

# 'There's nowhere wonky left to go': Gentrification, queerness and class politics of inclusion in (East) London

Olimpia Burchiellaro 

Department of Politics and International Relations, School of Social Sciences at the University of Westminster, United Kingdom

## Correspondence

Olimpia Burchiellaro, Department of Politics and International Relations, School of Social Sciences at the University of Westminster, 309 Regent Street, London W1B 2HW, UK.  
Email: burchio@westminster.ac.uk

This article explores the class politics of inclusion. Drawing from ethnographic fieldwork, I examine a community campaign organized to oppose the closure of a pub to make way for urban redevelopment and the local Council's and property developers' proposal to be 'inclusive' by planning a 'replacement LGBT venue' on its former site. Through this case study, the article shows the struggle surrounding the 'norms of intelligibility' imposed onto working-class and 'queer' expressions of sexuality in the attempt to gentrify a disadvantaged urban space. The article contributes to extant critical discussions of inclusion by unveiling the struggle surrounding the classed normative conditions attached to it. It further adds to queer perspectives on organization by showing how inclusion is predicated on 'straightening up' the 'wonkiness' of 'queer(ness)' in the pursuit of profit.

## KEYWORDS

class, gentrification, inclusion, queer theory, sexuality

'What did you like about *The Joiners*?' asks Danny. 'I don't know', she responds. 'It was wonky ... and there's nowhere wonky left to go.' (Extract from field notes, August 2017)

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## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Whilst inclusion is often sold as a benevolent and progressive project, critical scholars argue that it can work to conceal power relations and exclude 'undesirable' Others (David, 2016; Rennstam & Sullivan, 2018; Tyler, 2019). Most simply focus on who/what is excluded and 'silenced' from this discourse (e.g., Rennstam & Sullivan, 2018), but others, and in particular those working from a queer perspective, have questioned the terms upon which 'diversity' is recognized (Bendl, Fleischmann, & Walenta, 2008; Brewis, 2018; Tyler, 2019). In so doing, they have challenged the very notion that 'inclusion' is 'good' and traced the manifold ways in which becoming included can work to 'normalize' differences in pursuit of organizational interests. From this perspective, inclusion can exclude not simply through omission but by conferring recognition to certain 'forms of life ... according to the established norms of recognisability, on the condition of and at the cost of conforming to these norms' (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013, p. 36).

That inclusion is 'conditional' is by now a widely acknowledged (and sad) reality of organizational life. What has been less investigated is how such conditionality relates to class and its politics (yet see: Berrey, 2014; Zanoni, 2011). Yet other traditions of scholarship, such as urban geography and work on the gender/sexual politics of neoliberalism, suggest that 'inclusiveness' often 'shore[s] up politically and economically conservative' (Hubbard & Wilkinson, 2014, p. 599) processes of urban capital accumulation to the detriment of queer and working-class forms of difference (Halberstam, 2005; Ward, 2008).

The article takes a classed approach to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) inclusion. Conceptualizing inclusion as a 'regime of intelligibility' (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013; Tyler, 2019), I explore how an urban 'regeneration' project imposes 'conditions upon which the conferral of recognition' (Pullen, Thanem, Tyler, & Wallenberg, 2016, p. 85) depends, and the cost of these conditions for those communities and forms of difference that cannot be easily accommodated within geographies of capitalist accumulation. The analysis draws from ethnographic fieldwork conducted in relation to a 'queer pub' (The Joiners Arms) in East London, a community campaign organized to resist its closure by property developers and a Council's promise to include a 'replacement LGBT venue' in the new development.

The article offers a twofold contribution. First, the article talks back to the extant critical inclusion literature, showing how class informs the normative conditions attached to inclusion and unveiling the struggle surrounding such conditions. Second, the article advances queer perspectives on organization by showing how LGBT inclusion in urban regeneration works to 'straighten up' (Ahmed, 2006) the 'wonkiness' of 'queerness' (Halberstam, 2005).

## 2 | QUEERING INCLUSION

Queer approaches to diversity (management) have generated particularly useful insights on inclusion. Emerging from wider developments in the humanities and activism in the 1990s, queer approaches have argued that the discourse of diversity defines 'difference' against 'the norm' and around 'fixed notions of identity' (Bendl et al., 2008, p. 383). This actually reproduces rather than challenges exclusion, which accrues to those 'Others' who do not fit diversity's hetero- and homonormative regimes. Heteronormativity is 'typically understood as a normative regime that requires individuals to inscribe themselves into a hierarchical [hetero]sexual order' (Ng & Rumens, 2017, p. 109) (e.g., homosexual/heterosexual), whilst homonormativity is used to describe a form of sexual 'respectability politics' (Ward, 2008) which 'upholds ... a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption' (Duggan, 2003, p. 179). Understanding diversity as an essentializing discourse of power, queer approaches thus challenge the 'normalcy' with which certain expressions of sexuality (heterosexual and/or 'unthreateningly' homosexual) acquire recognition.

Whilst its meaning is widely disputed, in this article I think of 'queerness' as something which resists normative definition and categorization, something which is relationally 'wonky ... out of line, on a slant, the odd and the strange' (Ahmed, 2006, p. 566). 'Queer' in this way becomes particularly useful for resisting the classificatory

impulses of inclusion discourses that seek to render differences visible, identifiable or, indeed, manageable. From this perspective, the task of the critical scholar of inclusion becomes that of 'queering', understood as 'an attitude of unceasing disruptiveness' (Parker, 2001, p. 28), the normalizing or 'straightening' (Ahmed, 2006) tendencies of inclusion, which work to align (sexual) differences with normative scripts by making these readable, knowable and (thus) manage-able and include-able.

Melissa Tyler's (2019) recent work on 'normative regimes of intelligibility', too, offers some particularly useful conceptual tools for shedding light on how inclusion can exclude not simply through omission but through 'over- or conditional inclusion' (p. 54): a process through which certain 'forms of life ... are conferred recognition ... according to the established norms of recognisability, on the condition of and at the cost of conforming to these norms' (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013, p. 36). Unlike overt exclusion, 'over-inclusion' refers to a conditional kind of inclusion in which 'diverse' subjects can be included but only inasmuch as they 'conform to normative regimes of intelligibility and recognition' (p. 36). In this article I, too, conceptualize inclusion as a 'regime of intelligibility' (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013; Tyler, 2019), contributing to the theoretical queering of inclusion by questioning 'the conditions upon which the conferral of recognition depends' (Pullen et al., 2016, p. 85).

Whilst critical and queer perspectives on inclusion offer an initial entry point from which to challenge 'the conditions of inclusion' (Tyler, 2019, p. 62), class and its politics have to date remained a remarkably under-explored area of research (for an exception, see Berrey, 2014; Zanoni, 2011). Many argue that this is symptomatic of the largely corporate nature of inclusion initiatives (Berrey, 2014), the fact that organizations are not simply inscribed in, but actually reproduce, capitalist regimes, or 'the more general demise of class as an explanatory category in the social sciences' (Zanoni, 2011, p. 107). A similar neglect is apparent in queer approaches both within organization studies and beyond, which have, too, often 'retreat[ed] from class analysis' (Hennessy, 2000, p. 49) and pursued a cultural and discursive 'critique of institutionalized or compulsory heterosexuality and the gender binary rather than political economy and social class' (Seidman, 2011, p. 37; see also Taylor, 2011). In particular, there has been a lack of understanding of the mutually constitutive nature of 'sexuality' and 'the economy' (Seidman, 2011, p. 38).

The lack of attention to class is clearly problematic for the queer study of inclusion, preventing us from seeing how 'inclusiveness' informs processes of capital accumulation, how capitalism sustains (hetero- and homo-)normativity (e.g., Rao, 2015), and the ways in which class inflects experiences of sexuality (e.g., Taylor, 2011), ultimately rendering 'queer' into an unworkable tool to perform a trenchant anti-capitalist critique. The mutually constitutive politics of class and sexuality demand more attention and theorization in studies of inclusion, sexuality and organization. In what follows, and in order to redress these oversights, I develop a theoretical framework which reconciles a class analysis with a queer focus on the 'norms of the intelligible' (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013, p. 67) through the notion of 'gentrification'.

### 3 | GENTRIFICATION AS CLASS POLITICS OF INCLUSION: STRAIGHTENING THE QUEER

Gentrification refers to the (classed) process of transformation by which previously working-class, derelict and economically marginal neighbourhoods are 'regenerated' and replaced by areas that are more upscale, populated by middle-class residents and devoid of its earlier, usually poorer, residents (Schulman, 2012). This is accompanied by broader socio-political shifts including the implementation of austerity policies and the 'neoliberalization of planning' (Olesen, 2014), which posit the logics of capital accumulation as serving public interests and make local authorities dependent on private investments for the maintenance and 'revitalization' of areas under their jurisdiction (Campkin & Marshall, 2017, 2018; Olesen, 2014).

A quintessentially classed process, gentrification has also been used to trace the contradictory classed effects of market-led urban redevelopment on the broader fabric of social, cultural and political life in the city, including LGBT spaces (Doan & Higgins, 2011). On the one hand, understood as 'vital' components of the city's 'diversity appeal',

these spaces are promoted as part of what Bell and Binnie (2004) refer to as 'neoliberal strategies of urban governance', which foster 'up-market', cosmopolitan and middle-class forms of investment and consumption. On the other hand, however, when these spaces are located in poor and/or working-class areas, they are 'chased out', 'unwanted' and/or 'emptied' of 'undesirable' performances of working-class sexuality (Bell & Binnie, 2004; Delany, 1999; Doan & Higgins, 2011). Paradoxically, gentrification in these areas is often explicitly sold through the rhetoric of 'inclusivity', aiming to create 'cosmopolitan gay-friendly space[s]' (Hubbard & Wilkinson, 2014, p. 601) in areas traditionally associated with homophobic working-class masculinities (see also Andersson, 2009). From this perspective, gentrification works in tandem with hetero- and homo-normativity, excluding "undesirable" forms of sexual expression by reducing the "gay public sphere" to consumption spaces and gentrified neighbourhoods only' (Bell & Binnie, 2004, p. 1811).

In this article, I use gentrification as a theoretical framework to situate 'sexual subjects as ... classed subjects' (Taylor, 2011, p. 4) and shed light on the processes by which previously derelict urban areas are brought into an 'entrepreneurial, neoliberal frame' (Bell & Binnie, 2004, p. 1815). In particular, I conceptualize the 'problem of inclusion' in terms of the consequences that its normative regimes of intelligibility accrue for those (primarily urban poor and working-class) queers who are unable and/or unwilling to abide [read: to become intelligible] by their terms (Halberstam, 2005; Rao, 2015).

In developing a theoretical framework through gentrification, I follow Zanoni (2011) in emphasizing the importance of taking forms of difference (sexuality and class in our case) as 'interlocking in specific ways depending on the historical context and the specific situation in which relations take place' (p. 108), and thus not as having 'ontological primacy over one another' (p. 108; see also Taylor, 2011). Additionally, I foreground the importance of understanding class as more than just a matter of identity, 'style, accent and attire' (Zanoni, 2011, p. 107; see also Scully, Blake-Beard, Konrad, Prasad, & Pringle, 2006), but rather as a process and organizing principle.

Halberstam's (2005) work in particular will be used to reconcile sexuality to its classed dimensions by understanding 'queerness' as a way of inhabiting time and space beyond normative spatio-temporal logics 'that have been established for the purposes of protecting the rich from everyone else' (p. 10). From this perspective, hetero- and homo-normativity are upheld by middle-class logics and forms of capital accumulation (such as gentrification) which privilege certain (re)productive, 'safe' and 'privatised' understandings at the expense of working-class and/or queer uses of space and time. This locates 'class' at the intersection of the material and the ideological: as an 'exploitative relation between labour and capital' (Zanoni, 2011, p. 108) that is 'lived and carried in the body' (Taylor, 2011, p. 6).

In using gentrification as a theoretical framework to shed light on the norms of intelligibility governing inclusion, the article seeks to address three main research questions. First, what kind of 'diversity' is mobilized to make the case for inclusion, and what are thus the conditions upon which the conferral of recognition depends? Second, how are 'diverse' sexualities rendered intelligible through the classed process of gentrification? How are the norms governing inclusion under gentrification resisted?

## 4 | METHODOLOGY

The article draws on over 12 months of ethnographic fieldwork conducted in and around The Friends of the Joiners Arms, a community campaign established in 2014 to fight the closure of The Joiners Arms. The ethnographic data includes over 75 hours of participant observation with the community organization, and in which I followed the community organizers in a range of 'sites', including their internal meetings, held in a number of locations scattered across East London, and their external engagements with the councillors, the property developers and the media. During the ethnographic fieldwork, I recorded my field notes in a notebook and subsequently transcribed these electronically within a week of their recording, resulting in over 100 pages of field notes. I took notes of conversations and observations which related both to the campaigners' experience of inclusion and the specific ways

in which inclusion was framed and given a 'physical and institutional form' (Ahmed, 2012, p. 12) in the field. I further relied on the planning agreement and the media coverage of the campaign.

I joined the campaign in May 2017. At the time of research, this had collected over 6000 'likes' on its Facebook page yet the vast majority of its day-to-day activities were performed by a more modest group of four: Coleen, Reg, Danny and Dimitri (pseudonyms). All are in the thirties, former patrons of the pub, White and identify as LGBT. At the time of research, they all either lived in the borough of Tower Hamlets or in the adjacent borough of Hackney. They met at The Joiners Arms, becoming close friends with David, the owner, with whom they shared a passion for drinking, left-wing politics and storytelling. Apart from this, I do not include personal information about participants in the campaign (e.g., their class background) to protect their privacy.

Whilst the meaning of ethnography can vary, for the purposes of this article I build on feminist and postmodern interpretations to understand it not so much as a method of data collection but as an attitude to knowing itself: a reflexive exercise that is the 'result of textual collaboration' (Bruni, 2006, p. 305) between the ethnographer and the participants, which seeks to counter the 'epistemic violence' (Weatherall, 2019, p. 474) with which 'difference' is known and studied in organizations, and which ultimately rejects the search for 'objectivity' in favour of a self-reflexive approach to knowledge production. I used an ethnographic approach to look at how sexuality was enacted, shaped and organized by the 'normalizing discourse governing dominant conceptualizations' (Courtney, 2014, p. 386) of inclusion, and the manifold ways in 'the[se] dominant taxonomies fail to capture the complexity of individual gender and sexual subjectivities and practices' (Valocchi, 2005, p. 753).

Data analysis occurred in an iterative-inductive manner and was 'guided by what emerge[d] from the data rather than [through] establishing predetermined themes and coding categories' (Rumens, 2012, p. 964). It was performed by manually sorting field notes according to the themes they embodied and the stories they told. Rather than counting how many times something happened or a theme was covered, I was more interested in thinking about what the specific situated ethnographic encounters could tell us about the kind of 'diversity' mobilized to make the case for inclusion, the kinds of 'diverse' sexualities rendered intelligible through gentrification and the forms of resistance enacted in response to gentrification.

In the process of sorting, I then moved from a chronological approach to a thematic one and begun looking for patterns. For example, I noted early on in my field notes that class-inflected understandings of 'diversity' unfolded around notions of 'queerness'/'gayness' and 'wonkiness'/'straightness'. I also noted that the former terms were primarily used by campaigners and rendered unintelligible through the latter, primarily used by developers and local authorities. I used these ethnographic insights and concepts to theoretically 'reconstruct' the normative framework of intelligibility governing inclusion and gentrification. Throughout, I used descriptive data and situated ethnographic encounters (offered in the form of ethnographic vignettes) to illustrate the arguments and convey a sense of 'being there' (O'Reilly, 2005).

My involvement in the field resembled that of the 'participant-as-observer' (Weatherall, 2019), which meant that I was deeply involved in the labour required to run the campaign (reading documents, sending emails, drafting letters of objection, seeking legal advice on planning legislation and acting as a facilitator for some of the internal meetings) and that all the campaigners were aware of my research activities. I was also involved as a member of the LGBT community (I identify as a lesbian), and ultimately as a friend. This (personal *and* political) involvement with both the participants and their cause was central to the content and direction of the ethnographic project, and it is through, and not in spite of, this 'closeness', that the article engages with the issues and questions at stake.

Of course, 'closeness' was not without its challenges. I too, like Rooke (2009) experienced the ethnographic field as a process of undoing, 'moving within and between categories, slipping out of the comfort of identities of "lesbian" and "researcher"' (p. 157) and 'campaigner', all three of which provided me (at once *and* in equal measure) with a strategic possibility and a sense of unease. Not only did I originally join the campaign as someone concerned by the closure of yet another affordable queer venue in London — *not* as a PhD student researching inclusion — but in so doing I also entered a world populated by friends and (past and present) lovers with whom I'd been sharing a slice of 'queer London' since 2012 (see also Burchiellaro, forthcoming).

These pre-existing and emerging field relationships granted me ample and unique access to participants' world-view and activities, forms of access that other researchers in the field were often denied. Yet, it also meant that my findings were inevitably mediated through my positionality, which affected both the process of data collection (where at times I had to choose between writing/researching and speaking/participating) and interpretation (where the campaigners' perspective was also, to some extent, my own, and where I struggled at times with the dangers of 'going native'). I resolved to deal with these challenges by being open about my involvement and by reflecting on my positionality in the production of (forever partial) ethnographic knowledge.

## 5 | THE JOINERS ARMS

In recent years, numerous LGBT spaces in London have been closed down. Research conducted by the UCL Urban Lab and supported by the Greater London Authority (GLA) found that from 2006 to 2017 the number of LGBT venues in London fell from 125 to 53, a staggering 58 per cent decline in just over 10 years (Campkin & Marshall, 2017, 2018). Optimistically, some read this as a positive side effect of the increasing inclusion of LGBT people in mainstream society ('Gay Bars are Under Threat But Not from the Obvious Attacker,' 2016). But evidence suggests that the bulk of the closures are a direct result of gentrification rather than the lack of demand or need (Campkin & Marshall, 2018).

East London, an area characterized by 'some of the most pronounced pockets of disadvantage in the UK' (Hubbard & Wilkinson, 2014, p. 601), has been particularly affected. Gentrification in this area is often packaged and sold as a benevolent 'civilizing mission' for this 'problem place' and its 'challenging communities' (p. 601). Yet it has participated in the creation of 'unhospitable' climates for East London's working-class communities and its 'historical hidden location[s] of gay nightlife' (Andersson, 2009, p. 60): a number of venues 'scattered' (p. 63) across the area, which functioned as safe havens and cruising grounds for the working-class queers (Halberstam, 2005) which lived in these 'dangerous' urban landscapes.

Amid these urban landscapes stood The Joiners Arms. The pub was opened by David Pollard, a working-class gay man from the North of England, in May 1997 on Hackney Road in the borough of Tower Hamlets. As noted by Andersson (2009), The Joiners Arms used to be populated by a heterogeneous combination of hetero- and homosexual subjects: from the working-class patrons and local bar staff, to the 'stripper ... from down the road' (p. 64) and 'the chavs'1 (p. 58), to an ever-growing number of middle-class visitors from the adjacent and rapidly gentrifying area of Shoreditch in search of an adventure amidst the 'ruins of the urban landscape' (p. 63). Whilst the pub would later emerge as 'an LGBT venue', it was seen by all my key informants as a 'queer pub'. As an informant told me: 'David never called it an LGBT pub, no one ever called it an LGBT pub ... it was just a pub for everyone.'

The pub operated as a late-licence venue, and its 'dicey atmosphere' (Andersson, 2009, p. 64), 'unwelcoming exteriors' (p. 65), 'permanently flooded toilets' (p. 65), 'haggard rainbow flag' (p. 65) and 'almost invisible entrance' (p. 65) all represented 'an East End tradition of working-class pub culture' (p. 64) that strongly contrasted with both 'Shoreditch's more fashionable bar scene' (p. 64) and with the city's most famous 'cosmopolitan and classy' (p. 65) gay enclave, Soho. Whilst not free from problematic romanticizations of working-class culture and aesthetics, and catering to a predominantly White crowd, the pub nevertheless seemed to have provided a time and a space for those queers who 'live[d] (deliberately, accidentally, or out of necessity) during the hours when others sleep and in the spaces (physical, metaphysical, and economic) that others have abandoned' (Halberstam, 2005, p. 1), and facilitated a 'genuine interaction between the local working-class community and some of the middle-class gentrifiers' (Andersson, 2009, p. 66).

Yet, despite being a staple of East London's queer subcultural nightlife, the pub closed its doors in 2015 to make way for redevelopment. Involved in a number of other projects across East London, property developers Regal Homes bought the pub for £1½ million as one of multiple buildings on the block due to be repurposed as luxury flats and office spaces. The campaigners held their first official meeting in the pub in December 2014, a month before the

closure, with the aim of opposing the redevelopment. In the following sections, I detail how a seemingly progressive promise to include 'an LGBT venue' in the redevelopment, issued by the Council two years after the closure of the pub, produced a classed normative regime, 'straightening up' (Ahmed, 2006) 'queerness' in pursuit of profit.

## 6 | FINDINGS

I attended my first meeting with the Friends of the Joiners Arms in May 2017 in the basement of an anarchist community centre in East London. Being a relatively active member of the so-called 'queer activist scene', I knew that the campaigners had been holding meetings and protests outside the (now closed) pub, collecting (physical and virtual) signatures for an open letter calling on the Council to halt the redevelopment and re-open the venue, and going to another pub down the road to share stories of The Joiners' heyday. I also knew that, up until that point, the Council had not taken much interest in the campaign or the closure, and that the campaigners' encounter with the property developers had been limited to two (off-the-record) meetings in which the developers had attempted to intimidate them to desist. Apart from that, as Coleen would later attest, 'nothing much happened for [the] two years' spanning the closure of the pub in January 2015 and that warm afternoon in May.

But that afternoon, something *had* happened. I learnt from Coleen, who started the meeting by providing an 'update', that the Council had established an agreement with the property developers – called a 'Section 106' – which outlined that a 'replacement LGBT venue' had to be included in the redevelopment as a condition for the project's approval. The campaigners would be 'consulted', but the Council could not assure their demands would be accommodated.

## 7 | A 'SUFFICIENTLY GAY' REPLACEMENT VENUE

A draft of the agreement details the criteria and process through which the 'LGBT venue' would be established, stating that:

*a lease granted to an Interested Party shall include a covenant requiring the Public House to be operated as a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender-focused venue for the duration of the Lease.*

The promise of inclusion is here organized around the definition of 'an LGBT-focused venue' as 'a venue which adopts the LGBT+ Venues Charter published by the Greater London Authority' (London City Hall, 2016). The LGBT+ Venues Charter (London City Hall, 2016) – hereafter referred to as 'the Charter' – is a 'toolkit' 'designed by the GLA in response to the decline in LGBT spaces in the capital'. As explained by an informant who was consulted for its design (and who wishes to remain anonymous), the Charter was not intended for activists but for property developers and pub operators who, after purchasing land or property which included 'an LGBT venue', would like to maintain the venue's use as 'LGBT-focused'.

What constitutes 'an LGBT venue' is defined by the Charter through three characteristics. First, 'an LGBT venue' is one that has 'a visible rainbow flag ... displayed on the outside of the venue'. Cast as 'a universal symbol of the LGBTQ+ community', the rainbow flag stands to indicate the venue's 'LGBT character' and its 'orientation' towards LGBT people. Second, the venue should be explicitly 'marketed as an LGBTQ+ venue'. Finally, 'an LGBT venue' must abide to existing equality legislation, welcoming 'anyone regardless of background or identity, religion, race/ethnicity, gender identity or expression, disability, age or sexual orientation'.

Interestingly, class is omitted as one of designated forms of difference against which the venue must not discriminate,<sup>2</sup> raising questions about the agreement's ability 'to reconcile profound socio-economic injustice within a frame of recognition' (Taylor, 2018, p. 1380). Moreover, given the nature of the pub the agreement was supposedly intended to protect – a working-class pub with a 'haggard' rainbow flag that was not understood by its patrons as 'LGBT' in any simple terms – it is unsurprising that the campaigners, including myself, were taken aback by the terms and conditions of this promise.

Amidst the arguable arbitrariness of some of these designations, it was even rumoured that an inspector from City Hall would come in to check the venue was 'sufficiently gay'. The rumour was eventually reproached as a thoughtless remark made by a lower-level GLA employee over the phone and quickly retracted. But the moniker 'sufficient gayness' lingered in the field and was often used by the campaigners to mock the agreement's definition of 'an LGBT venue'. Through this promise, 'gayness' or 'LGBT-ness' was rendered into legitimate objects and targets of (diversity) management: things that could be measured, legislated and maintained through the use of rainbow flags and marketing strategies (Rumens, 2015).

## 8 | 'A DEVELOPMENT THAT HAS A PLACE FOR EVERYONE'

'Diversity' was mobilized in the field to make the case for inclusion in multiple ways. It was constructed as something to be celebrated and as something that 'added value' to the redevelopment and to the wider area. In a press release issued to *The Guardian* after the agreement, Regal Homes claimed that the firm is 'committed to keeping this space within our development ... as an LGBT+ venue' ('You Must Include Gay Venue on Site of Joiners Arms Planners Tell Developers' 2017) and that they were excited 'to deliver a development that has "a place for everyone"'. Likewise, the Mayor of Tower Hamlets, John Biggs, released a statement of support saying that 'Tower Hamlets council is committed to celebrating our great diversity, which includes serving the needs of our LGBTQ+ community' ('You Must Include Gay Venue on Site of Joiners Arms, Planners Tell Developers', 2017). Here diversity is no longer linked to 'histories of discrimination' (Ahonen, Tienari, Meriläinen, & Pullen, 2014), but rather rendered into something 'happy' and something to be celebrated.

At the same time, 'diversity' was also understood as the identity of a specific consumer group. For example, the agreement was often referred to in the media with reference to 'the sexual orientation of a venue's customers' ('You Must Include Gay Venue on Site of Joiners Arms, Planners Tell Developers,' 2017) and the value that 'LGBT businesses' add to London's economy. Here diversity emerges as a 'commodity' (Swan, 2010) that sells a 'particular version of difference' (p. 95), according to market-driven understandings.

Finally, the agreement mobilized 'diversity' as something not simply compatible with but that actually legitimated and justified the process of redevelopment. As a planning officer explains, the agreement presented the Council with 'an interesting link between conventional planning considerations and the council's equalities duty' ('Idea Exchange: We're the First Council to Use Planning Powers to Save an LGBT Venue' 2017). The promise of inclusion is here posited as enacting a 'win-win' situation in which both the interests of the property developers and those of 'the LGBT community' could be accommodated within a common framework. The agreement thus served to reconcile the Council's (legally enforced) 'equalities duty' with the process of gentrification by making the redevelopment project 'acceptable' and (thus) 'approvable' by including LGBT subjects within its folds.

The agreement was widely celebrated by the Council, the property developers and the media as a creative way of ensuring planning and redevelopment could be made more 'inclusive'. In many ways, it did certainly represent a radical departure from 'heterosexist' planning operations (Doan & Higgins, 2011) and, in particular, the infamous days of Section 28, which stipulated, from 1988 until its repeal in 2003, that local government abstain from 'intentionally promoting homosexuality'. Yet, making 'diversity' palatable and compatible with gentrification may ultimately prove to be problematic for the inclusion of forms of 'difference' that are unintelligible within this normative framework.

## 9 | 'WE DON'T WANT "SUFFICIENT GAYNESS". WE WANT WHOLEHEARTED MASSIVE QUEERNESS'

In the weeks following the establishment of the agreement, the campaigners held a number of meetings during which they drew from pro bono legal advice, testimonies from a host of other community campaigns and their own

reading of planning legislation and the agreement to discuss the terms of inclusion and to draft a formal response to the Council. What emerged from the meetings was that, despite the promise of inclusion, the campaigners were going to remain opposed to the redevelopment.

In these meetings, I observed that the campaigners' opposition revolved around the agreement's classed understanding of 'an LGBT venue'. They challenged the supposedly 'inclusive' nature of the redevelopment by questioning the kinds of 'diverse' sexual subjects that it would include. During one of the first meetings organized in response to the agreement, Reg said:

*... the new venue runs the risk of just becoming a venue with LGBTQ+ programming ... it runs the risk of becoming just another White gay pub ... it doesn't serve the LGBTQI community ... you could deny a community group like this for a fucking capitalist pig like [name of the owner of a commercial LGBT nightclub].* Reg questions the kinds of 'diverse' sexual subjects which would benefit from such a space. He does so by distinguishing two ways of operating the space, as a 'community group like this' or as a 'fucking capitalist pig', referring to the owner of a commercial LGBT nightclub in Soho.

Some of the campaigners also highlighted the incongruity between the kind of 'LGBT venue' promised by the agreement and the pub which it was supposedly intended to 'replace'. As part of the agreement, the property developers produced a computer-generated image of what the 'future LGBT venue' would look like after regeneration. The image depicted a clean and well-lit space with large floor to ceiling windows and an impressively noticeable rainbow flag hoisted above its entrance. I watched as the campaigners opened the image on their laptops during a meeting, visibly cringing at its sight. 'We don't want a fucking gastro-pub', responds Reg after seeing the image. Indeed, I too noted the contrast between the space imagined by the property developers and The Joiners Arms, whose tattered flag and unpretentiously dingy look were precisely what gave the pub its working-class and 'queer' feel.

The campaigners' opposition challenged the very premising of inclusion on 'sufficient gayness'. 'We don't want "sufficient gayness" ... we want wholehearted massive queerness', Danny tells me at one of the meetings, in his living room, ahead of a local council meeting, where the plans that would see The Joiners Arms demolished and replaced by a 'new LGBT venue' are due to be discussed. Here we might wonder what exactly Danny meant by 'wholehearted queerness'. Yet, as argued, 'queerness' may not only be something that resists definition, but also something that acquires its meaning in opposition to the normative. Pitting 'queerness' against 'sufficient gayness' we could thus argue that Danny understands 'queerness' as something that cannot be legislated or measured in the way that 'sufficient gayness' can, something that cannot be brought under the purview of state promotion in the same way that 'an LGBT venue' can, something that cannot be rendered intelligible and thus include-able according to the norms of intelligibility governing inclusion in the redevelopment. From this perspective, the promise of inclusion represented an 'assimilatory inclusion of ready-made identities' (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013, p. 34), which determined what bodies are included – and include-able – and what bodies can become 'increasingly disposable, dispossessed by capital and its exploitative excess, uncountable and unaccounted for' (p. 29). Gentrification rendered (un)intelligible those queer and working-class ways of being which challenge the spatio-temporal logics of capitalist normativity, unveiling the 'straightening' effects of inclusion within a process of capital accumulation.

## 10 | 'I DON'T WANT A PUB TILL 4 IN THE MORNING'

One of the most serious points of the campaigners' opposition was the agreement's failure to (re)provision a late licence for the replacement venue. Indeed, whilst The Joiners Arms had operated for 18 years as a late-licence venue, the promised LGBT venue had no such guarantees. As highlighted by Dimitri at one of the meetings, the presence of a late licence 'provided so much of the benefit to the community'. Indeed, the campaigners argued that the pub had catered to a wide range of sexual subjects and workers – those involved in alternative economic temporal practices beyond a 9–5, 'early to bed, early to rise' (Halberstam, 2005, p. 3) logic (such as bartenders and sex workers) – precisely because it would stay open late. As Coleen explains to a reporter ahead of the Development Planning Committee meeting in which the application was due to be discussed,

*with ... a recommendation from the officers that [the venue] closes early 7 days a week, we cannot possibly hope to have a space resembling or replacing the important role the Joiners Arms played in our community.*

The campaigners understood the late licence as an integral component of the pub's queerness.

The (re)provisioning of a late licence was not only absent from the agreement, but was also absent in any revised arrangement. This seemed to stem from the increasingly gentrified character of the area to be developed, as the luxury flats that would now occupy the space above it would require a limitation on the sound levels and operating hours.

I attended a roundtable discussion with the property developers and the campaigners organized by the Council as an opportunity for the former to respond to the latter's concerns. Indeed, much to the dismay of the developers, their application was deferred at the first Development Planning Committee meeting by two councillors who had not been convinced that 'the LGBT community's' concerns had been given adequate attention. The meeting began with an impassioned speech by the CEO of Regal Homes explaining to the campaigners that they 'are committed to diversity and to the LGBT community'. Yet, during the meeting it emerged that whilst the property developers were willing to accommodate some of the campaigners' considerations — such as, for example, offering a year's free rent for the future venue and contributing £130,000 towards fit-out costs — the issue of the late licence was non-negotiable. As the CEO continued:

*I don't want a pub till 4 in the morning ... it's gonna disturb the residents. And if you think about it, over the past few years there's been nothing opposite there but a derelict car wash and derelict factories, and now you've got a built-up community, there'll be people living in flats, lights in the flats, you know, the whole thing's changing, so it is a slightly different feel to what you've been used to, in a better way from a security aspect.* The 'built-up' community enabled by the redevelopment is petitioned as more desirable and 'secure' than the dereliction which had previously afflicted the area. Yet, paradoxically, it is this very 'built-up community' that is cited as a reason for failing to (re)provide a late licence. Conflicting understandings of 'safety' are thus mobilized by the property developers and the campaigners. On the one hand, property developers deemed the changing character of the area as providing more safety than the 'dereliction' and abandonment which previously characterized Hackney Road. On the other hand, this 'dereliction', representative of the area's marginality *vis-à-vis* processes of capital accumulation, provided a safe space for those queer subjects which were unable and/or unwilling to live according to middle-class spatio-temporal logics (Halberstam, 2005).

In a de-brief meeting after the roundtable discussion, Coleen, too, links the lack of the (re)provision of a late licence to the changing character of the area:

*They don't like the late licence [because] they want us to entertain people in the office. They want some swanky little bar.* Her comments point to the ways in which gentrification produces LGBT spaces as 'spectacles for straight observers' (Bell & Binnie, 2004, p. 1816), where difference is included but only on condition that it does not disrupt the 'normal' rhythms of work and play in the city (Stockton, 2011). Yet, whilst in these discussions 'straight' is often synonymous with 'heterosexual', Coleen's 'straight observers' are the 'people in the office'. 'Straightness' is thus understood as a specific (middle-class) way of inhabiting a space and a time, in the office, that abides to and (re)produces the logics of capitalist (re)production.

This seems to suggest that, whilst gentrification need not entail the 'de-gaying' of space (Doan & Higgins, 2011) and that LGBT-ness can indeed be preserved through, and even reconciled with, the process of redevelopment, a loosening of hetero-norms and normativities may not necessarily entail a more 'inclusive' planning and urban space. Rather, inclusion is bestowed according to fixed notions of identity and homonormative 'market-mediated and consumer-driven' (Valocchi, 2017, p. 326) understandings of diversity, privileging sexual subjects that embody and/or assimilate into middle-class values and practices (Duggan, 2003).

Of course, we could argue that even an 'assimilatory' form of inclusion may offer opportunities for (some) LGBT subjects to be(come) included, to be(come) visible, to live 'ordinary' lives (Brown, 2012). Moreover, it is fair to say that not everyone enjoyed or remembered The Joiners Arms as fondly as the campaigners did. For some, 'a working-class pub experience' may be far from desirable, synonymous with Whiteness, excessive drinking and/or threatening

forms of masculinity (Ward, 2008). Still, inclusion in the context of redevelopment was done not simply by including some (homonormative) subjects over others. Rather, inclusion was done by literally emptying sexuality and space of its 'undesirable' or 'queer unwanted' (Binnie, 2004) class dimensions.

## 11 | DISCUSSION: 'THERE'S NOWHERE WONKY LEFT TO GO'

I am sitting in The Glory, a gay pub in Hackney, with Danny, waiting for a reporter from BBC News to interview him for a television segment on the agreement. Danny recognizes one of the bartenders as a former patron and bartender of the Joiners. He leans over to talk to her, she recognizes him, they start talking, reminiscing, about the pub. 'What did you like about the Joiners?' asks Danny. 'I don't know', she responds. 'It was wonky ... and there's nowhere wonky left to go.'

The term 'wonkiness' invites us to interrogate the promise of inclusion as a modality of 'straightening' (Ahmed, 2006). In her *Queer Phenomenology*, Sara Ahmed (2006) thinks of 'queerness' as a form of 'wonkiness' that is unintelligible by the 'straightness' of normativity. Normativity is herein conceptualized in 'terms of the requirement to follow a straight line, whereby straightness gets attached to other values including decent, conventional, direct and honest' (Ahmed, 2006, p. 70). 'Straightness' here is not synonymous with 'heterosexuality' but rather an effect of things lining up with the straight line. 'Wonkiness', on the other hand, is as an effect of things coming 'out of line' with the 'straight line': one is 'wonky' when one is 'oblique' (p. 565) and/or 'off-line' (p. 565).

Thinking of 'queerness' as a form of 'wonkiness' enables us to theorize the specific ways in which inclusion takes place by reading queer desire in such a way that 'brings what is "slantwise" back into line' (Ahmed, 2006, p. 79). In a remarkably powerful ethnographic moment, the interaction documented above between Danny and the bartender exposes the costs of doing inclusion according to 'straight' norms. Indeed, the bartender remembers The Joiners Arms as 'wonky': a space that did not fit into the (rather straight) acronym 'LGBT', an unpredictable, oblique space of infinite possibilities beyond the neat confines of identity politics, beyond conventions of 'decency'.

From this perspective, we could read the promise of inclusion as 'straightening' inasmuch as it worked to 'correct' the wonkiness/queerness of The Joiners Arms. Indeed, as explored, previously 'queer' ways of extending and inhabiting space and time were not only made (un)intelligible and manageable from within the logic of (diversity) management, but also brought 'back into line' with the (re)productive logics of gentrification and capital accumulation. The 'wonkiness' of The Joiners Arms is thus straightened up to fit a celebratory, market-driven and 'sufficiently gay' narrative of diversity. Ultimately, it is only by becoming 'straight' that The Joiners Arms can be (come) included in the redevelopment. Such a reading exposes how inclusion is thus not simply 'exclusionary' by omission. Rather, it is *through* inclusion that the queer potential and the class politics of 'wonkiness' are disciplined and 'straightened up' through processes of capital accumulation.

In emphasizing that working-class and 'queer' ways of inhabiting and extending into space and time are rendered (un)intelligible by the normative spatio-temporal logics imposed by inclusion in the redevelopment, this study offers a contribution to extant critical discussions on inclusion and to queer perspectives on organization.

Firstly, the study contributes to the critical inclusion literature by showing how class informs the 'norms of the intelligible' (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013, p. 67) governing inclusion and its normative conditions. These conditions are (re)produced in the ways in which 'diversity' is managed and governed.

Indeed, it is *through* inclusion that The Joiners Arms, a 'queer' and working-class space, becomes an object and a target of (LGBT diversity) management. Inclusion here operates as a 'technology of power' which renders 'diversity' governable and manageable according to established (classed) norms of intelligibility. In bestowing this promise according to 'ready-made identities' (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013, p. 34), the agreement determined the forms queer lives 'must take in order to count as lives worth living' (Ahmed, 2006, p. 84). These forms of life did not include those 'wholeheartedly queer' ways of being which thrived in the pub the agreement was supposedly intended to protect, rendering unintelligible the campaigners' lived experiences of sexuality in their 'intersectional complexity'

(Tyler, 2019, p. 49). Thus, whilst LGBT inclusion may surely be considered a desirable goal, the findings reveal the classed struggle occurring beneath inclusion's celebratory and welcoming façade. This shows that it is not only questionable whether and how far inclusion may actually dismantle homonormativity, but also that, as Tyler (2019) argues, inclusion comes with 'normative conditions attached to it' (p. 50) that determine, and limit, who and/or what can be(come) included according to classed logics.

The findings complement and extend extant discussions on the exclusionary pressures which accompany inclusion. On the one hand, they complement these by showing that inclusion is indeed often 'peripheral' (Rennstam & Sullivan, 2018) and/or entails the silencing and suppression of forms of difference that cannot be included according to the norms governing recognition (Steidl & Brookshire, 2018). On the other hand, the study extends these by showing how these norms are organized according to classed logics. This also extends previous findings that diversity management initiatives rely on and reinforce class hierarchies (e.g., Berrey, 2014; Zanoni, 2011) to the discourse of inclusion, whose classed logics have thus far been under-examined. By shedding light on how inclusion is enacted through gentrification, as an extension of the logics of neoliberal capitalism which re-inscribes a classed/capitalist framework of intelligibility, the study thus emphasizes the importance of considering class and its spatio-temporal politics in our understanding of inclusion.

Secondly, the article contributes to queer perspectives on organization by pointing to how inclusion can work to 'straighten up' (Ahmed, 2006) the class politics and the 'wonkiness' of 'queerness' (Halberstam, 2005) in pursuit of profit. Here we see the significance of exploring the mutually constitutive politics of sexuality *and* class in our understanding of 'queer', and considering both not simply as 'identities' but as lived organizing principles in relation to gentrification. In particular, the study invites queer perspectives to further reflect on the normative regimes of intelligibility engendered by gentrification (Tyler, 2019).

Indeed, whilst queer spaces have

*historically grown 'organically' ... located in parts of the city that were seen as beyond the control and active policy-making reach of the state ... [and/or] policed and subject to planning controls ... in a negative sense* (Bell & Binnie, 2004, p. 1815)

through gentrification these spaces are rendered 'intelligible' and can become targets of active and positive state promotion/inclusion. Yet the findings show that whilst intelligibility might be a requirement for recognition, this also imposes severe limits on the kind of 'diversity' that can be(come) included. This empties 'diversity' of its 'queerness' and working-classness which are deemed too 'unsafe' and 'disruptive' to be reconciled with the resurgent forms of middle-class consumption engendered by gentrification (Binnie & Skeggs, 2004; Ward, 2008). Crucially, inclusion is here not simply 'exclusionary': it does not simply promote some lifestyles over others. Rather, it entails the active disciplining of sexuality, space and class in 'an attempt to engineer specific urban outcomes' (Hubbard & Wilkinson, 2014, p. 599). By stressing how 'straightening up' is organized according to classed norms to the detriment of working-class ways of being, the article contributes to extant queer perspectives on organization by shedding light on the mutually constitutive nature of 'sexuality', 'class' and 'the economy'.

This also contributes to queer perspectives on organization by showing the ways in which 'queer' can be turned into a workable tool to question the possibility of 'making inclusion work' (Katila, Meriläinen, & Tienari, 2010) and expanding the 'inclusionary potential' (Dobusch, 2017) of diversity within a capitalist framework. Indeed, to the extent that inclusion rendered 'queerness' unintelligible, the data shows that commitments to inclusion cannot simply be about recognizing and incorporating 'diverse' sexual identities but need to consider — and problematize — the intricate imbrication of sexuality 'in the institutions of capitalist modernity' (Duggan, 2003, p. 83). The findings thus suggest that 'recognition' might not only not be enough to counter the reproduction of intersectional inequalities and exclusions along classed lines, but also that the recognition of 'diverse' sexual identities without redistribution might 'essentially be the ruse through which neoliberal capitalism pretends to become more inclusive' (Rao, 2015, p. 44).

The forms of queering considered in this article open up a number of avenues for potential future inquiry. Firstly, forthcoming interrogations should continue to trouble the terms of inclusion by reconciling a focus on 'the norms of the intelligible' with its class politics in order to explore the particular ways in which processes of capital

accumulation sustain (hetero- and homo-)normativity. Secondly, forthcoming interrogations should also continue interrogating diversity categories, and in particular, 'at what expense and for what purposes the terms are used, and through what relations of power such categories have been wrought' (Butler, 1993, p. 20). Lastly, the ethnographic study proposed should encourage critical scholars and activists to commit to a 'wonkier' model of inclusion which troubles the 'straightness' and predictability with which narratives of inclusion demand we give a ('sufficiently gay') name to our (wonky) desires and spaces. Posited in these terms, resisting inclusion occurs not by fighting for the recognition of a wider range of 'diverse' LGBT identities, but by becoming committed to a twisted or wonky path of unexpected possibilities and potentialities.

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## ORCID

Olimpia Burchiellaro  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3363-737X>

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> As Andersson (2009) explains, the origin of the term is 'contested, but some read it as an acronym for council house and violent' (p. 58).
- <sup>2</sup> Explicitly at least. We might wonder whether 'background' might be a less politically loaded way of referring to class in the British context.

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## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

**Olimpia Burchiellaro** is a Leverhulme Early Career Fellow in the Department of Politics and International Relations, School of Social Sciences at the University of Westminster. Her primary research interests are in gender/sexuality, anthropology, politics, ethnography and queer theory. She is currently working on a project exploring the complicities and resistances between global corporations and local activists in global South/non-western contexts. Social media editor for *Gender, Work and Organization* and member of the Gender and Sexuality Study Group at the Centre for the Study of Democracy, her work is published in journals including *Organization Studies* and *ephemera: theory & politics in organizations*.

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