008–2009, the equivalent figure for housing associations was less than half at 18% (GLA 2011). In other words, relative differences remain *within* the social rental sector with council housing less well maintained than housing association property.<sup>1</sup>

The result of the two scissor blades is that the 'contrast between the disinvested LA [local authority] housing stock in London and the highly valued land it sits on creates enormous capital accumulation potential—in other words what can be termed a "state-induced rent gap"' (Watt 2009a, 235). Council tenants pay relatively low rents, while their housing sits atop land which has a potentially large value *if only* the resident base could be made to change. This change can occur *directly* if the council, as landlord, decants the residents (typically tenants and leaseholders) and then sells the stock and land to a developer who redevelops the site via demolition and/or 'upgrading' and typically creates new private apartments for sale. East London examples include council

estates in Tower Hamlets (Hoskins and Tallon 2004) and Hackney (Couvee 2012). As discussed below, a similar process is also occurring at the Carpenters Estate albeit that this estate also contains a sizable number of freeholders (who own the land as well as their house) in addition to tenants and leaseholders and the redevelopment involves a new university campus. An *indirect* change in land usage and resident population can occur via the stock transfer of council housing and land to a housing association which can then reparcel some of the land out to private developers who in turn create new saleable units consequent upon the demolition of existing homes and/or filling in 'empty' areas on the estate site, such as green space. This process has taken place in several transferred London council-built estates, including those involving large-scale regeneration schemes such as the New Deal for Communities (Bennington, Fordham, and Robinson 2004; Watt 2009a, 2009c).

Whether either direct or indirect transfer of council housing occurs, the result is the same—the rent gap value of the existing land is unlocked via a transfer of ownership which involves complex *legal recalibrations* of existing tenant/resident rights (through decanting, stock transfer and CPOs—compulsory purchase orders<sup>2</sup>) which in turn allows new development to occur and a higher-value usage to come into being.<sup>3</sup> Hence state-led gentrification is brought about in council-built housing estates—neighbourhoods that form some of the remaining redoubts of working-class residential space in London, not least in East London (Gunter and Watt 2009; Couvee 2012).

### Regeneration and housing in East London and Newham

East London has been one of the main laboratories for post-war UK urban policy as it has passed through several iterations from slum clearance, to property-led regeneration in London Docklands (Foster 1999),

community participation (Fearnley 2000) and, more recently, the redevelopment of council estates involving either their partial or full demolition (Watt 2009a; Couvee 2012). While there has been no evaluation of the collective impact of urban policy in East London, assessments of particular programmes suggest that despite their sometimes spectacular physical impacts (as in London Docklands), they have had at best only modest success in raising the economic and social well-being of deprived local populations, and at worst have exacerbated processes of social polarization and exclusion, in some cases by fostering gentrification (see, *inter alia*, Foster 1999; Fearnley 2000; Bernstock 2009; Dines 2009; Minton 2012).

Polarization and exclusion processes have to be contextualized in relation to the large-scale as well as long-standing nature of deprivation, not least housing-related deprivation, in East London. This includes homelessness, overcrowding and poor housing conditions, issues that affect many thousands of East Londoners (London Assembly 2010). There were 7989 households living in temporary accommodation in the six host boroughs in March 2012 and of these 2253 were in Newham alone, that is, 24.5 per thousand households (DCLG 2012). Overcrowding and homelessness are underpinned by severe shortages of quality affordable housing, notably social rental housing. A staggering 103,944 households were on the local authorities' housing waiting lists across the six host boroughs in April 2011, with Newham alone accounting for nearly one-third of this number (DCLG 2012). If one goes back to April 2005, that is, just before the London Games were announced, the host boroughs added over 30,000 more households to their waiting lists from 2005 to 2011, that is, 42% rise, which represents a much steeper increase than the nearly 19% average for London and England (*ibid.*).

The host borough councils could rightly point out that the Olympics will bring many new homes to East London, notably 2818 in the East Village (former Athletes



Village) site of which 1379 will be ‘affordable’ (Inside Housing 2012a). However, only 675 of the latter will be social housing, with the remainder intermediate market rented and shared equity (ibid.). Of course *any* new social rental homes are to be welcomed, but when one factors in the hundred thousand-plus on the waiting lists, as well as the several hundred social rental homes that have *already* been lost at the Clay Lane and Carpenters estates (see below), it is clear that the Olympics housing legacy will be limited for *existing* working-class East Londoners (see Bernstock 2009, for further details).

The above indicates the extent of housing deprivation in East London with particularly intense effects in the London Borough of Newham. The latter is one of the most deprived boroughs in London and also has one of the most ethnically diverse populations in the UK (Kennelly and Watt 2012). Under its high-profile mayor, Sir Robin Wales, the Labour-controlled Newham Council has had an ambitious long-term regeneration strategy involving extensive private-sector redevelopment, including residential property alongside the rebranding of Stratford as a transport and retail hub, a strategy which has more recently embraced the 2012 Games (Florio and Edwards 2001; Campbell 2012; Wales 2012). According to an NEF (2008) report, 23 regeneration programmes were underway in Newham. These include Stratford City, a £4 billion programme involving the development of 4500 new homes as well as major leisure and retail facilities, notably the flagship Stratford Westfield mega-mall, the largest in Europe, and also the gateway to the Olympic Park for most Games visitors.

The relationship between the 2012 Olympic Games, Stratford City and the various other regeneration schemes in Newham lies outside the scope of this paper (see Bernstock 2009; Davis and Thornley 2010; Minton 2012). There is nevertheless a widespread, generally credible view that the arrival of the Games brought existing regeneration activities *forward*, especially in

Stratford, albeit that the timescale varies from three years (NEF 2008) to ‘around five to seven years’ (Wales 2012, 320), while Clive Dutton, Newham Council’s Executive Director for Regeneration, Planning and Property, has claimed that the Olympics ‘has most certainly accelerated what would have happened in some shape or form—it’s just fast-forwarded it by at least 20 years’ (cited in *East Magazine* 2012).

### The 2012 Olympics, displacement and resistance

Olympic-related gentrification and displacement processes associated with rising private housing costs have already been identified including by the host borough councils themselves (LBH 2008, 15). The phrase ‘disparity between income and house prices (particularly if the area is “gentrified”) could make it difficult for residents to stay in Stratford’ (Urban Initiatives 2011b, 27) also appears at the end of the Evidence Base Report for Newham Council’s Stratford Metropolitan Masterplan as a potential ‘threat’, but is not discussed in detail. Indeed part of the already emerging Olympic legacy deficit arises from the removal of *existing* locally available jobs, genuinely affordable housing and community facilities which benefitted lower-income East Londoners, but which stood in the way of physical redevelopment for the Games facilities (Bernstock 2009; Davis and Thornley 2010; Raco and Tunney 2010). For example, over 400 homes were demolished at the Clays Lane housing estate in Newham, its residents having been evicted as a result of a CPO (Hatcher 2012). This direct physical displacement prompted considerable opposition in the face of what one former resident describes as the intransigent and manipulative attitude of the London Development Agency: ‘they just wanted to demoralize us and convince us opposition was pointless’ (Cheyne 2009, 404). Such opposition forms part of a long-term,

metropolitan-wide contestation, including in East London, against regeneration programmes during neoliberalization's roll-back (Thatcherism) and roll-out (New Labour) phases (see, *inter alia*, Foster 1999; Watt 2009a; Dines 2009; Davison, Dovey, and Woodcock 2012).

The social and ideological bases of such contestation vary, but two dominant strands can be identified, strands that implicitly or explicitly weave together largely defensive social and spatial discourses of class, place, community and belonging (Watt 2010; Somerville 2011). The first strand has an anti-privatization emphasis on preserving the established but threatened gains made under the KWS, as seen in campaigns against estate stock transfers (Watt 2009a, 2009c). The second strand can be seen in Dines' (2009) account of the Queens Market redevelopment in Newham in which the existing market melded social (working-class, multi-cultural) and spatial (East End) identities together. Each strand highlights how antagonistic class relations become interlinked with processes of urban spatial restructuring, as David Harvey (2008) has trenchantly analysed in his notion of 'accumulation by dispossession'. Those with substantial money and power (corporations and sometimes individuals) are the only ones who currently exercise the 'right to the city' (Harvey 2008) and it is *their* right that threatens the capacity of lower-income groups (and their children) to continue to live in the city. For the latter, accumulation by dispossession highlights antagonistic class relations via a discursive over-laying of often imprecise social categories ('them and us', 'rich and poor', 'big business and ordinary people') with ideas and feelings about *place* and especially *local place* (Watt 2008b; Davidson 2009; Davison, Dovey, and Woodcock 2012). In wishing to preserve their present place with all of its sedimented individual and collective memories (Porter and Barber 2006) as 'theirs', multi-ethnic, largely working-class communities in East London and elsewhere in the city find themselves at the cusp of those

class antagonisms that the un-dialectical notion of 'professionalization' tends to obscure.

The following case studies examine how these processes of regeneration, gentrification and contestation are occurring from the perspective of East Londoners living in two working-class residential spaces located in the borough of Newham, that is, a council estate and a temporary supported housing unit. Such spaces involve residents 'getting by' amidst daily deprivations of income, employment, housing and other resources (Gunter and Watt 2009; Kennelly and Watt 2012). They are dominated by a 'working-class habitus' in Bourdieusian terms, albeit a habitus that is embedded in shifting combinations of post-industrial, post-Fordist flexible forms of work (formal and informal) and unemployment, rather than 'an earlier and now displaced industrial, Fordist political economy' (Watt 2006, 778; Smith 2005; Gunter and Watt 2009; Somerville 2011). Furthermore, unlike the early post-war white 'East End', these contemporary working-class spaces are multi-ethnic and include sizeable black, South Asian and 'mixed-race' populations, recent European migrants, as well as white East Enders (Gunter and Watt 2009; Kennelly and Watt 2012). From the perspective of those living in largely white, affluent middle-class London areas – of gentrified Victorian housing, new-build and suburban private housing estates – council estates and other aspects of working-class space ('local' shops and pubs) represent stigmatized places to avoid (Butler and Robson 2003; Davidson 2008; Watt 2009b).

### The Carpenters Estate

This section examines the Carpenters Estate, a council-built housing estate of around 700 units located near the Olympic Park in Stratford (Figure 1). The estate consists of three 22-storey tower blocks (Lund, Dennison and James Riley Points), low-rise flats and





**Figure 1** Carpenters Estate, July 2012  
(Photo: Paul Watt)

terraced housing. The present estate was built in the late 1960s, although it has a long pre-history rooted in Stratford's industrial past (Dunn et al. 2010). The estate site also includes neighbourhood facilities such as a school, college, two community centres, a health centre and several small businesses.

This section draws upon a number of data sources, including ethnographic research undertaken by the author from March to October 2012. This involved participant observation (within a scholar activist framework) at two 'anti-gentrification' tours organized by CARP (Carpenters Against Regeneration Plans, a locally based campaign group formed in late 2011), at CARP and other meetings, plus informal gatherings in the local Carpenters Arms pub. Interviews were conducted with various people connected to the estate including three residents and one ex-resident (CARP members from BME backgrounds—Black and Minority Ethnic), three local businessmen and one

student filmmaker; informal conversations were also held with around 30 residents. This section of the paper thus draws considerably on the author's sympathetic involvement with CARP (see CARP 2012; *East End Howler* 2012; *savecarpenters* 2012). It also utilizes several recent secondary sources including films and media reports (BBC News 2012; *Site/Fringe* 2012; *The Irish World* 2012), plus interview and survey data with Carpenters residents and ex-residents *before* CARP came into existence (Open University 2009; Urban Initiatives 2011a), as well as a recent survey of residents (TPAS 2012).<sup>4</sup> This range of data is included to demonstrate that many of the issues which CARP have highlighted in their campaign regarding the regeneration of Stratford and their estate are to a very large extent embedded in wider Carpenters residents' concerns.

When the estate was fully occupied in 2005, council tenants occupied 73% of the

705 properties, another 14% were leaseholders and 13% were freeholders (LBN 2012b; author's calculations). Rates of owner occupation were around 17–18% in the high-rise and low-rise blocks, but much greater (66%) in the houses (ibid.). Leaseholders and freeholders represent a combination of ex-council tenants who bought their properties under the 1980 Right-to-Buy legislation and others who bought on the open market (Jones and Murie 2006). A minority of bought properties have been let out by their owners to private tenants.<sup>5</sup>

### *Estate redevelopment*

The following represents a highly condensed summary of the Carpenters Estate's physical problems and redevelopment process, both of which are subject to divergent interpretations.<sup>6</sup> This redevelopment is tied into Newham Council's regeneration strategy including the Stratford Metropolitan Masterplan adopted in December 2010. Here I primarily focus on the response of residents who have 'been through endless plans' (female resident) for redevelopment, rather than on the details of either the plans themselves or Newham Council's commitments as set out in the Carpenters Residents Charter (LBN 2012a). In addition, I am not concerned here with the history of how the various estate representative bodies—CARP, the Tenant Management Organization (TMO) and the Carpenters Residents Steering Group 'The Official Recognised Body for Consultation on the Estate' (Carpenters RSG 2012)—inter-relate to one another.<sup>7</sup>

On its website, Newham Council describes the rationale for redevelopment on the Carpenters: 'by 2004 it had become apparent that the estate was falling into disrepair' (LBN 2012a). Such disrepair must be set in a borough-wide context whereby the percentage of non-decent local authority homes in Newham increased to 58.1% in 2006–2007 from 48.9% in 2001–2002, and only

substantially reduced (to 27%) in 2009–10 (HM Government 2012). Furthermore, a Council report noted that 'the properties at Lund and Dennison Point do not form part of the Decent Homes Programme' (LBN 2009a, 14), while a Newham Councillor explained that the Decent Homes programme did not reach the Carpenters Estate (*The Irish World* 2012). Residents themselves have also highlighted 'under investment' on the estate (LBN 2011, 96; see also Dunn et al. 2010; CARP 2012). Newham Council began decanting residents from James Riley Point in order to demolish the block and develop the released land with a view to generating income to fund the maintenance of the other two towers (LBN 2012a). Eventually, however, all three towers as well some of the low-rise housing were faced with decant and demolition since the Council argued that it lacked sufficient funds for refurbishment (2012a).

A lengthy decanting process has occurred since 2005 whereby more than half of the original residents had left by September 2012 (LBN 2012b). This process has been differentiated by tenure with the main movers being council tenants followed by leaseholders, while the number of freeholders has remained nearly the same. Tenants made up nearly half of the remaining 320 households by 2012, while freeholders represented 30% of households. The tower blocks have been most depleted with only 72 occupied flats by 2012 compared to 434 in 2005 (ibid.). Most remaining residents are thus concentrated in the houses and low-rise flats. It is unclear where the owner-occupiers have moved to, although Newham Council data indicates that over two-thirds of the 250 decanted tenants were relocated within the E15 postcode, while most of the remainder have been moved elsewhere in Newham with 15 relocated outside the borough (LBN 2012a). This issue of geographical dispersal is clearly one that would benefit from further research.

The latest turn in the Carpenters Estate's long-running redevelopment saga is one Harvey (2008) has highlighted in relation to

US cities, that is, the role of universities in reshaping urban space. The Carpenters Estate faces the prospect of becoming the site of a new campus for University College London (UCL, 'London's global university') (BBC News 2012; LBN 2012b). Following a 'memorandum of understanding' between Newham Council and UCL in November 2011, UCL (2012) developed a 'vision' of establishing a new university quarter comprising research, teaching and residential facilities on the 23-acre site of the estate, and it assumes non-UCL uses (including residential) of 21% of the site. Since UCL has still to prepare a more detailed scheme for the new campus, many issues at the time of writing (October 2012) are unclear. Nevertheless, residents have expressed anger at what UCL's proposed new campus might mean in relation to the demolition of their homes and whether their 'guaranteed' Right to Return in the Carpenters Residents Charter (LBN 2012a) following redevelopment would be real or illusory (BBC News 2012; Carpenters RSG 2012; Inside Housing 2012b).

### *Community and resistance*

'Community' is a much-contested term in regeneration, not least as a result of New Labour's promulgation of community as *the* mechanism for unravelling what they saw as neighbourhoods of social exclusion across urban Britain and especially in council-built estates (Wallace 2010). Newham Council's *Sustainable Community Strategy for 2010–2030* (LBN 2009b, 13) states that its regeneration opportunities in terms of housing 'must never be at the expense of a cohesive community. Because we are building communities rather than housing estates, housing must be mixed by class, ethnicity and tenure, whether the property is new or old.' Carpenters residents, on the other hand, feel that they *already* have a cohesive, socially mixed community.

The dominant theme that emerges from numerous data sources is that most

Carpenters Estate residents (as well as many ex-residents) like living on the estate and furthermore that they could see no good reason for what they regarded as the destruction of their existing neighbourhood and its established community ties. One consultation exercise found that, 'the main message from Carpenters residents who rejected both [redevelopment] options seems to be that [...] the plan should protect existing stable and balanced communities, such as that on the Carpenters Estate rather than seeking to redevelop the estate for other uses' (Urban Initiatives 2011a, 24). A later independent survey carried out with those living in the low-rise flats and houses found that 'an overwhelming majority (88%) of residents wish to remain in their existing homes and do not wish them to be part of any future redevelopment' (TPAS 2012, 2); only 7% said 'demolish and rebuild'.

Despite the estate languishing near the bottom of official deprivation indices, Carpenters residents and ex-residents in interviews, meetings and conversations routinely used the term 'community' to capture their sense of place (see also Dunn et al. 2010; TPAS 2012), for example:

'We are a little bit like an island in as much as we're separated from the rest of Newham by the high street and the railway, but that might be one of the reasons why we've got such a good community spirit. This estate is well worth preserving.' (interview with elderly male resident, cited in Open University 2009)

'Basically we got shifted by Newham Council. I got moved to Forest Gate and it's a nice area, though it's not quite the same as the Carpenters Estate 'cos the people aren't as warm, you know, because this was more of a community.' (interview with young male ex-Carpenters resident, cited in Open University 2009)

Such a sense of community was undoubtedly facilitated by the estate's range of on-site facilities. Observation on the estate revealed considerable everyday neighbourly conviviality and this was by no means restricted to those from the same ethnic group, but was

instead often inter-ethnic in character (cf. Maginn 2004). Residents also took pride in their homes and gardens, a factor in their wanting to remain on the estate (TPAS 2012). The Carpenters Estate has therefore managed to avoid the 'spatial alienation and dissolution of place' that Wacquant (2008, 241) associates with the US 'hyperghetto'. While council estates and their residents in the UK are routinely framed within a discourse of high crime, anti-social behaviour and joblessness (Watt 2008b) a discourse which has more veracity in the case of the US projects that Wacquant (2008) discusses – the sociological reality in London council estates is far less one-dimensional. Many London estates, such as the Carpenters, are characterized by routine neighbourliness, local social capital and positive place identity, as well as by wage labour—often low-paid and insecure—alongside unemployment (see, *inter alia*, Maginn 2004; Smith 2005; Watt 2006; Gunter and Watt 2009).

Several older Carpenters residents' strong sense of place belonging was rooted in their longevity of residence. A frequent refrain in meetings and conversations was that they laid claim to local place on the basis of having lived on the estate since it was built, that is, for over 40 years, and that as a result their sedimented memories of family and work were bound up with the neighbourhood. For example, Mary had lived on the estate for over 40 years, had worked at the local school, purchased her home in the 1980s via the Right-to-Buy and strongly objected to losing her home and neighbours: 'they are going to have to drag me out through my front door' (BBC News 2012; see *The Irish World* 2012). One of Newham's oft-stated problems is that it has a 'transient population' (Campbell 2012, 311). This makes little sense, however, in relation to the Carpenters Estate given the frequent longevity of residence, especially in the low-rise flats and houses: 'it is very much a stable community in that respect. People know each other and feel safe in the neighbourhood' (TPAS 2012, 2).

No major social fault-lines appeared to exist on the Carpenters Estate even if, like all other contemporary urban neighbourhoods, it is unlikely to be entirely 'communal'. Those tensions, which surfaced during the period of observation, emanated from contrasting views regarding the redevelopment process itself, as has been identified in other large-scale regeneration schemes (Wallace 2010). In addition, CARP members complained that Newham Council was pursuing a 'divide-and-rule' strategy of pitting different tenure categories (tenants vs. owner-occupiers) against each other. Despite this, there was common concern from *both* owners and tenants that the demolition of the estate would mean a diminution in Newham's already inadequate social rental housing stock: 'there are already so many private "for sale" developments going ahead in Stratford but few are suitable for social housing especially families' (Carpenters RSG 2012, 7). The decanting process itself had an unforeseen consequence on the remaining residents, that is, it highlighted what they might lose if they left. One ex-resident who had been decanted from one of the tower blocks explained how opinions regarding leaving were initially divided, but had gradually become less so.

'There was quite a sizable group [of residents] who wanted to stay, another sizable group who were happy to leave and another group who were ambiguous, so I'd say it was quite a mix. As things sort of mutated and changed and the estate started to clear out, that mood changed, because I had few friends who were still on the estate. Quite a lot of people actually began to gradually realize what they were losing I think, because obviously they'd talked to some people who'd moved out and they were saying "actually it's shit and this is a good place to live in".' (interviewee 1, male ex-resident)

Other interviewees noted similar issues.

'I'm not against regeneration at all, but they want to bulldoze everything, they don't take the community's feelings into account and a



lot of old people live here. A lot of the people who've moved out have regretted it.'  
(interviewee 2, female resident)

Feelings of community and place belonging are by no means fixed and often gain traction from a prospective state of affairs, not least an external threat (Somerville 2011). For example, when the tower blocks were originally threatened with demolition, a Tower Block Action Group was formed (Open University 2009). More recently, UCL's vision prompted a considerable coming together of Carpenters residents *in favour* of remaining in their existing homes and neighbourhood and *against* what they regarded as an uninvited 'guest': 'roughly 100 angry residents from Newham's Carpenters estate attended a standing room only meeting in Stratford on Monday evening to call on University College London to abandon its proposals' (Inside Housing 2012b). The social basis of the residents' views and the underlying class relations which are revealed are encapsulated by this section from a statement by the Carpenters RSG (2012, 6) that was read out at the meeting: 'We are essentially a working-class community. What you are proposing is social cleansing in the name of your corporate objectives. That's injustice and we do not intend to let it happen.'

### *Gentrification*

Carpenters' residents were only too well aware that Stratford was changing, partly as a result of the Olympics. For them, such changes were associated with shifting class relations and a re-balancing of their estate and Stratford in a manner that did not include them: 'the Council want to get rid of the poor people' (interviewee 2); 'the future is in Stratford but we're not the type of people it seems they want in Stratford. They seem to want all the well-to-do people in from the City with the money' (elderly male resident, BBC News 2012). CARP partially mobilized its campaign around such

sentiments as it explicitly tied the fate of the estate to gentrification and the Olympics (savecarpenters 2012). This can be seen by its organization of two tours of the estate during 2012, one in March and the second in July, both badged under 'The Unofficial Gentrification Tour—A Tale of Two Newhams. Newham's Robin Wales is excited, but what is the REAL Olympic Legacy?' One CARP member described the rationale behind the first tour.

'... you've got all these [official] Olympics walks so let's do one of our own, an alternative walk on the estate. I thought it was just going to be a handful of people and a dog, but then it had the quality of incorporating quite a lot of the local residents as well and former residents. Then the media got interested, the *Newham Recorder* [local newspaper] billed it as a march although it wasn't, it was a walk [laughs].'  
(interviewee 1)

The first tour included around 100 people who walked from Stratford train station to the Carpenters Estate where they were given a guided tour by CARP members. Later the local Carpenters Arms pub hosted a series of talks including from people who had been active in opposing other Newham regeneration schemes including Clays Lane and Queens Market. This culminated in an evening screening of the *On the Edge* film projected against the wall of the Carpenters Arms pub. The film was made by Site/Fringe (2012), a collective of MA Art & Politics students from Goldsmiths, University of London (in conjunction with the Museum of London) whose aim was 'to highlight the effects of the gentrification process that is occurring at an ever-increasing pace because of the Olympics' (film notes). Some CARP members articulated a sophisticated critique of gentrification (cf. NEF 2008), for example, in the following interview quotation:

'The anti-gentrification is really the fact that you don't want to displace an existing



community and then replace it with a new community, it's so artificial, so superficial to do that. For us [CARP], it's about actually being part of this community and continuing to be so. There are many people who live here and who've lived here for many years that want to still be here and there's no reason why they should be moved or forced to leave to make way for the owner-occupiers, young professionals who've got *money* and lots of disposable income. [...] The wealth that is created in those new [business] hubs [in Stratford Westfield] is never filtered down to local businesses or to the local community. We're against the whole idea of gentrification because it destroys community and it destroys local businesses. It changes the area you live in beyond recognition, so that if you suffer the consequences of having to move out, even if you want to move back in it's far too expensive.' (interviewee 3, male resident)

These views were echoed in interviews with local businessmen who described struggling to fit into the brave new world of corporate Stratford: 'with Westfield and the Olympics they've battered all the small businesses' (interviewee A); 'Newham was where I grew up, it used to be left-wing, but now it's totally changed, it's all corporate' (interviewee B).

CARP members tended to argue that they were not against either the Olympics or regeneration per se—they were interested in seeing their estate improved for example. Nevertheless, they thought that one of the reasons why their estate was being targeted for such drastic redevelopment was its strategic location near the Olympic Park and Westfield. A common theme expressed in interviews and meetings was how the Olympics had speeded up regeneration, a notion that gels with other accounts as discussed above.

'Yes absolutely [the Olympics made a difference to Carpenters Estate]. Overnight in the eyes of Newham Council it became a juicy piece of land in my opinion. But having said that it's always been a good piece of land to develop on ... and there were always going

to be those plans at Stratford City that was always going to happen, but I think the Olympic Games accelerated the entire process.' (interviewee 1)

The symbolic contrast between corporate affluence and the estate's deprivation was highlighted during the Olympic Games in various ways. For example, news teams from two global mass media organizations, BBC and Al Jazeera, were located on the upper floors of Lund Point and Dennison Point, respectively, a media coup that was only made possible by the decanting of the previous residents. In addition, all three Carpenters towers had corporate advertising from sponsors emblazoned on their outside edges to coincide with the Games (Figure 2). Such corporate wealth thus became juxtaposed with the 'tinning up' of empty homes and the ensuing rundown appearance of parts of the estate (Minton 2012). This running down has been deliberate according to CARP activists:

'When the decant happened they [Newham Council] stopped investing in the area. [...] They've deliberately run it down—the only thing going up since the Olympics is new lights so as it looks pretty for the VIPs.' (interviewee 4, male resident)

### Young people living in temporary housing

The second case study is based on research interviews conducted in summer 2011 with 21 young people living in temporary housing in Newham (Kennelly and Watt 2012).<sup>8</sup> Like the Carpenters' residents, there was a clear sense that their local neighbourhood was dramatically changing as a result of the Olympics and other Stratford regeneration schemes, although they did not understand such changes in *explicit* gentrification terms, even if they *felt* gentrification was occurring. In the focus groups, they responded to the following statement: 'The 2012 Olympics will create more affordable housing in my community.' Despite this



**Figure 2** Carpenters and Dockland Centre in foreground, with corporate Olympics branding in background, July 2012 (Photo: Paul Watt)

statement being weighted in a *pro-Olympics* direction, nearly all the young people disagreed with it. The comments from the following focus group exchange illustrate their sceptical views on genuinely affordable housing provision.

Niamh: 'I think with the Olympics and the Westfield site even though Stratford's a city it's going to turn it into a main city and living in a city there's no affordable . . . especially for lower income youths as well, no housing that's affordable.'

Faith: 'I agree with what she says really, the prices have already gone up and up, so there's no chance, we haven't got no hope really unless we get something really soon or get a really good job and buy our own place. I wouldn't like to live around Newham; I'd like to move out of Newham.'

Jack: 'I think the Olympics is making everything more expensive around here. I disagree that there's going to be housing available. If they can't afford to give us a house now, what's going to make the Olympics? ... Like she said, the Olympics is making Stratford a main city, they haven't got houses [...] anyone that lives there so I feel like Stratford is going to turn into somewhere like Canary Wharf [Docklands] soon and it's going to be expensive.'

The young people were nominally permitted to stay in the temporary housing for two years, although a few stayed longer. They were only too well aware of the acute difficulties they faced in trying to access permanent social rental housing when they left their current accommodation. Several contrasted their own straightened housing circumstances with the new private residential, office and retail developments in the local area that had no impact upon alleviating *their* housing needs.

Michael: 'This Olympic site is taking up a lot of space as well; it runs all the way to Leyton and all them places.'

Niamh: 'That could be houses.'

Michael: 'That could all be houses because people are homeless, I'm one of them, do you know what I'm saying.'

Some of the young people created photo journals documenting their views on how the Olympics was affecting their lives (see Kennelly and Watt 2012). A prominent theme in the photo journals was how the building of luxury flats reflected priorities other than their own and from which they could derive no benefit. This can be seen in Olu's caption for two of his photos, which showed advertising signs for 'Apartments For Sale' and 'Luxury One, Two and Three Bedroom Apartments'.

'This advertisement goes a long way from attracting local residents because it is simply unaffordable. [...] It's not for us and all the promises of affordable homes and local jobs is nothing but hot air and the real people benefitting are the large businesses.'

There were animated discussions in the focus groups regarding the impacts of the Olympics on their area, including considerable bewilderment that the Games were being staged in Newham at all, a borough which they knew to be deprived. One potential knock-on effect that provoked comment was the possibility that West Ham United (an East London football club) would vacate its current ground at Upton Park to one of the new Olympic venues after the Games.

Jack: 'They'll turn it [Upton Park] into properties, just like Emirates Stadium [Arsenal ground], the old one.'

Freddie: 'How much are they [properties] going to be because it was an ex-football stadium?'

Jack: 'They'll be expensive.'

Tiffany: 'In a shit area, expensive housing in a shit area, it makes no sense.'

Tiffany's comment perfectly intuitively the conundrum of uneven urban development in deprived, but gentrifying neighbourhoods (Smith 1996). Similarly, Jessica identifies the broader social transformation of the area as a result of the Olympics involving increased tourism, rising prices and their own ultimate exit (displacement) to a cheaper area.

'I think that the money they're spending on the Olympics is definitely going to change the area to a much higher-class area and all the people that don't have the money to stay in the area are going to be kicked out. After the Olympics has finished I don't think it's just going to be a dead area, I think it's going to be a giant tourist attraction that's going to generate millions for years to come I believe and it's definitely ... it's not for us, you know what I mean. That's why everything, all the prices, the rate of living and everything is

going to go up so we'll probably have to move to other parts of Newham, like Manor Park, Forest Gate, areas like that, and Stratford is going to be as famous as the West End to Americans, people all over the world, so it's just about money.'

## Conclusion

East London's contemporary third-wave gentrification involves the wholesale physical, economic and social transformation of deprived inner-city areas and is increasingly being driven by large-scale regeneration programmes such as the Olympics. We have seen how those people living in working-class spaces do not necessarily welcome such changes, not least since it threatens their sense of place, that is, 'displacement' (Davidson 2009, 226).

Neither of the two groups we looked at regarded the regeneration and Olympics-related changes, and especially the 'new Stratford' in the shape of the upmarket private apartments for sale or rent, as having much to do with them. Instead, both the Carpenters residents and the temporarily housed young people thought that they might not be living in Stratford or maybe not even in Newham in the future. Legacy is for others, not for them. Displacement is taking place directly and indirectly as the local area changes so that existing residents no longer feel it is 'their place'. At the present time, displacement activity is primarily direct in the case of the Carpenters Estate, and mainly indirect via displacement pressure in the case of the young people. However, at any moment the latter could turn into more direct forms as the young people's sojourn in their existing accommodation ends, but they fail to obtain a scarce social housing tenancy and have instead to rely on friends, family or the increasingly expensive private rental sector—the previous reliance on which put them in temporary housing in the first place.

There are however certain differences, largely generational, between the accounts

of place and neighbourhood change in the two case studies. Whereas the Carpenters residents are trying to preserve, either symbolically or literally, a sense of their homes and neighbourhoods as constituting a place with positive meaning—a community—the young people displayed little pride in their current residence even though they appreciated what the housing unit provided for them. Therefore, whilst the Carpenters Estate managed to hold onto a sense of community, such stable notions of place and community are far less evident in the young people's accounts. This difference reflects how the largely middle-aged and elderly Carpenters residents are a combination of council tenants and owner-occupiers (including ex-tenants), many of whom gained access to publicly built and subsidized council housing in its KWS heyday. Those ex-tenants who exercised the Right-to-Buy their homes can be regarded as that section of the working classes who, at least for a period, appeared to benefit from the Thatcherite expansion of the 'property-owning democracy' (Jones and Murie 2006). The problem such Carpenters' homeowners are facing at the time of writing (October 2012) is that their inclusion in the property-owning democracy has turned out to be chimerical. Despite investing in their homes in terms of both use and exchange values, the latter are simply inadequate relative to the potential returns that *could* be achieved if the land is parcelled up and sold off for higher-value property development. The young people living in temporary housing, on the other hand, are experiencing the tail-end of the neoliberal property-owning dream (Hodkinson and Robbins, forthcoming), one in which home ownership in London is out-of-bounds to all but the cash-rich (Heywood 2012). Most of the young people we interviewed aspired to a council flat, a form of housing that now represents an elusive 'gold standard' of secure and low-cost accommodation in London, a city that is experiencing an ongoing crisis of social housing provision (Watt 2009c).



The two groups also responded differently to their potential displacement. Although the young people's anxieties regarding the transformation of East London into a more upmarket place were all too real, they did not name 'gentrification' even if they intuitively grasped its meaning. CARP members and other Carpenters residents, on the other hand, knew only too well what gentrification meant. The deployment of this discourse in relation to the Olympics behemoth helped CARP to construct a metropolitan-wide platform of resistance which drew in other groups including anti-Olympics activists, students, academics and others opposed to the narrow terms in which 'regeneration' is being framed in East London (B. 2012; Couvee 2012; savecarpenters 2012). It is noteworthy that most of the leading CARP members were not the 'usual suspects', that is, established leftist campaigners. Their mobilization was not therefore prompted by some pre-existing political ideology, but instead by a desire to defend their 'right to stay put' and 'right to place' (Davidson 2009).

The restructuring of urban space that Harvey (2008) identifies as accumulation by dispossession is producing increasingly antagonistic class relations that are in turn making such relations and their accompanying social injustices more apparent to those who's right to the city is being threatened. In turn this is leading to greater class resentment and in some cases anger against 'them'—corporate wealth and power—a resentment and anger whose political consequences are as yet unforeseen, but which will no doubt be played out on the streets and estates of East London.

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### Notes

- 1 The Decent Homes standard is however described as 'low' by the House of Commons (2010, 12) report and does not cover the external aspects of housing estates.
- 2 'CPOs are legally binding orders which allow the council to purchase people's homes by force' (Minton 2012, 85). Such legal powers have been used to push through demolition in various large-scale regeneration projects, including by the London Development Agency in the case of the 2012 Olympics and the demolition of the Clays Lane Estate (Hatcher 2012).
- 3 See Smith (1996) and Lees, Slater, and Wyly (2008) on rent gap theory.
- 4 The TPAS (2012) report is based on an independent survey of those living in the low-rise housing carried out on behalf of the Carpenters RSG in August 2012 by Denise Barnes, a TPAS Independent Adviser.
- 5 The LBN (2012b) tables exclude mention of private tenants.
- 6 See the official account (LBN 2009a, 2012b), the consultant's account (Campbell 2012), a report by LSE postgraduates (Dunn et al. 2010) and several critical accounts (B. 2012; *East End Howler* 2012; CARP 2012).
- 7 In 1997, the Carpenters Estate residents voted to form a TMO that took over some management functions from Newham Council.
- 8 The research project examines young people's responses to the 2010 Vancouver and 2012 London Olympic Games. It is funded through a Standard Research Grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada; Jackie Kennelly is Principal Investigator and the author is assisting with the London aspect.

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