СПОРТИВНЫЕ МЕГАСОБЫТИЯ: ПОЛИТИЧЕСКИЙ КОНТЕКСТ
SPORT MEGA-EVENTS: A POLITICAL CONTEXT

Alan Bairner

POLITICS, THE BRITISH AND THE OLYMPIC GAMES

The main focus of this essay is the engagement of the British, politicians and public alike, with the Olympic Games and, more specifically, the political symbolism associated with the London Olympics of 2012 and with subsequent discussions about legacy. The essay begins with a consideration of the reasons why political science and those who are professionally involved in the study of politics have been so reluctant to address sport generally and the Olympics in particular. The United Kingdom's historic association with the Olympic Games is briefly outlined. This is followed by an extended discussion of events leading up to London 2012 and debates about the legacy of the Games. What emerges is clear evidence of the ways in which mega-events, such as the Olympics, are redolent of political purpose and political symbolism and can reflect as well as contributing to political debates within host nations. The article seeks to demonstrate that, although the British have often exhibited some ambivalence toward the Olympics, not only mainstream politicians but also radical critics became engaged with London 2012 for a few years at least, albeit for a range of different reasons.

Keywords: *politics of sport, Olympic Games, Great Britain, nationalism.*

Алан Байрнер

ПОЛИТИКА, БРИТАНЦЫ И ОЛИМПИЙСКИЕ ИГРЫ

Данная статья посвящена вовлечению британцев, политиков и широкой публики в Олимпийские игры, которое отражается в политическом символизме Олимпийских игр в Лондоне 2012 г. и последующих дискуссиях об их наследии. В начале статьи автор рассматривает причины

Байрнер Алан — PhD (доктор философии), профессор спорта и социальной теории Школы по исследованиям спорта, физической культуры и здоровья Университета Лафборо (Великобритания) (a.e.s.bairner@lboro.ac.uk)

Alan Bairner — PhD, Professor of Sport and Social Theory, School of Sport, Exercise and Health Sciences, Loughborough University (UK) (a.e.s.bairner@lboro.ac.uk)

игнорирования спорта в целом и Олимпийских игр, в частности, в политической науке и профессиональных исследованиях политической сферы. Кратко представлена историческая связь Великобритании с Олимпийскими играми, которая, по мнению автора, была установлена благодаря проведению в Англии Венлокских игр в течение XIX в. и поддерживается в результате организации современных Олимпийских игр 1908 и 1948 гг. в Лондоне. Затем следует обращение автора к широкому обсуждению предшествующих Олимпийским играм 2012 г. в Лондоне событий и дискуссиям о наследии Игр. Представлены явные свидетельства того, как мегасобытия в форме Олимпийских игр наполняются политическими целями и политическим символизмом. Они также отражают и воспроизводят политические дебаты в национальных государствах, проводящих Олимпийские игры. Цель статьи состоит в том, чтобы показать вовлеченность как ведущих британских политиков, так и радикальных критиков, в Лондонские игры, — по крайней мере, в течение нескольких лет, несмотря на двойственное отношение британцев к Олимпийским играм.

Ключевые слова: *политика в сфере спорта, Олимпийские игры, Великобритания, национализм.*

Introduction

According to Hiller (2000: 439), 'mega-events are short-term high profile events like Olympics and World Fairs that are usually thought of in terms of their tourism and economic impacts'. It is worth noting, however, that they are very often also redolent of political purpose and political symbolism and they can reflect and also contribute to political debates within host nations. As Black (2007: 262) argues, 'for ambitious civic and national boosters they provide unique opportunities for the pursuit of symbolic politics — a chance to signal important changes of direction, "reframe" dominant narratives about the host, and/or reinforce key messages about what the host has become / is becoming'. What is certain is that they cannot be wholly detached from politics either in the developing world or in the West.

Yet, the claim that 'sport and politics don't mix' is a familiar trope to anyone with an interest in sport or politics or both. I almost certainly first heard this mantra as a child, fascinated as I then was by the Olympic Games in Rome and in Tokyo and obsessed by the rather less glamorous performances of Dunfermline Athletic Football Club. Only gradually did I come to realise that most people who make this assertion really mean that 'sport and politics shouldn't' mix and they do so, I suspect, despite being all too aware that in fact the relationship between the two is both inevitable and inescapable, not least where the Olympic Games are concerned (Hill 1992; Bairner, Molnar 2010).

With some notable exceptions (one thinks of Lincoln Allison (1986a; 1993; 2005), Barrie Houlihan (1994) and, more recently, Mike Dennis and Jonathan Grix (2012) in the United Kingdom for example), relatively few people involved in teaching and studying politics have chosen to take sport seriously. Indeed, many of those who work in the general area of the social sciences of sport actually appear to me to have a strong

antipathy towards sport (Bairner 2009). The resultant marginalization of the study of the politics of sport is by no means unique. According to Stone (2010: vii) 'in the eyes of many scholars, the field of urban politics has become increasingly disconnected from the mainstream study of politics...'. In the case of the study of sport, however, it can reasonably be suggested that there never has been any real connection. For that reason, it is easy to agree with Stone's (2010: xi) claim that dialogue 'appears to be a much-needed step within the current discipline of political science'. The main focus of this essay is the engagement of the British, politicians and public alike, with the Olympic Games and, more specifically, the political symbolism associated with the London Olympics of 2012 and with subsequent discussions about legacy. First, however, it is worth considering the reasons why political science and those who are professionally involved in the study of politics have been so reluctant to address sport generally and the Olympics in particular.

The neglect of sport

It can be argued from the outset that political studies (or political science, to use the term more favoured in North America) have been slower than other cognate academic disciplines, including sociology, anthropology and history, to engage seriously with sport. Some attempts have been made to examine certain aspects of sport within specific branches of political studies, most notably policy analysis and international relations. Such work is of course inherently compatible with that 'statist thinking' which is a major component of the edifice of contemporary political science (Magnusson 2010: 53). However, exponents of other elements of the discipline, including political theory, have tended to either ignore sport completely or to mention it only as a passing aside.

Needless to say not all political theorists or political scientists more generally lack knowledge of sport. Indeed for many it is an important aspect of their lives — but often only of their lives as lived away from the lecture theatre, the seminar room and the computer screen. Sport for them is something that goes on outside of the academic realm. As such it offers an escape from thinking constantly about *important* matters. But this in itself highlights a significant paradox because if sport is important at all to them, for whatever reason, and we know that it is certainly of major significance to millions of other people throughout the world, then surely it deserves to be regarded as a weighty issue rather than a relatively meaningless diversion. In any case, sport is closely linked to most, if not all, of those aspects of human society that political scientists clearly do regard as significant — social class, gender, race, nationalism, ethnicity, policy-making, law and order, international relations and so on. Indeed, sport cannot be disentangled from these issues and consequently demands proper attention if only because of the company that it keeps. As a result, sport can actually offer an important avenue along which students of politics can travel in search of a deeper understanding of numerous aspects of human society. As Whannel (1983: 27) once put it, "sport offers a way of seeing the world".

However, before going on to justify these claims by looking at the specific political characteristics of the United Kingdom's relationship with the Olympic movement and the Olympic Games, it is worth reminding ourselves of the main reasons why academia

in general, and political scientists in particular, have tended to ignore sport, at least until relatively recently. This has much to do with the privileged position that has been assigned to sport and which the would-be custodians of sport's best interests have assigned to themselves. The myth of sport's autonomy has been so widely and successfully promoted as to effectively block attempts by all but the most tenacious to try to set sport within a wider social context. Arguably political science was always more likely to be seen by sports people as posing a threat to their world view than other disciplines for the simple reason that it must inevitably speak directly, rather than tangentially as might be the case with history and sociology, about the relationship between sport and politics which their myth of autonomy seeks to deny. As one of the leading protagonists in the struggle to establish the political study of sport suggests, "taking what has been said so far about the nature and development of sport and putting it alongside the assumptions in ordinary language about the concerns of politics — government, policy-making, social order and control — it would seem obvious that sport and politics impinge on one another" (Allison 1986b: 12). Despite this, or perhaps because its truth is widely understood but not explicitly recognised, we are still constantly assailed with the claim by sports people, politicians and others that sport and politics do not or, at the very least, should not mix. It is worth noting that when Avery Brundage, then head of the United States Olympic Committee and later the IOC's president, made his celebrated statement, in the lead up to the 1936 Berlin Olympics, that politics have no place in sport, Adolf Hitler had already politicised sport with his attempts to cleanse German teams and clubs of Jewish participants (Bairner and Molnar 2010). To investigate the relationship between sport and politics more thoroughly, where better to start than in the United Kingdom which played such a pioneering role in the 'invention' of modern sport and whose sporting evangelists contributed greatly to the global diffusion of numerous sports?

Sport, the British and the Olympics

Although I have referred to the British in the title of this article as 'ambivalent Olympians', it would not be unreasonable to claim that they are also both ambivalent Europeans and even ambivalent global citizens, except when imperialist expansionism has been involved. Successive UK governments have been eager to be at the centre of world events whilst simultaneously trying to maintain some distance between themselves and certain international organisations, most notably the European Union. This isolationist tendency has been replicated and, indeed, magnified in the world of sport. Nowhere has this been more apparent than in the attitude of the UK's four national association football governing bodies to the emergence and subsequent development of UEFA and FIFA which can best be described as relatively detached involvement (Tomlinson 2000).

At first glance, however, the UK's relationship with the International Olympic Committee, Olympism, and the Olympic Games would seem to be altogether more positive. For example, Baron De Coubertin was influenced from the outset not only by the ancient Olympics but also by England's Much Wenlock Games (Hill 1992). In addition, the British played a pioneering role in many of the sports now contested at the Olympics Games, both summer and, more surprisingly, winter (Holt 1990), and

Britain was also the location of the antecedent of the Paralympic Games (Howe 2008). In 2012, London became the first city to host the Games for a third time. Moreover, on each of these occasions, to varying degrees, the host nation has helped the Olympic movement in difficult circumstances — first, in 1908, due to the late withdrawal of Rome as hosts (Kent 2008), second in 1948 in the context of post-war austerity (Hampton 2008), and finally in 2012 against the backdrop of global economic recession. Arguably most conclusive of all, however, was the refusal of the British Olympic family to obey government instructions and boycott the Moscow Olympics, the men and women of the British Olympic movement inadvertently endorsing Avery Brundage's somewhat disingenuous response to the Berlin Games. As Hill (1992: 140–141) observes, 'Britain would no doubt not relish being described as a client state, but its government, under the enthusiastic guidance of the then Prime Minister, Mrs Margaret Thatcher, made a major effort to follow American policy, although in the end without success'. Ultimately, as Hill (1992: 152) argues, 'the British government did not display the same mixture of ruthlessness and stupidity as the American, but what turned public opinion against it was its insistence that the athletes would be acting irresponsibly if they went to the Games, while it allowed trade and other official links to continue undiminished'.

On the other hand, the British public's interest in the Olympics has always been muted when compared with the enthusiasm for association football and perhaps even more significantly for 'British' sports such cricket and rugby union. Ironically the lack of interest in the Olympic men's football tournament was a perfect example of such insular thinking with British fans being far more concerned with the exploits of teams such as Manchester United, Celtic, Chelsea and Arsenal than with a competition with which the UK team has had a relatively fitful relationship (Marks 2010).

British feelings of superiority in relation, if not to sporting performance, at least to sporting invention go some way towards explaining the ambivalence. Certainly the British have never demonstrated as much enthusiasm for being at the helm of the Olympic movement than the nationals of such smaller countries as Sweden. It is as though there is an attitude that if they cannot be in sole charge, they prefer to remain slightly aloof. There may of course be another, even more basic explanation. After all, the modern games were the brainchild of a Frenchman and French is an official language of the IOC. Perhaps these truths are simply too much for many Britons to bear. Yet despite all of this British ambivalence, in 2012 London did indeed become the first city to host the modern summer Games on three separate occasions. The significance of London 2012 is, therefore, worthy of more detailed discussion in order to further elucidate British attitudes to Olympism and, more specifically, the impact of hosting a sport mega-event on relationship between sport and political debate in the UK.

London 2012: an overview

On 6 July 2005, the announcement was made that London had beaten Paris for the right to host the Olympic Games of 2012. The desire to hold the Games in London for a third time was linked to a relatively widespread belief that the United Kingdom was in a relatively healthy political and economic state and that London was arguably the

world's leading financial centre. The bid also reflected Prime Minister Tony Blair's ambition to show off the 'Cool Britannia' brand to the rest of the world. Indeed, such was the widespread enthusiasm for the bid amongst the British political establishment that, as Mark Perryman (2013a: 9) notes, 'there was very little serious discussion about the principal non-sporting claims of the worth of hosting the Olympics — whether back in 2005, during the years of preparation, during the Games themselves or afterwards'. Yet, as Perryman continues, 'the Olympics matter precisely because of the huge claims made — by the IOC, the London Games organisers and all the politicians — about its ability to make a difference way beyond the spectacular action in pool, velodrome and track'.

On 7 July 2005, enthusiasm was temporarily dampened, when four suicide bombers detonated explosive devices on various parts of the London transport system resulting in 52 deaths and many serious injuries. In the years that followed, security in the city and throughout the UK was tightened and numerous arrests of suspected Islamic fundamentalists were made. Dissident Irish republicans were also identified as presenting a growing threat to the capital.

Furthermore, between 2007 and 2008, a financial crisis began in the United States and quickly engulfed the UK banking sector. Economic recession followed in the US, the UK and the rest of Europe. As on the two previous occasions when London had hosted the Summer Olympics, delivery would now take place in adverse circumstances with significant cutbacks in public spending being imposed by the new coalition government and personal incomes being reduced in real terms. Not surprisingly, therefore, there was now a degree of trepidation about what could be expected and, from some quarters, more strongly expressed fears. The Beijing Olympics of 2008 had created two further challenges. First, could London hope to emulate Beijing, especially in relation to the Opening and Closing Ceremonies? Second, could Team GB improve on an unexpectedly high level of achievement in Beijing? These specifically Olympic-related concerns, however, were by no means the only matters under discussion by the sceptics.

In the summer of 2011 London and other English and Welsh cities were affected by riots, initially prompted by the fatal shooting in London by the city's Metropolitan Police Force of a young black man, Mark Duggan, which led to considerable damage to property (Carrington 2013). An area relatively near the Olympic Park site was amongst the most badly affected. Furthermore, terrorist attacks intended to coincide with the event itself remained a genuine possibility as, indeed, was a repeat of the previous summer's rioting. Transport problems were also predicted.

One critic, in particular, concentrated above all on the whole idea of legacy and the gap which he perceived between what was being said and what was being done in order to make the Games a reality. In a book first published the year before the Games took place, Iain Sinclair (2011: 44) commented,

> When I hear these words, in close conjunction, 'Olympics' and 'legacy', I remember that legacy is a two-edged sword; it cuts both ways through time. And I repeat this mantra: Berlin '36, Mexico City '68, Munich '72. Count the cost. Heap up the dead. Bury that in the direction of travel.

For Sinclair (2011: 60), 'the scam of scams was always the Olympics'. Increasingly what the Games produce are 'managed populism', 'subverted dissent' (p. 61). Everywhere he went in the vicinity of the Olympic Park during the years and months leading up to the Games, Sinclair (2011: 114), encountered 'distrust of the politics of mendacity, the suspicion that the ugly truths were being concealed behind the Olympic smokescreen'.

According to Hiller (2000: 339), relatively little attention has been paid to the ways in which 'mega-events are related to urban processes'. In the case of London 2012, however, even before the Games took place critics were commenting on the intended renewal of urban space which was integral to the successful hosting bid. For example, with specific reference to the massive Westfield shopping centre which is located next to the Olympic Stadium, Sinclair (2011: 132–133) wrote, 'this definitive non-space, a managed illusion, is nothing more than a rehearsal for the grandest project of them all, the zillion pound consumer hive that is the only guaranteed legacy of the 2012 Olympic Games'. On visiting the centre, he observes, 'with uniformed police walking around in couples, with controlled exits, floors above floors, figures endlessly processing, there is a suggestion of the Panopticon prison' (p. 141).

Naysayers such as Sinclair and Anna Minton (2009: 31) who had correctly predicted that the London Olympics would be 'the largest security operation ever undertaken in the UK' were almost certainly in the minority as the media cast its spell in anticipation of the arrival of what, in sporting terms, is generally regarded as the greatest show on earth. What Sinclair represented was a pocket of dissident voices which maintained all along that the London Olympics would do more harm than good. Their impulse was staunchly radical although there could also be heard in the background the grumbling of those who simply do not like foreigners or foreign inventions. In such ways did a number of fears, both real and imagined, cast a shadow over preparations for the Games.

In spite of minor worries and strongly worded, but relatively infrequently expressed, outright antagonism, the local organisers and most members of the general public, especially in the south of England if not always in London itself, remained optimistic about what the Games could achieve. Their hopes and expectations are best approached in terms of various facets of the relatively imprecise concept of legacy. 'Event legacy', as used by the International Olympic Committee, 'captures the value of sport facilities and public improvements that are turned over to communities or sports organisations after the Olympic Games' (Gratton, Preuss 2008: 1923). This is a rather narrow definition, however, and does not include legacies such as urban renewal, increased employment opportunities, strengthened community and/or national identity or the various types of capital that politicians may hope to gain. The following discussion focuses on legacy in relation to three potential beneficiaries of London 2012 — London itself, the United Kingdom as a whole and British sport.

First, what was the intended legacy for the city of London itself? It was believed by some that London's status as a global city would be enhanced and that tourists would come in large numbers to attend the Olympics. More importantly, it had consistently been argued that a previously rundown part of the city would be regenerated leading to new affordable housing and employment opportunities for local people.

Second, there was the potential legacy for the UK as a whole. Here was an opportunity for the country to come together not least with the Torch Relay having so many stops and with some events, notably football, being played at various venues throughout Britain.

Third, and perhaps more traditionally, there was to be a legacy for British sport. Home advantage would surely help to enhance performances, thereby highlighting the value of public investment, particularly Lottery Funding. The construction of various new sporting facilities would further improve the quality of elite sport in Britain and make it easier to attract other mega events to London in the years ahead. The Olympics would make it possible to 'Inspire a Generation' — the hope that the Games would encourage more young people to take up sport with longer term implications for elite performance and for health.

Legacy — what legacy?

Much to the surprise of many, the infrastructure for the Games was completed ahead of schedule. The government and LOCOG regularly argued that this had been achieved under budget although questions were frequently asked about the cost of security. Indeed, in the days leading up to the Opening Ceremony the private company (G4S) that had been employed to provide security admitted that it had been unable to recruit enough staff and it was decided that members of the armed forces would have to be used despite other on-going commitments in Afghanistan and elsewhere. There was also public concern about the degree of heightened security including the location of missile launchers on top of apartment blocks close to the Olympic Park.

After some initial problems centred on empty seats for which tickets had been allocated to national Olympic committees, governing bodies, and VIPs, the Games were generally hailed as a major organisational success. Not everyone was impressed by the Opening and Closing Ceremonies but most were. For the most part, the transport system did its job and most venues were full. There were no terrorist attacks and no riots. With specific reference to certain aspects of legacy, however, it is perhaps too early to make definitive statements. As Gratton and Preuss (Gratton, Preuss 2008: 1933) note, 'the problem is that it will take 15-20 years to measure the true legacy of an event such as the Olympic Games'. Furthermore, 'there is also the political position that host governments may not welcome a truly scientific assessment of the true legacy benefits of hosting the Olympic Games (Ibid). Comments on the legacy of London 2012 are, therefore, inevitably incomplete at this point in time.

The immediate impact on London was negligible unless one was actually in the undeniably lively environs of the Olympic Park and other venues. There were fewer tourists than normal and lower than usual takings in central London shops. Needless to say, however, now that the circus has left town, London remains a global city and tourist numbers are almost certain to return to normal. There are also improved transport links to east London but arguably to parts of the city to which most people do not wish to travel. It is too early to say if this will change since much will depend on how effectively the Olympic Park area is regenerated in terms of new jobs for local people and cheap affordable housing. Low-paid, unskilled, temporary jobs were certain created and these were taken, for the most part, by young people of ethnic-minority

origin (Perryman 2013b). But what are the prospects for longer-term employment figures?

What about the UK as a whole? Much was made of the idea that pride in being British had been restored due to the success of the Games themselves and of Team GB (the colloquial, and increasingly semi-official, name for the team representing the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland). One positive aspect of the performance of Britain's athletes was the degree to which this reminded spectators and the world beyond of the country's cultural and ethnic diversity (Alibhai-Brown 2013). On a single night in the main stadium, for example, gold medals were won by Greg Rutherford, a white middle-class long jumper, by Jessica Ennis, the Sheffield-born, mixed heritage heptathlete and by Mo Farah, born in Somalia but very much a proud Londoner. In another potentially significant development, female members of the British team were arguably given more recognition by media and public than once would have been the case (Coddington 2013). In other respects, however, the political implications of what had occurred remain harder to gauge. For example, it was widely suggested that London 2012 would have a major impact on the referendum on Scottish independence which will take place in 2014. Against this, despite the national reach of the Torch Relay, the Games were very much a 'middle England' affair in terms of the social class and regional and ethnic background of the vast majority of spectators. As Perryman (2013b: 24) writes, 'This was the Home Counties games, not London's, white flight in reverse'. Furthermore, with specific reference to Scottish politics, it is worth noting that before the referendum on independence takes place, the country's largest city, Glasgow, will have played host to another major international multi-sport event, the Commonwealth Games, which will no doubt be used for political purposes by both competing factions. London 2012 will have become a fairly distant memory.

Prime Minister David Cameron and other Conservatives were keen to highlight the role of volunteers in making the Olympics such as a success. The Games Makers, as they were called, were very much the friendly face of the event. This example of volunteerism fitted in with David Cameron's idea of the 'Big Society' which emphasises the need for public-spiritedness but is seen by its critics as simply a means whereby cuts to statutory public services can be made. As Kisby (2010: 484) describes, 'Cameron argued that providing individuals and communities with more control over initiatives designed to promote the public good would represent "a big advance for people power" and is something that has underpinned his philosophy since becoming Conservative party leader in 2005'. There is certainly no guarantee that the enthusiasm shown for making the Olympic Games a success will be replicated in areas such as care for the elderly, the disabled and the homeless.

What about the legacy for British sports. The Medal Table certainly tells a story. Team GB won more medals than at Beijing and in a greater number of sports. Furthermore, many medal winners acknowledged the importance of home support. The successes were also undeniably the result of substantial investment in UK sport generally and exceptional organization in a number specific sports, including cycling and rowing. But funding levels be maintained? In addition, if viewed in a more negative light, many of Team GB's medals not for the first time came in sports in which there is less extensive global competition e.g. sailing, rowing and cycling as opposed to

swimming and track and field and it is also worthy of note, as it has been in the past, that a disproportionate number of the UK's medals winners had been educated privately in schools which as a rule provide better sports facilities and coaching than are available in most state schools. To date there is little evidence that youth sport participation has increased since the Games. As Judy Murray, mother of tennis gold-medal winner Andy Murray, has pointed out, there is a dearth of new talent in her sport not least because several schemes to improve free-to-use public courts in deprived urban areas have failed to materialise (Parkhouse 2013). Inspiring a generation, which was the aim of London 2012, is one thing but if there are insufficient facilities and coaches to meet demand, the inspired generation will become quickly disillusioned. In addition, figures show that 'there are now fewer adults playing sport regularly than before the London 2012 Olympics' (Gibson 2013).

Finally, the extent to which those new Olympic-specific facilities that were not deemed as temporary from the outset will be used in the future remains a matter for speculation. The World Athletics Championships will take place in the main Olympic stadium in 2017 but so far there is uncertainty as to which professional football team (probably West Ham United) will become the permanent tenants and how the relationship between Premiership football and other sports, notably athletics, will work out in practice.

Conclusion

Despite my own initial scepticism and that of many others, such as Iain Sinclair, the London Games were an undoubted success at least in their own terms. This does not mean, however, that they will be judged a success in the years ahead with specific reference to legacy. First, what will be the impact on British sport of a successful home Olympics? There is a danger that with London over, the momentum that had built up will be lost, with funding being cut or else aimed more at grass roots sport. The standards reached in Beijing and London will certainly be hard to attain in Rio de Janeiro. Nevertheless, the strategic vision that has been apparent in sports such as cycling will almost certainly ensure that there will be no immediate return to the performance level of Atlanta in 1996 when only a single gold medal was won by a British competitor. If, however, the achievement levels drop considerably in the years ahead, there is a very real likelihood that the ambivalent Olympians will lose interest and focus almost exclusively once again on domestic football, rugby, cricket and horse racing. More interesting for politics scholars, in any case, are considerations on how, if at all, London 2012 may contribute to change in British political and social life and in attitudes towards the global community.

London is still London with an appeal to visitors that has little or nothing to do with its having been a three-time Olympic host city. If there is to be successful regeneration of the Stratford area of east London (which remains in doubt), could this not have been achieved without the Olympics? Perhaps not given that at least one locally elected Member of Parliament, Rushanara Ali, has already described the post-Olympic mood as one of 'betrayal' (Perryman 2013b: 25). In 2012, in the boroughs adjoining the Olympic Park, adult unemployment rose by 26 % and long-term youth unemployment stood at 55 %.

But has the UK as a whole changed or is it likely to change in the foreseeable future based on the often proclaimed success of the Games? As Horne (2007: 92) argues, 'sports mega-events are a significant part of the experience of modernity, but they cannot be seen as a panacea for its social and economic problems'. There is certainly no reason to believe that the work of the Games Makers provides evidence that Cameron's 'Big Society' will prove to be anything other than a smokescreen aimed at disguising what is in effect an attack on the most vulnerable sections of British society. According to one commentator, 'It cannot be stated enough that London 2012 is the best evidence yet that the Big Society exists' (Rajan 2012). Arguably more realistic, however, was an alternative analysis, according to which 'London 2012 was a glorious one-off, but a one-off nonetheless'. The author of these words concluded, 'Signing up to the Prime Minister's pet project is not what most of us had in mind when we applied to help with the Olympics all those months ago. And if he tries to co-opt us, it could turn us off the whole idea (Dejevsky 2012). As Glaser (2013: 67) expresses it, 'At a time when benefits claimants and interns are being forced to work for nothing, the volunteers became an unwitting advertisement for unpaid labour'. It should be added that the Cameron himself refers less and less to the concept and as long ago as 2010, well before the London Games, he admitted, in an interview in the *Evening Standard*, that 'the idea was complicated and difficult to sell on the doorstep' (Smith 2010: 829). All of this led one Professor of Health Policy and Management to conjecture that the Big Society may be 'something of a Big Con after all' (Hunter 2011: 14). Certainly, as Morgan (2013: 392) suggests, despite its good intent, 'a deeper analysis of the policy implies that the "Big Society" speaks more to the principles of the dominant neo-liberal paradigm than it does volunteerism'.

As for the constitutional future of the UK, it is too early to predict if the success of Team GB will have any lingering influence on the political culture of Scotland. It is not impossible, however, that, with sport mega–events still in mind, the Commonwealth Games which are due to take place in Glasgow in Scotland in 2014 may well have as much, if not more, influence on the voting intentions of the Scots.

In conclusion, sport offers a lens through which to study political events. More than that, however, it is also itself inherently political. The Olympic Games, and other sport mega-events, undeniably provoke extreme responses which are themselves embedded in the politics of given eras. British (and, in particular, English) suspicion of all things foreign must be viewed alongside socially conservative (i.e. Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat) politicians' attempts to harness aspects of London 2012 for their own strategic ends and also the sustained critique by the political Left before, during and after the Games which centred above all the inevitable distance between was promised by Olympic advocates and what could realistically be achieved. For a few years at least, the ambivalent Olympians became more engaged with the Games, albeit for a range of different reasons.

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