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**Policing, Newham and the 2012 Olympic Games:
A Working Paper**
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Policing, Newham and the 2012 Olympic Games: A Working Paper

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Abstract

In this paper we describe Newham – the setting for the 2012 Olympics and the context for the Games and its policing. We also describe the various stages of Olympic policing, including Games time, before discussing some issues around the aftermath of the Games and Olympic legacy. The sometimes-pessimistic predictions of both police and a variety of commentators (including this research team) as to what the Games might bring to the Capital remained unrealised. Whether by accident or design, and senior police commanders conceded that they were unsure as to which, there were no catastrophes. In the absence of the public inquiries and commissions that often follow high-profile police operations, life in East London – for residents and police alike – quickly returned to business-as-usual following the Olympic closing ceremony. Hundreds of thousands had visited Newham, but the host borough remained an enigma.

Keywords: London Olympics 2012, sporting mega-events, contemporary policing, ‘Olympic crime’

Introduction

London was awarded the right to host the 2012 Olympic Games in July 2005. The next day, a terrorist attack on London’s public transport network killed 52 members of the public and injured more than 700. The convergence of global sporting mega-events and security systems able to respond to all possible eventualities was, therefore, laid bare. As the agency with primary responsibility for keeping London safe, the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) was required to plan the UK’s largest post-war policing operation while ensuring that ‘the Games

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remained the story'. This paper is a summary of a two-year study which seeks to describe the key aspects of policing the London Olympics¹, and the impact that sporting mega-events can have on hosting cities and their localities (Burbank, Andranovich and Heying, 2001; Roche, 2000; Ritchie, 2000; Toohey and Veal, 2005; Chalip, 2006; Preuss, 2007; Short, 2008; Tian and Johnston, 2008; Mangan and Dyreson, 2010; Smith, 2010 and 2013; and Van Wynsberghe, Derom and Maurer, 2013). Essentially a case study of contemporary policing, the research examines the demands of local and routine engagement that informed the hosting of the Games and explores, simultaneously, how the exceptional pressures of hosting the Olympics brought previously unexpected issues to the local context. How the police sought to define, monitor, prioritise, contain, investigate and solve 'Olympic-related' crime (Murray, 2005; Bigo and Tsoukala, 2006; Klein, 2008; Fussey and Coaffee, 2009; Fussey, Coaffee, Armstrong and Hobbs, 2011; Samatas, 2007, 2008, 2010a and 2010b; Dodd, 2009; Jenkins, 2012; Graham, 2012), and how 'Olympic-related' policing connected to the policing of other social events and public settings, were integral concerns for the research.

The East End Borough of Newham was the primary host for the 2012 Olympics, encompassing the Olympic Park (including the Olympic Stadium and Athletes' Village) and *ExCel* venue, as well as accommodating national teams² and hosting key Olympic logistics infrastructure³. Throughout the period of the Olympic policing operation (June to September 2012), our fieldwork focused on the day-to-day policing of Newham by both borough and dedicated Olympic police units. The anticipated risks of hosting the Games did not materialise; Olympic policing resources were under-employed and, in the eyes of some, inefficiently used. Local crime problems were allegedly displaced but remained essentially identical in character to those which existed in the borough before the Games. Furthermore, the much-feared disruption of the transport infrastructure and foot-fall access problems proved non-existent. Crucially, terrorist activity did not materialise, protest – and the feared concomitant violence – against the Games was minimal; criminal targeting of Olympic visitors, staff and volunteers was almost non-existent, while religious proselytising from a wide faith spectrum was a highly visible, occasionally vociferous yet peaceful aspect at the periphery of the Games.

For the MPS, the Olympics were an exceptional sixty-day disruption of the everyday routines of borough policing. However, the MPS were aware that this event carried huge political baggage and the reputation of both a city and indeed, a nation, rested in part on the abilities of local police to anticipate problems in the vicinity of the Games and head it off at the earliest opportunity. Securing the Games took considerable planning against a background of changing security plans and budgets (O'Neill, 2005; Tsoukala, 2006; Toohey and Taylor, 2008; Cornelissen, 2011), and also changing risks and personnel which included key figures from the police, Olympic delivery agencies and both local and national political spheres. What was true for central police planners was also true for the local police in East London; policing both the exceptional and the routine were carried out against a background of constant change. The biggest policing challenge proved to be Olympic visitor over-crowding at critical pinch-points, which were, in turn, considered the most likely locations for a terrorist attack – not least as they lay outside of the Olympic Park security cordon. Policing

¹ This paper is based on the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)-funded project, *A Sociology of Policing and Police-Community Relations at the London 2012 Olympics*.

² The United States team, for example, were based at the University of East London campus based in the south of the borough.

³ This included the Uniform Distribution and Accreditation Centre (UDAC) in the West Ham district, as well as two major Olympic transport and fuel depots.

and security procedures were exacerbated by the complex governance arrangements and competing demands present in critical locations, and tensions were at times evident between commercial and safety considerations in the vicinity of the Westfield shopping mall.

In this paper we describe Newham – the setting for the 2012 Olympics and the context for the Games and its policing. We also describe the various stages of Olympic policing, including Games time, before discussing some issues around the aftermath of the Games and Olympic legacy. The sometimes-pessimistic predictions of both police and a variety of commentators (including this research team) as to what the Games might bring to the Capital remained unrealised. Whether by accident or design, and senior police commanders conceded that they were unsure as to which, there were no catastrophes. In the absence of the public inquiries and commissions that often follow high-profile police operations, life in East London – for residents and police alike – quickly returned to business-as-usual following the Olympic closing ceremony. Hundreds of thousands had visited Newham, but the host borough remained an enigma.

Newham: What Kind of a Place?

'The London Borough of Newham: A Place to Work, Rest and Stay' (London Borough of Newham Council slogan, 2012)

The millions that visited the Olympic Park contained few who had ever previously visited this part of London. The Olympic Park was little more than a sterile peninsula in the northwest corner of Newham, into which the public was funnelled directly from adjacent transport hubs without ever setting foot in, or thinking about, the borough, leaving it as they found it, *terra incognita*. The Games were *in*, but not *of* Newham – and the Olympic Park was a kind of non-place, physically isolated by perimeter security, but also psychologically and culturally isolated from any sense of being in London, let alone Newham. Were it not for the ubiquity of the Union flag waved in support of the athletes of Team Great Britain (Team GB), the Games could literally have been anywhere in the world, a triumph of global corporatism (Monbiot, 2001).

While the Local Authority has branded Newham a place to 'Live, Work and Stay', the reality for many of its impoverished residents, drawn from every corner of the world to the most ethnically diverse place in the UK, is that it is more a transit lounge than a destination. Newham might best be described as a twenty-first century location of impermanence: a place to bed down, earn and leave. It is a synthetic construction formed with the merger of East Ham and West Ham in 1965 – hence *Newham*; this conceit of urban political governance is illustrative of the borough's contemporary challenges. The Newham that hosted the 2012 Games was characterised by pockets of cheap and exploited labour, a massive grey economy, and a disregard for planning laws and other regulations, notably around housing and the minimum wage. The local police estimated that as much as 20 per cent of the population was not officially accounted for, and Council sources reported that around 30 per cent of residents moved address each year (Armstrong et al, in progress).

Pre-Olympic Policing: Business as Usual?

Newham is also home to the local government ward of Stratford, which in 2008-9 returned some of the highest level of knife crime in the MPS. The borough as a whole had the fourth

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highest level of serious violence in London in 2009-10, and in 2006 an inspection by Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary found significant failings in policing (Bainbridge, 2006). The proposed solutions included: moving key police personnel to shore up the leadership of borough policing, and the identification and targeting of particular crime types, notably weapons carrying and violence (conducted by young people). As a consequence, two tactical interventions were prioritised. Firstly, particularly in 2010-11, Newham dramatically increased the use of stop and search activities targeting young people with the explicit intention of deterring knife carrying. A particular feature of this tactic was the routine authorisation of controversial 'Section 60' (s60) powers, which allowed police officers to stop and search anyone in a defined geographical area without having to justify their actions on the basis of specific suspicion. By 2010-11, Newham accounted for around one third of all s60 stops and searches in London⁴. These powers were being authorised on two out of every three days (MPS Performance Information Bureau [PIB] Report, n.d.). This widespread use of s60 powers has since been discredited and virtually ceased (in the whole of 2013, only 372 s60 stops and searches were conducted in Newham, a 98 per cent reduction on 2010-11 – MPS, 2013).

With Council partners, the police developed, also in 2010, what they called *Total Enforcement* (TE); this consisted of the use of an expanded police Licensing Team working with regulatory enforcement officers to exploit all possible regulatory opportunities to intervene in, and in many cases close down, businesses deemed to be 'crime generators'. Particular attention was paid to pubs and other venues selling alcohol and – apparently at the behest of the Mayor of Newham and in the absence of any particular evidence – fried chicken shops, where young people comprised a large proportion of customers. Enforcement activities were dominated by health and safety checks combined with a focus on unregulated migrant workers staffing the premises. Some of the latter lacked legal residential status, were generally paid less than minimum wage rates, and lived in cramped and unsanitary conditions – including above commercial premises, in squats, and in so-called 'super sheds' (typically small illegal dormitory blocks built in residential gardens). Some were even found to be living in abandoned shipping containers. Although these interventions stressed concerns regarding the exploitation of vulnerable migrant workers and residents, operations were nevertheless frequently conducted in conjunction with the UK Border Agency, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and other public bodies whose involvement produced arrests intended to result in deportation. Other particular targets, all defined by their cultural 'otherness', included Somali-run social venues where *Khat* was chewed (branded 'Khat houses' by the police, drawing apparently derogatory parallels to 'crack houses' where illicit drugs were consumed), *shisha* bars, and the 'houses of multiple occupancy' squats occupied by Lithuanian residents. A separate and distinct focus was on a residential block in the Stratford area that was specifically built to accommodate several hundred residents, all of whom were under the age of 25, the largest such facility in Europe. Many residents were referred to this facility by various social services. The building thus accommodated hundreds of young people from across the globe, some carrying a variety of social and personal issues, and a minority of whom were routinely identified by the local police as a major source of crime in the area. As a consequence, the local police worked with the block management to enhance security and better control access, including the introduction of vetting of prospective residents, and improving the information-sharing about residents and their associates and activities. In short, there were intensive and quite extraordinary levels of surveillance.

⁴ In 2010, Newham conducted almost 18,000 s60 stops and searches, out of an MPS total of a little over 53,000.

The New Klondike

In late 2011, the greatest show on earth was imminent. At its vanguard was *Westfield Stratford City*, Europe's biggest shopping mall and the gateway to the Olympic site for over 70 per cent of the visitors to the Olympic Park. The Mall was opened in September 2011, bringing an average of 100,000 shoppers a day into the borough (and more than 200,000 around Christmas 2011). Such foot-fall brought wealth to the retailers but created a new set of problems for the police. The most serious reputational threat to Westfield – and, therefore, to Olympic and police reputations – was that the mall might become a magnet for rival youth gangs who, according to police intelligence, were in twitter exchanges before the Mall's opening preparing to contest 'ownership'⁵. This development threatened the spill-over of hitherto relatively hidden violence into an ostensibly private, but heavily surveilled and very public domain⁶. The threat informed discussions between the Mall management and local police, and reputational concerns led to Westfield funding an extra Newham police presence in addition to their own security personnel. After its September 2011 opening, Westfield quickly accounted for around three per cent of borough crime, including a murder in July 2012. Throughout 2012, the Mall was the site of both private security and local police anti-gang tactics. These included, plain-clothed police spotters directing uniformed officers to conduct stop-and-search operations targeting 'known' gang members. At other times, initiatives saw a focus on partnership involving the police, council and Westfield management. Facial recognition of known and suspected offenders was trialled in Westfield, having been pioneered over a decade earlier in the wider Stratford area. More generally, the management of Westfield used their own banning orders to eject and exclude young people whom they considered to be a 'threat'. In some cases, they acted only on suspicion amounting simply to young people being observed walking around the Mall in a small group without making any purchases.

Two issues that remained elusive, however, were the impact of all of this local Police activity on business-as-usual matters, and how it related to the coming Olympic Games. Any correlation between the policing of serious youth violence/gangs and the Games was never made explicit. However, the weight of evidence suggested that the timing was not coincidental and, as will be seen below, as Games time approached, a number of increasingly exclusionary strategies was employed in order further to sanitise and pacify the borough, as the focus of police and Council enforcement activities moved to the use of public spaces in the Stratford area by young people, street drinkers, rough sleepers and sex workers. The cleansing of Newham, and in particular Stratford, was a role that fell to local Police in collaboration with local agencies. Further, the changing nature of Stratford – in particular the creation of Westfield – exacerbated existing local problems, which led to innovative strategies of control and created collaborations that were to have a life extending beyond Games time.

Pre-Olympic Planning Principles: 'Opening the Oven Door': January – May 2012

The Olympics were hidden in plain sight in the borough until a matter of weeks before the Opening Ceremony. By contrast, the 'construction economy' had become highly visible from

⁵ This assertion never actually materialised and a more accurate description of what happened when violence flared is that groups of rivals encountered each other by chance while visiting the Mall.

⁶ A specialist Guns and Gang Squad had been formed in Newham in early 2011.

as far back as 2007: both the Olympic Park and the Westfield Mall saw up to 30,000 building workers enter the borough each day. These workers included individuals who, according to the Police, were linked to risks posed by terrorism, as well as to systemic threats including cyber, financial and organised crime. Considerable effort was expended by the police (centrally, not locally) to identify and remove potential risks, including a wide range of operations that placed building workers as well as local residents on a growing list of pre-Olympic suspects who were subject to analysis and intelligence gathering. Indeed, a database was created by an Olympic police unit that reportedly included details of every address within a particular radius of the Olympic Park.

As Games-time approached, the implications of hosting the new Olympic infrastructure became increasingly apparent – particularly in areas outside the Olympic Park such as team accommodation and logistics hubs (the latter included parking and fuel stores for Olympic buses and the Uniform Distribution and Accreditation Centre (UDAC) for all Olympic workers and volunteers). However, who was to police what, when, and under whose command led to some fierce negotiations. The 2012 Olympics had no precedent in UK policing. There was no clear-cut, risk assessment-based, mega-event script to turn to (Chang and Singh, 1990; Chappellet, 2001; Stamatakis, Gargalianos, Afthinos, and Nassis, 2003; Horne and Manzenreiter, 2006a; Jennings, 2008 and 2010; Boyle and Haggerty, 2009; Leopkey and Parent, 2009; Giulianotti and Klauser, 2010 and 2011), and Pre-Games rehearsals were led, at times, by very junior figures, although those offering hypothetical solutions were, for the most part, very senior. The police knew that they would face a reality that required decision-making about who had the right and the power to edit, set the scene and possibly alter the plot. But, for the early stages of Olympic preparation quite where the stage began and ended, and who constituted the cast, raised some dilemmas distinguished by *knowns* (events that occurred) and *unknowns* (hypotheticals), and the construction of ‘Olympic related’ crime and policing was a constantly negotiated feature of the 2012 Games.

Planning Processes: The Pursuit of the Omni-Competent

Against this background, one senior MPS individual located in Newham took on the task of co-ordinating the police response of Newham and the boroughs bordering the Olympic Park and other Olympic venues. Although often frustrated by a lack of information regarding centrally generated schemas and a concomitant confusion over decision-making protocols, this officer became central to the Olympic planning process, negotiating with the plethora of public and private agencies, and providing an authoritative local sensitivity to networks where a wide range of both individual and corporate interests was fiercely represented. These issues were exacerbated by the fact that he was not working on Olympic planning full-time, and the crucial Olympic duties that he was expected to fulfil had to be conducted alongside his routine day job. Incredibly, six months before the Games commenced, this officer was moved to a neighbouring (non-Olympic) borough, thereby epitomising the lack of MPS continuity in Newham. Indeed, although the Newham borough police senior management team had, in late 2011, all agreed to stay in their posts until after the Games, by the time the event began almost all had left. Local knowledge was, it can be seen, afforded a surprisingly low priority.

The months preceding the Opening Ceremony saw the borough police re-organise their personnel onto an ‘Olympic shift pattern’. The borough needed to be able to operate under conditions of constrained resources, and once the Olympics were underway, many borough police personnel were to be ‘abstracted’ to Olympic duties both local and pan-London. For instance, this arrangement meant that the existing CID squads would not be sustainable and

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so – in theory – individual detectives would have to be able to assume a variety of roles depending on day-to-day needs. Senior detectives viewed this system as an opportunity of breaking with the past and moving towards a more ‘omnicompetent’ work culture. In reality, the omnicompetent model did not materialise; officers sought to continue in their pre-Olympic roles and certain key ‘specialisms’ were neglected (Armstrong et. al., in progress).

Conditions and Charging: An Olympian Contest?

The opportunities for occupational change of both working practices and the attendant culture offered by the Games, failed to impress a profession that is notorious for its conservative tendencies. Our research witnessed policing discontent over: the threat to their right to park in the borough in the Olympic weeks; the deployment of personnel from one station to different police stations/teams; and the realisation that the Olympic shift patterns meant that weekends at home were a luxury afforded very few officers during the Games. These difficulties combined with such practical matters as: how they would get to work in times of anticipated traffic grid-lock; where they would store their equipment; how they would get around the borough when on duty; and when they would see their families and take post-Games annual leave. The Olympic duty was one which saw no overtime paid and required many officers to work 12-hour shifts, in some cases parading at 4am (significantly, before most public transport services had commenced).

A dedicated Olympic-related Charge Centre (OCC) was created at one of the borough’s four police stations, where previously moribund custody cells were re-opened to accommodate prisoners arrested by police officers on Olympic duties. In reality, the custody suites were under-used. A particular bone of contention expressed by Newham police was that the OCC officers – sent from the Centre – were highly reluctant to assist their borough colleagues. At daily borough briefings, the Newham CID complained – often loudly – that they had found their OCC colleagues ‘twiddling their thumbs’ whilst denying their requests for assistance with the excuse that the OCC needed to ensure a degree of ‘resilience’ to deal with any spikes in Olympic-related demand. Tensions resulted, with local officers feeling that their needs were being ignored.

Olympic-Related Vulnerabilities

The Games were considered an obvious target for politically disaffected causes, both domestic and international, and the MPS had to work on a Games Plan that considered a terrorist attack as plausible, while being careful not to ramp up perceptions of the threat to the detriment of the event (Boyle and Haggerty, 2012). Consequently, ‘Operation Griffin’ was begun in the borough in 2011 – initially as a series of security briefings led by the MPS, but with input from other emergency services and the Council, to a host of local business interests. These meetings were tasked with warning, whilst simultaneously seeking to reassure and sensitise, local businesses to indicators of risks that they could report to the police. Meanwhile, the Westfield Mall, whose security manager was a former senior officer in the MPS, had become the UK’s highest Counter-Terrorist concern in the lead-up to the Games, and was subject to a host of security projects and exercises. At times, stories about the efficiency of the Mall’s security regime were placed in local newspapers for the benefit of locals, and were intended as both reassurance and a subtle warning as to the Mall’s security capability. The MPS, both Central and Local, were adamant that ‘hostile reconnaissance’ had taken place in the Mall, and the presence of uniformed police in the Mall equipped with automatic weapons in the weeks before the Opening Ceremony was a none-too-subtle show of force.

Stratford's extensive and highly connected transport network provided for a variety of Olympic time fears ranging from over-crowding to mundane everyday rail disruption such as suicide attempts on the tube lines and engineering failure, to a terrorist attack on the infrastructure. In this plethora of roles and responsibilities, lines of command had to be negotiated and relationships built with a variety of Olympic hosting agencies and facilitators. However, some issues were not subject to negotiation – notably the deployments by the Ministry of Defence of Rapier anti-aircraft missiles on both council-owned high rise blocks and private homes, in boroughs bordering the Olympic Park⁷. In addition, only weeks before the Games began, the private security agency that had won the contract to deliver the Olympic Park search regime was found to be lacking the required (and contracted) personnel. Many of their tasks were taken over by 13,000 British soldiers, all in uniform and primarily in public-facing roles such as security screening. Whilst in the eyes of the MPS such a presence was another much-welcomed level of uniformed and visible resilience and reassurance for Olympic visitors, the presence of so many soldiers in a borough that had the second largest Muslim population in the UK (ONS, 2011) brought a degree of consternation to local police, who realised that the off-duty soldiers might not be appreciated by all Newham residents, particularly with the Olympics coinciding with Ramadan. Consequently, local police were involved in unforeseen discussions with the military concerning where off-duty military personnel might best carry out their socialising. In addition, shortly before the Olympics began, a senior military official visited Stratford police station to discuss the local criminal intelligence picture, with a particular emphasis placed upon the potential threat posed to the soldiers by local youths of Muslim heritage.

Unstated (Olympic) Vulnerabilities: New Visions and New Friends?

What constituted “Olympic Related Crime” proved to be problematic. There was a definition offered by those who constituted the Olympic Command Team, but the words were vague. A further research issue was: when were police operations ‘Olympic-related’ and when were they not? Our research repeatedly encountered operations and initiatives implemented by local police – often without direct reference being made to the Olympics, even where it seemed beyond reasonable doubt that policy-makers had at least one eye on the Games. Most obviously, from early 2012 there was an increasing focus on the central Stratford area to the exclusion of other parts of the borough. The issue was related to serious youth violence and “gangs” and produced a tri-partite partnership involving the police, the local authority and Westfield Mall in what was a conflation of local and commercial reputational concerns, but which saw personnel from, at times, twenty agencies meet monthly in the run-up to the Games.

The local police were explicitly concerned with the activities of a group of – mainly African born – migrant youths, a handful of whom were involved in street robberies and low-level drug-dealing in the Stratford area. They also spent much of their day in a public park scheduled to host a Big Screen for Olympic-time public viewing, and were subject to adversarial policing tactics over a two-year period, beginning in 2010, which intensified in Olympic time. Myths grew around this group in MPD ‘intelligence’. For instance, they were apparently planning to bring friends and associates to London in Games Time in order to rob affluent Olympic visitors. Curiously, our research seldom heard this group referred to by

⁷ An emphasis was placed upon readiness for any eventuality pertinent to an armed threat to the Games. The surface-to-air missiles complemented a warship moored in the mouth of the Thames some 20 miles from the Olympic Park and units of the elite Special Air Service (SAS) military unit being on standby.

local MPS as a specific Olympic threat or concern. In local police perceptions, they were considered to be a cohort of friends who had too much time on their hands by virtue of being unemployed and not having a working command of the English language. Crucially, however, local police did not challenge perceptions of the Games Time threat posed by this group, for to do so may have damaged efforts to win additional funding from the Olympic policing budget.

Random acts of youth violence upped the ante around pre-Games policing. An altercation in Westfield Mall food court in December 2011 between local youths resulted in a number of knife wounds, and brought home the potential threats to the reputation of both the Olympics and Westfield. The response was four-fold: *Operation Laraki* (funded by Operation 5 Rings, an Olympic police funding source) pursued a cleansing policy of the Stratford Town Centre area and perimeter of the Olympic Park, performed mostly by uniformed police drawn from the Territorial Support Units. This initiative was combined with *Operation Menhir*, which utilised plain-clothed local-based police, some of whom acted as ‘Spotters’ and directed uniformed officers to individuals who then became subject to ‘stop and searches’ on the bridge linking Stratford to the Westfield Mall. In addition came *Operation Massachusetts*, which from April 2012 proclaimed itself as a problem-solving initiative to address youth violence in Stratford. It identified and targeted fifty gang members involved in ‘organised criminality’ and saw both the youths and their parents receiving letters from the Council threatening their housing tenancy should the youths continue their delinquency. The final project was entitled *Operation New Hampshire* and saw Council officials working with the Gangs Unit to have gang-related videos removed from social media sites. These videos were alleged to contain material that constituted Hate Crime, Incitement to Violence and to have implications for the safeguarding of minors. More than sixty videos were, therefore, removed from social media sites.

The issue at another level was the pollution of the aesthetic of Olympic-time Stratford (Fussey et. al., 2011). The target was not only youths liable to commit disorder and robbery, but street drinkers, rough sleepers, drug addicts and dealers, and also those who funded their drug habits by street prostitution. Council officials, supported by local police officers, were tasked with cleansing the area of such ‘polluting presences’. People were directed to social services and, at times, arrested (Douglas, 1966; Lianos and Douglas, 2000; Raco and Tunney, 2012). Both the unsightly and the potentially dangerous ‘gangsters’ faced restrictions on their movements by virtue of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs), as well as other Banning Orders, some of which barred them from the borough of Newham. On top of addressing the issue of human flotsam, the local aesthetic was improved by Council employees pro-actively clearing waste in front garden homes in a strategy begun a year before the Games. Officers of the council-funded Enforcement Team (begun in late 2011) were deployed pre-Games to target – and to issue fixed penalty notices to – those who spat chewing gum onto the pavements of Meridian Square. Newham’s Mayor developed an antipathy towards small businesses that sold fruit and vegetables from shop-front plastic bowls, which led to vigorous action by trading standards officials to change their displays – but to no avail.

The immediate area outside the Stratford railway terminus which segued into Meridian – a 1,000m² public area outside Stratford station (owned in part by Newham Council and by Transport for London), was cleared of its long-time coffee making *Tuk-Tuk* vehicle, but a long-standing hot dog stall was not removed after its proprietor fought successfully to remain trading as he had for the previous five years. The functional 1960-70s architecture of Stratford in the shape of a small one-level shopping mall and its roof top car park, which

overlooked the Westfield stairway, was cloaked in a ‘shoal’⁸ of 50 titanium leaves. Elsewhere, some four modernist high-rises had their façades or side profiles concealed behind enormous draped advertising banners for: BMW vehicles, Gillette razor blades and Adidas sporting apparel. The glass panels of the bridge that took Olympic visitors from Meridian Square to the Westfield Mall were liveried in their entirety by the Coca-Cola Corporation.

Games Time

Games Time for the MPS was a 60-day duty that encapsulated both the 17 days of the Olympics and the ensuing 11 days of the Paralympics. In policing terms, the centre of Stratford became part of a ‘new territory’ called the Olympic Co-ordination Zone (OCZ). This ‘borough-within-boroughs’ – in reality a ring around a mile in circumference around the Olympic Park – saw responsibility in terms of management for parts of Stratford effectively removed from the borough police during the Olympics. This situation changed in the interval between the Games ending and the Paralympics beginning, when the OCZ boundary was reduced and local borough police resumed responsibility for the entire Stratford area, a process that only served to confuse governance arrangements (Coalter, 2004; Vigor, Mean and Tims, 2004; Evans, 2010; Macrury and Poynter, 2010; Lindsay, 2011; Smith, Stevenson and Edmundson, 2011).

Other spaces/zones generated a mixed policing economy. The daily arrival and departure of hundreds of thousands of Olympic spectators, as well as shoppers and Olympic *flaneurs*, produced a pinch point of foot passengers that had no parallel in London in terms of duration and numbers. Managing this congestion required the MPS (both OCZ and Newham MPS) to liaise with policing colleagues from the British Transport Police (BTP) to ensure safety from both possible terrorist attack as well as mundane crowd management. With the bulk of Olympic spectators arriving on public transport and entering the Olympic Park via Westfield, MPS had to liaise daily and, indeed, sometimes hourly, with the security management and personnel of the Mall. In addition, Newham Council had its own municipal ‘police’ in the form of uniformed Enforcement Officers, who, resplendent in their neo-police livery, assumed relatively routine roles focusing on aspects of anti-social behaviour. Such personnel are part of a particularly interesting local agency given that its Director is a former senior MPS police officer who was once Newham’s Police Commander. His status as a senior local figure with close contacts in many of the key police and other agencies in the locality proved very useful at key junctures throughout both the Pre-Game period and in Games Time. His contacts were particularly evident on Olympic Opening Ceremony night in an environment featuring public police from Newham, other parts of the MPS, Newham’s Enforcement officers, Westfield security, several private security firms, and officers from all over the UK.

The Opening Ceremony provided the OCZ and the borough police with the realisation that, despite pre-Olympic negotiations, lines of command remained blurred. The 68 steps of the rusty bridge that led foot-fall from Meridian Square into the Westfield Mall and the road crossing between the Stratford Centre and the Westfield stairway (with three lanes of traffic separating them) required negotiations and informal agreements as to who did what, how and when. For instance, on the evening of the Opening Ceremony, a private security firm of some two dozen thick-set men (more often found controlling entry and behaviour around licensed

⁸ <http://egretwest.com/projects/public-realm/stratford/>

premises) were employed by Transport for London as a front-line resource, backed up by the various liveried Westfield Mall security staff. These men were in addition to police officers from both the MPS and forces from across the country, and were brought in to police Stratford and to step into situations when considered necessary, in part of the biggest mutual aid operation in the UK since the 1984-1985 coal miners' dispute.

Protest – Political and Situational

It was widely assumed by the police, media and other commentators that the London Olympics would be a magnet for groups protesting about a wide variety of issues, particularly given the experience of Vancouver when hosting the 2010 Winter Olympics (Lenskyj, 2008; Boykoff, 2011; Harvey, Horne, Safai, Darnell and Courchesne-O'Neill, 2013). Anticipating protest from a variety of sources – both 'soft' and 'hard' – became a central concern for Olympic police planners, arguably reinforced by the fact that the Olympic policing operation was being headed by some of the most senior officers from the MPS' Public Order cadre. The police response to demonstrations and public protests during the Games was decidedly mixed, and because it was an unprecedented task for the MPS, it was difficult to predict. The Games would not be 'lost' by the MPS and, therefore, 'lines in the sand' had to be drawn early. This decision had consequences for what was an innocent protest by a cycling safety lobby group. On the evening of the Opening Ceremony, over-zealous police 'kettled' (surrounded and contained) a group of 200 cyclists who rode as the '*Critical Mass*' protest group on roads in the vicinity of the Olympic Park. Some 190 cyclists were arrested at the scene, but just three were charged with an offence. This incident did not bode well for the rest of the Games, and the police response throughout the Games to those in the vicinity of the Olympic Park was, on occasion, over-zealous. There were over 250 arrests (by dedicated plain-clothed police from a specialist unit run by the Olympic Directorate) on charges of 'ticket touting' which, in most instances, was not part of a professional money-making racket but involved visitors selling surplus tickets at face value.

There were numerous small protests in the vicinity of Stratford. One was a camp of three hunger strikers who denied themselves food for a week whilst highlighting human rights abuses in Sri Lanka. Another group protested against the connection between Olympic sponsor Dow Chemical and the Union Carbide tragedy in Bhopal, India. Disabled rights groups protested in the vicinity of the Olympic Park against the French based firm ATOS which, whilst a sponsor of the Olympics and Paralympics, was also contracted by the UK government to undertake 'fitness for work' assessments on all citizens receiving state disability benefits. In all cases, official estimates of likely turnout proved to be massively over-stated. The absence of any large-scale protest surprised the police. In the case of the Sri Lankan protest, for example, police predicted a turnout that could have reached several thousand, rather than the 146 who attended on the first day and the handful of protestors that remained throughout the Games.

By contrast – and completely unpredicted – the police found themselves overseeing up to four dozen religious groups who took up positions in Meridian Square. Despite pressure from some quarters (notably ex-police officers working as security advisors to Transport for London), a tolerant and permissive approach was adopted by the MPS, which allowed the many representatives of the world's major religions (and other niche interests) to flout rules about advertising by non-Olympic sponsors. On the closing day of the Olympics, a group of sixty UK Islamists held a public protest in Meridian Square. As tens of thousands gathered to witness the Closing Ceremony, chants of '*Jihad*' were largely drowned out by the cacophony of nearby traffic combined with the songs of the myriad Christian preachers sharing the same

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space. In the course of forty minutes, the jihadists made their speeches, said their prayers, and proclaimed their commitment to Holy War before leaving peacefully while escorted by police to the car park of a nearby supermarket (where free parking was available). The likes of *Jews for Jesus* and a river-dancing defrocked Catholic priest (and 2004 Olympic marathon disrupter (BBC news report, 2004)) preached and proselytised unmolested, but were carefully monitored by what was, throughout the Games, a plethora of static, uniformed police whose main function seemed to be to posing for tourists' photographs. Remarkably little occurred to deflect attention from the state's corporately-financed takeover of a large slice of London. The Games remained the story.

The Olympic Aftermath: Closing Ceremony to December 2012

The Closing Ceremony of the Paralympics marked the end of the Olympic policing operation. For some of the most senior police commanders, this was the culmination of a 30-year police career. For many in the hand-picked (and fundamentally autocratic) public order operation, the occasion passed not as a moment of triumph, but rather was marked by an air of despondency as their achievements went largely unremarked by the wider MPS, and particularly, the new Management Board. Attention was firmly fixed on the future and the need to make huge budget savings; there appeared to be no appetite for dwelling on the past. For those left behind, the loss of power and patronage was palpable and some of the country's most experienced senior officers were effectively 'parked' in non-jobs to mark time before their retirement. Their sense of loss was matched by the anger of hundreds in the MPS who had to pay the costs of attending the post-Olympic dinner dance party.

An unwieldy and relatively unscientific 'Olympic Command Team Debrief' was convened to capture learning in the form of dozens of themed meetings, from which key points were fed into a final report destined to gather dust on a shelf. Much to the apparent disquiet of the Olympic Command Team, it was apparent that most of the rest of the MPS was not particularly interested in the Olympics, nor in changing the way that they went about their daily business. Significantly, there was no Newham MPS de-brief, nor were any local officers invited to the Olympic Command Team Debrief meetings (unlike one of the research team). As had been the case throughout most of the planning and delivery, the local context was largely ignored and the high/low policing schism laid bare (Brodeur, 1983).

However, the policing of the event brought to a head a number of issues. A distant centre with contingent notions of what was 'Olympic-related' managed and manipulated the 'realities' concerning the scale and nature of criminality at the Games. Indeed, the MPS was never able to satisfactorily pin down how many crimes and arrests could be attributed to the Olympics. The malleable notion of the 'Olympic-related' that had allowed the Olympic Command Team to moderate and manage the limits of their responsibilities ultimately proved too fluid. Nevertheless, informed by the Debrief, we can ask whether the Games provided lessons for future policing and the securitisation of mega-events (Lenskyj, 2004; Owen, 2005; Leopkay and Parent, 2009; Yy, Klauser and Chan, 2009; Graham, 2010; Bernhard and Martin, 2011; King, 2012).

Fundamentally, the London Olympics demonstrated the way that parochial social problems – such as internecine violence between local youths – can assume potentially global significance given the theoretical risks that they represent to the reputation of the host country. There was, after all, a murder in broad daylight (which police initially declared to be

‘gang-related’, before later confirming that it was not) in the Westfield shopping mall – merely weeks before hundreds of thousands of Olympic visitors and as many as 25,000 journalists and photographers arrived in search of a story. Confronted with such risks, but with heightened concerns only extending for a relatively short period of time and limited to a relatively small locality, there was a clear incentive to take temporary and illiberal measures to enforce the separation of local and Olympic populations. What might have been an opportunity to leverage Olympic resources to tackle entrenched problems was missed in favour of temporary pragmatism, and the potential for an Olympic economic ‘bounce’ in the wider borough of Newham was largely curtailed by the corralling of spectators, who were actively discouraged from venturing beyond the station-shopping mall-Olympic Park corridor.

The limitations of intelligence were also evident, reflected in planning assumptions that layered one ‘worst case scenario’ (a terrorist attack) on top of another (a repeat of the 2011 riots⁹), with the result that London was significantly denuded of local police resources in favour of an unprecedented number of centrally accountable and relatively inflexible public order units which proved relatively ineffective at supporting local police and were ultimately surplus to Olympic policing requirements. Similarly, the intelligence handling capacity made available to Olympic commanders proved to be four or five times over-resourced, with assumptions about the likely increase in intelligence having been extrapolated from the wholly different context of Vancouver. It was telling that the Debrief Report lacked a section dealing with intelligence and no-one from the Olympic Command Team seemed willing to discuss this omission.

In the final analysis, Olympic risks were to be mitigated at almost any cost, whether tangible in the case of finance or much less tangibly in terms of the reduced service available to wider non-Olympic publics in London. It is perhaps just as well that London was significantly quieter than normal during the Olympics, as people apparently avoided or even left the city in order to avoid the apocalypse that never came. The MPS was never, then, going to ‘lose’ the Games.

Epilogue: Ceremonies of Closure

As both the Olympic caravan and Olympic policing operation departed, a great deal of uncertainty was left in their wake, principally: what kind of legacy would be created from the venues and infrastructure built for the Games? For the Newham police, a new series of unknowns presented themselves around the re-branded Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, which would one day exist without a secure perimeter fence and the reassurance that someone else had responsibility for looking after safety and security. Furthermore, in straitened economic times, there were no offers of additional resources or funding from Scotland Yard. So, were the Games an opportunity to leverage a new policing capacity or to assist a sense of renewal (cf. Van Wynsbergh et. al., 2012)? Does policing as a culture and profession change in some way as a consequence of hosting such a mega-event? The Games could re-enforce or empower or indeed do both. So what does the research tell us?

⁹ It is our contention that the 2011 riots that began in London and spread to several other English cities provided a powerful reinforcement for the prevailing police stance that youth presented one of the most potent threats to the 2012 Olympics.

Planning for the policing of the post-Games environment only really started as the Games wound down; the looming challenges injected a sense of urgency, arguably reflecting a reactive and tactical bias in local police organisational culture that has a number of other implications. In essence, the various commercial and public interests in the Olympic Park – the Athletes' Village and other developments including a new health centre and school – were presented with a proposition that they pay for a dedicated day-to-day police presence after the Olympics, with response policing provided out of the existing borough resources at no additional cost. This arrangement would replicate, on a larger scale, one already in place at the Westfield Mall. It was clear that all parties implicitly (and occasionally explicitly) understood that commercial reputations were at stake, and the police made it clear that post-Olympic security needed to get off to the best possible start. They claimed to have learnt from bitter experience in other parts of the borough (notably Beckton) that, once the rot sets in between the public and private housing residents, it can be almost impossible to reverse (cf. Lindsay, 2013).

Some things remained the same. In February 2013, a teenager was stabbed with a samurai sword in Canning Town, and in March, the MPS Trident Gang Command entered the borough for a special three-month operation dealing with youth violence and gangs. Just days after this operation wound down, a local youth bled to death outside the gate of his home after being stabbed in the neck allegedly in retribution for the theft days earlier of a mobile phone. Two years after Westfield opened it was reported by a police/council panel that there was no gang issue to report, and no gang claimed the mall as theirs. Churn, complexity, and an ever-increasing sense of post-community are the real Olympic legacies. As the Park and Olympic Village morph into a sanitised island of private land occupied by an incoming demographic protected by plural policing, there remain thousands of Newham residents whose bed is in a shed. The MPS continues to serve but does so with less resourcing now that two of the boroughs' four police stations closed a year after the Games. In an attempt to save monies from other budgets, Newham Council is seeking to export its poorer residents to Stoke-on-Trent, which is some 160 miles away (BBC News, 2012). Overall, the Olympic legacy is somewhat different from that promised in the bidding document.

The 2012 Games were about money, prestige and reputation, and were, from the outset, framed by the risk of terrorism situated and framed within a post-industrial context that enabled a remarkable level of pliable governance and corporate intrusion. The policing of the event was marked by the short-term careerism that festers at the heart of modern policing, and was informed by a churning, impoverished vernacular cosmopolitanism that is extraordinary even by the standards of the UK's beleaguered political economy. The somewhat chaotic policing of Newham before and during the event exaggerated local maladies, while playing down the lived realities of locals for whom the irrelevance of the Games was impossible to exaggerate. The policing legacy of the 2012 Games will be "plural policing" (Melossi, 1997; Crawford, Lister, Blackburn and Burnett, 2007; Jones and Newburn, 2006) comprised of public, private, and municipal police operating in the new spaces created by the event. The marketisation of policing has gained purchase in the unique spaces of the Olympic Park, ensuring that the recalibration of state policing resources, in competition with private and municipal providers, promises to favour the advantaged over the disadvantaged. We concur, therefore, with Loader (2000: 331) that such a re-allocation of policing services will merely confirm "divisions between those consumers who are well placed to become active risk managers and those (generally more 'at-risk' groups) whose demands for safety the security market expresses relatively little interest in satisfying".

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