



GEOGRAPHY MATTERS

Post-16 and HE Phase Committee
Spring 2023

Welcome to Geography Matters 2023! This year's edition of *Geography Matters* embraces the opportunity for us to collaborate with a variety of geographers to support those working with students of geography across schools, colleges and universities. Our resident bookworms encourage us to read around the subject with a range of recommendations for geographers including non-fiction reads exploring a range of landscapes and cultures. It's always good to hear how geography is valuable in other disciplines and Ellie shares how geography underpins her politics studies. There are more essential top tips for the NEA from Naomi Andersson following her advice last year. Iain Palôt reflects on the Post-16 & HE committee's professional development concerning decolonisation of the geography curriculum, and Hafsa Bobat Garcia challenges us to consider how the term 'slum' is often portrayed in the narrative of geographical textbooks. The question of 'Why do we live in hazardous places?' is explored by Serval Miller, drawing on his experience of fieldwork with university students in Naples. This is a really helpful article for students and teachers interested in the complex interactions of human and physical geography. Finally, Rich Waller emphasises the role of geography in understanding the energy transition.

As always, a huge thank you to all our contributors.

Gill Miller, *Ed.*

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Welcome from our Co-Chairs

Ellie Barker and Laura-Jayne Ward

Collaboration is an essential aspect of geography. By bringing together individuals from diverse backgrounds, collaboration can facilitate the exchange of ideas, knowledge and skills necessary for effective problem-solving. It can also lead to innovative solutions to address complex geographical challenges. The challenges facing geography teachers and lecturers at Post-16 also continue (from funding shortages which lead to cutting courses to rising costs of fieldwork). Despite these, the numbers of young people studying A level geography continue to rise and the Post-16 & HE Phase Committee is here to support teachers in schools, colleges and universities through collaboration of ideas and creation of resources. In taking on the role as Co-Chairs since conference last year, we have embraced the opportunity to collaborate and the support the work of Geographical Association as well as develop further activities for Post-16 and HE students and teachers.

This year we held short, online sessions focusing on specific aspects of the A level geography course to share ideas and support teachers. These began by exploring how to choose our case studies for Changing Places and will soon be followed by how we tackle the challenge of teaching statistical analysis to A level students. We continue to share links, resources and ideas through our social media presence on Twitter. Our committee is increasingly working to collaborate with more geographers across the sectors to further support geography teaching at Post-16. As always, *Geography Matters* continues to provide a platform for geographical collaboration with a range of articles and advice from different geographical perspectives: students, teachers, academics and subject experts. This edition is no different.

We have two conference sessions this year. On **Friday at 4:30pm** we are discussing how we can use academic and non-fiction texts to support A level geography students to enhance their geographical learning, a session which builds on the workshop we ran for ECTs last year. We are hosting a panel discussion on **Saturday at 9am** to discuss how we can best prepare and encourage A level and IB students to study geography in higher education.

Please do come and join us at one of our sessions and tweet us @GeogPost16HE so we know to come and say hello. We are always looking for ways to collaborate with those passionate about geography at Post-16 and beyond whether that be through joining us at one of our discussion meetings, contributing something for our next edition of *Geography Matters* or sharing an idea in one of our online sessions.

All that is left to be said is to thank the members of the Post-16 and HE Phase Committee past, present and future for their commitment to furthering geography across the various sectors and to thank everyone who has contributed to another really useful edition of *Geography Matters*.

We hope you have an enjoyable conference collaborating and exploring how we can ensure the next generation of geographers thrive.



Book recommendations for geographers from our resident bookworms

Ellie Barker
Prendergast School

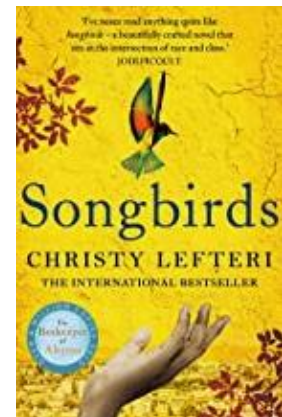
and

Naomi Andersson
Ludlow Sixth Form College

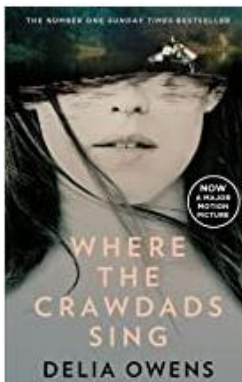
***Songbirds* by Christy Lefteri**

Songbirds by Christy Lefteri is a novel that follows the story of Nisha, a young woman who leaves her home to work as a domestic helper in Cyprus. Through her experiences, the novel explores the lives of migrant workers in modern-day Cyprus and reveals the hidden world of human trafficking. Nisha fights to protect herself and others from exploitation, highlighting the complex interplay between globalisation, migration and human rights.

For A level geographers, *Songbirds* offers an insightful exploration of the social and economic issues faced by migrant workers in today's globalised world. The book is an excellent resource for students interested in topics such as globalisation, migration and human rights, and offers a vivid portrayal of Cyprus' landscapes, people, and cultures. **(EB)**



***Where the Crawdads Sing* by Delia Owens**



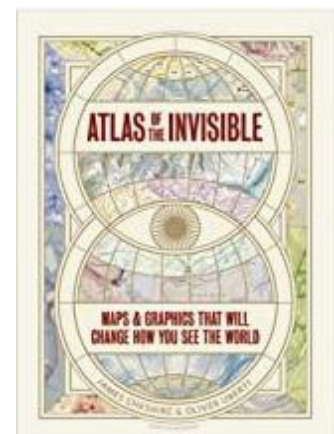
Where the Crawdads Sing by Delia Owens follows the story of Kya, a young girl who lives in the marshes of North Carolina. The novel explores themes of isolation, love, and loss as Kya navigates her way through life in the marsh, while also facing accusations surrounding a murder case.

For A level geographers, *Where the Crawdads Sing* is an excellent book for students interested in ecosystems, conservation, and the human-environment relationship, as it vividly portrays the human and physical geography of the South-eastern United States. The book offers a nuanced depiction of the cultural and economic traditions of the region, making it an engaging read for those interested in the geography and history of the American South. **(EB)**

***Atlas of the Invisible* by James Cheshire and Oliver Uberti**

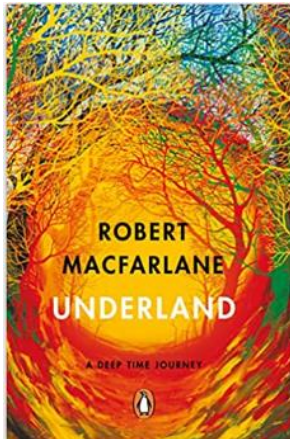
Atlas of the Invisible by James Cheshire and Oliver Uberti is a collection of maps and graphics that reveal the hidden patterns and structures of the modern world. The book covers a wide range of topics, including climate change, population growth, and urbanisation, using infographics, GIS and visualisations to help readers understand complex data and information.

For A level geographers, *Atlas of the Invisible* is an excellent resource for exploring the power of maps in communicating complex geographic information. The book provides a fascinating insight into the use of data and technology to understand contemporary issues, such as global migration, food security, and natural



disasters. The creative and innovative use of maps makes this book an engaging and thought-provoking resource for students looking to develop their analytical and critical thinking skills. **(EB)**

***Underland* by Robert McFarlane**



This is my most 'post-it noted' book of all time. I had to read it twice, once for joy and once for the job. It is packed with valuable examples of history, geography and links to our landscapes, particularly below the landscape surface with the human stories of need, resources, extraction, re-use, and recreation. Robert's writing style is conversational, the pages turn themselves, and it is hard to put down. He has researched innumerable details that lend themselves to improving lessons with anecdotes and favourite sections. **(NA)**

<https://blackwells.co.uk/bookshop/product/Underland-by-Robert-Macfarlane/9780141030579>

***What white people can do next: from allyship to coalition* by Emma Dabiri (2021)**

How do we make meaningful change in our societies, at the hyper local or classroom level? Emma helpfully points out the mistakes we make, the privileges we don't recognise, and humorously uses her own life experiences to make us realise the difference we can make in our own communities. Through reading this book I was able to check my privilege, learn from past errors, misconceptions and ignorance. By questioning my bias, it gave me a safe space to explore how white people can alter their behaviours, reactions and messaging, to become inclusive for all. In teaching, this is particularly valuable in de-colonisation of the curriculum. I was motivated to write to publishers pointing out pages, sections and case studies which held deep rooted colonial bias, inaccuracies, one sided stories or white standpoints. And I found myself pointing out – true for whom? **(NA)**



<https://blackwells.co.uk/bookshop/product/What-White-People-Can-Do-Next-by-Emma-Dabiri/9780141996738>

***The Climate Book* – Greta Thunberg (2022)**

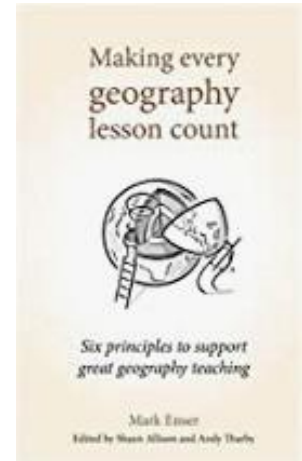


This heavy tome is set to be a classic. The graphics and statistics are beautifully presented and the essays range across science disciplines representing diverse collaboration from thought leaders from around the world. This is a book to read again with post-it notes at hand, to link evidence and observation to the teaching of climate, water, and carbon. Interestingly it also contributes to social and global inequality and points the finger at governance, outdated economic models and conspicuous consumption. This well-organised book is invaluable for improving lessons with soundbites, anecdotes, and cold hard facts. Definitely a keeper. **(NA)**

<https://blackwells.co.uk/bookshop/product/The-Climate-Book-by-Greta-Thunberg/9780241547472>

***Making every Geography Lesson Count* – Mark Enser**

This practical guide has been on my classroom desk for nearly 8 years. It is well thumbed and I come back to it in times of need, when stuck, stale, fed up of the rinse and repeat of some topics and activities. It never fails to deliver a new technique, a nuance to try, an observation to make, a scaffold to erect or a pointless monologue to scrap and rework into an active, memorable, collaborative session. It has enabled me to support my students in being more independent, from setting tasks for them to take ownership, using more AfL and on the spot feedback, metacognition techniques, thinking harder about sequencing, using routines, and setting minimum standards. The book is gentle, it is kind, it is not prescriptive, it suggests. I'd better have another look actually and see how else I can improve. **(NA)**



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Geography matters - whatever you do!

Ellie

University of Edinburgh



Hi! My name's Ellie and I'm a third year Politics student at University of Edinburgh. I took geography A level at school and in my first two years of university I studied geography alongside politics. Geography has provided me with good foundational knowledge on which my understanding of politics and political systems is built. One of my recent politics courses was about globalisation and I found that my A level geography helped me understand the course material better, and provided a foundation on which I could delve deeper

into the subject. Geography has also given me a unique perspective through which to study politics, specifically the ways that political systems are formed over space and time and are affected by the Earth's landscapes. I see this in the courses I am currently studying, such as in 'Africa in World Politics', where I am studying how conflict there is dictated by borders, both natural and man-made, and how levels of development are dictated by resources and the ability to trade over land and oceans. Politics and geography are intrinsically linked and I am very grateful for the way in which my background in geography supports my politics studies today.

More top tips for the NEA

Naomi Andersson
Ludlow Sixth Form College

1. Start early! And keep to deadlines. You don't want it creeping into revision time in Year 2.
2. Choosing a local topic may help you to go into depth on something quite specific. Don't pick a broad overarching question that cannot be answered in detail within the word count.
3. Avoid topics which require several visits, which could become expensive, onerous and impractical.
4. Avoid topics which require too much different data so that you will find it hard to identify links and inter-relationships between the data sets.
5. Ask an expert. Interview someone who knows a lot about your topic. This deep and rich source of information can be coded, mapped and presented in many different ways.
6. Ensure your data presentation is varied and interesting. And check that every item is complete with figure number, title, labelled axes and appropriate annotation.
7. Use all the amazing guides out there to help you such as David Holmes' workbook and the RGS guide (<https://www.rgs.org/schools/teaching-resources/a-student-guide-to-the-a-level-independent-investi/>). All the textbooks have a section on the NEA too.



Biggest piece of advice. Make sure you explain:

- how your investigation links to your studies,
- the theory behind the topic you are investigating,
- explicitly state (and reference) how geographical theory applies to your topic,
- how your question links to geography in the wider context.

Who are the Post-16 & HE Phase Committee?

Laura-Jayne Ward	<i>Whitley Academy</i>	<i>Co-Chair</i>
Eleanor Barker	<i>Prendergast School</i>	<i>Co-Chair</i>
Naomi Andersson	<i>Ludlow Sixth Form College</i>	<i>Secretary</i>
Hafsa Bobat Garcia	<i>Portsmouth College</i>	
Gill Miller	<i>University of Chester</i>	<i>Geography Matters Editor</i>
Servel Miller	<i>University of Chester</i>	
Richard Waller	<i>University of Keele</i>	

Many of our meetings are online these days. If you are interested in joining us via zoom, then you are always welcome. Contact Laura-Jayne laurajward@me.com or Ellie eleanormarybarker@gmail.com.

Reflections on a CPD event to explore decolonisation in the geography curriculum

Iain Palôt with Hafsa Bobat Garcia and Ellie Barker

It is now nearly three years since George Floyd was murdered by a police officer in Minneapolis on 25 May 2020. Despite events of this kind being not unusual in the United States, this particular killing resonated around the world and gave a huge impetus, to a call for changes within the education curriculum here in the UK. The momentum which emerged led to demands to ‘decolonise the curriculum’ in schools, colleges and universities. Groups were formed, papers were circulated, discussions took place, articles written, conference sessions delivered, and there was a continuing stream of online sessions.

However, it remains to be seen whether these activities will achieve any lasting changes to the curriculum. Already Black History Month has become what *Guardian* columnist, Nesrine Malik, calls a ‘presentational event’ just before Guy Fawkes night and Christmas. *Geography for All* was a six-term project, initiated by the RGS-IBG, through which A level geography was promoted in schools by undergraduate mentors to groups of identified students from the BAME community. Teachers are being helped with delivery in the classroom but still requires a generational shift in approach and is not a quick fix.

Members of the Post-16 & HE Phase Committee undertook an initial trawl through the main A level specifications to highlight those subject topics which would encourage colleagues to introduce and include ‘decolonising’ issues. The committee felt it would be useful to identify the opportunities for students to realise that there was far more to many geographical topics than the bald statements in the specification, as is so clearly explained by Kehinde Andrews in his book, *The New Age of Empire*. An example of the committee’s work can be found here:

https://www.geography.org.uk/write/MediaUploads/Get%20involved/AQA_multi_cultural_specs.pdf.

There are similar lists for Edexcel and WJEC.

For example, we looked at content and suggested potential links to decolonisation which would be appropriate:

Topic	Content	Links to de-colonialisation
4B.2 Population characteristics vary from place to place and over time	b. Different levels of cultural diversity in places can be explained by social clustering, accessibility to key cities, physical factors and government planning policy. (A: actions by governments may foster or suppress diversity)	Consideration of post-colonial labour migration in key sectors
	c. Suburban and inner-city areas are perceived differently in terms of their desirability as places to live and work by contrasting demographic groups (by age, ethnicity, life-cycle stage). (3) (A: attitudes may vary)	Ethnic enclaves may be viewed differently by ethnic groups from majority of residents

At a very early stage we recognised that lasting change was more than *what* we taught but *how* we taught it, and the language that we used. A bid was made for GA funding to further these ideas and two sessions were organised with an external trainer to reflect our understanding de-colonialism, its place in geography, our own attitudes and approaches, and how we could develop as teachers. The initial training session was prefaced by considerable preparation work provided for us in the form of articles,

TED talks and an encouragement to start reading for ourselves, and to examine our own practices in classrooms and lectures.

The first session put us on the spot. What did we understand about certain words and phrases, like **coloniality** and **decolonisation**? Did we understand **intersectionality**? How might these terms, now in common usage, be applied to Geography and in particular, used in our teaching? Were we biased, despite our assumptions, and did we assume a certain degree of privilege which then filtered through into our day-to-day teaching language?

Coloniality: the state or condition of control over a territory by people from another territory. This can lead to indigenous peoples becoming a minority group in an area where they were once a majority or dominant group.

Decolonisation: this is the process by which colonies, (see above), become independent of the colonising country. This can be a gradual and peaceful process but for some, violent native rebellions fuelled by nationalism.

Intersectionality: a term first used by Kimberlé Crenshaw and is the acknowledgment that everyone has their own unique experiences of discrimination and oppression and so we must consider everything and anything that can marginalise people - gender, race, class, sexual orientation, physical ability etc.

From the outset it was made clear that the language we use in the classroom is important. A consequence of what we are teaching makes it more problematic. For instance, the word and meaning of 'slum' is not in itself an issue, but the context and the way it is used is the real concern. There are plenty of local words to use so we should desist in using 19th century London slang as a generic term.

What words provoke the most difficulty? Those used to categorise different ethnicities can still exclude some groups or are centred on whiteness. 'Coloured' is now generally regarded as a pejorative term, so is 'black' acceptable? Some people regard themselves as brown, and in some cultures 'black' is still regarded as pejorative. 'BAME' is in common usage among all communities or POC. This latter term has been in use since at least 1786 in Henry Smeathman's suggestion to the then government to establish a colony for the Black Poor in Sierra Leone. Helpful detail of the scheme and why it was put forward can be found in the excellent *Black England* by Gretchen Gerzina. Ethnicity also creates further problems by linking race and culture, but in parts of the world such as the Middle East, racial colouring may be the same but cultural and religious backgrounds can be very different. Perhaps the answer is to ask the students themselves what language is appropriate. This may be equally as problematic. Does there even need to be an answer? Perhaps we should just be far more aware, more thoughtful, and careful in the language that we use and the context in which we use it.

Few people these days have a single identity, as my recent DNA results have shown me; it turns out that I am 72.9% North European, 15.3% Ashkenazi Jew, a mere 9.1% English and 2.7% Scandinavian, but I identify as British! So, who am I and is that part of the problem? We have to be honest with ourselves about this and appreciate the issues for our students who come from different cultural backgrounds and understandings to those being presented in our texts and lessons.

Geography is taught largely by white teachers (as evidenced by attendance at GA conference). It is perhaps inevitable that many teachers may unconsciously approach the subject from a purely white European perspective despite their best intentions. Equally, those colleagues with a non-white background face challenges just as fraught when confronted with a 'white' class, 'white' texts and a

‘white’ curriculum, examination specifications and papers. Perhaps a solution would have different ‘teaching’ communities engage more regularly with one another to discuss issues of curriculum and development of programmes of study from differing perspectives.

Teaching any subject can benefit from people who have different experiences in order to show the things we cannot see or have not seen. This applies to geography in particular, given its history and focus on people and places across the world. This sense of ‘pluriversality’ is a concept emerging from decolonial theory that provides a counternarrative to contemporary northern assumptions of the universal, something that is only now being recognised as more western academics are researching into and acknowledging indigenous knowledge. Current research in the Arctic and northern lands is a particularly good example.

There is clearly a need for a far more diverse range of views and canon of knowledge to inform our teaching to allow us and our students to recognise, accept and celebrate different viewpoints and experiences. Teachers and students alike should be valued for what they bring to the classroom by including different frames of reference and drawing on different experiences. Textbooks, even those published recently, may present a monocultural representation of events and topics. A move towards an ‘asset based’ curriculum focused on strengths would be welcome to present diversity in thought, culture, and traits as positive assets. Nevertheless, the connection between information literacy and what is included or left out from textbooks remains in the hands of the small group of influential textbook writers. This situation is slowly improving but also requires the review of examination specifications and programmes of study from KS1 onwards.

Critical discourse analysis through critical questioning, even from an early age, can be used to identify and change the value systems and actively disrupt the status quo. Critical questioning to analyse resources may include: which people does this data support? what perspectives have been included and/or excluded? is this a global view, or a view from the global north or global south or indeed is it another view entirely?

Maps are in common usage in the classroom but retain a strong colonial influence. Mercator’s projection can still be found in many classrooms with all its inherent distortions, while the Peters projection or a map with a different centre meridian, such as having India at its centre, or the world upside down, are noticeable by their absence and availability.

As teachers we face a number of questions which require answers if we are to move forward. We are, as chapter 64 of the Dao De Jing tells us ‘*At the beginning of the journey of a thousand miles*’, and that our CPD training may be that first single step. However, if anything is to change, we must persevere, engage with others and always draw into the conversation those who feel they are excluded.

Particular thanks go to Alia Alzougbi from Global Learning London for organising the facilitator Navan for the first session and for running the second session of our CPD training.

References and further reading

Refer also to the Post 16/HE reading list from writers with ethnic backgrounds.

Andrews K. (2021) *The New Age of Empire, How Racism and Colonialism Still Rule the World*, Allen Lane: London.

Gerzina, G. (2022) *Black England, A forgotten Georgian History*, John Murray: London.

Faloyin, D. (202) *Africa is not a country, Breaking Stereotypes of Modern Africa*. Harvill Secker, London.

Anderson, N., Das, S. and Whittall, D. (2021): Why the word slum should not be used in geography classrooms; *Decolonising Geography*:

<https://decolonisegeography.com/blog/2021/08/why-the-word-slum-should-not-be-used-in-geography-classrooms/#:~:text=%E2%80%9CThe%20word%20'slum'%20%E2%80%A6,government%20to%20provide%20these%20things> [27/3/22].

Future Learn. (2022) *Development and Planning in African Cities*: Exploring theories, policies and practices from Sierra Leone: <https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/african-cities> [27/3/22].

Shah, S. (2020) *The Next Great Migration. The Story of Movement on a Changing Planet*. Bloomsbury Publishing, London.

Mayne, A. (2007) *Slums the history of a global injustice*. Reaktion books Ltd: London.

Parsons, A. (2010) The seven myths of 'slums' - a summary: <https://www.sharing.org/information-centre/reports/seven-myths-%E2%80%98slums%E2%80%99-summary> [27/3/22].

The Skoll Foundation. (2019) Jockin Arputham, Founder of Slum Dwellers International, Skoll Awardee, Tribute Memorial: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fNizFv1ptNw&t=1s> [27/3/22].

Milner, C. (2020) Classroom strategies for tackling the whiteness of geography, *Teaching Geography*, 43.3, pp 105-7.

Milner, C., Robinson, H. and Garcia, H. (2021) How to start a conversation about diversity in education, *Teaching Geography*, 46.2, pp 59–60.

Anderson, N., Habib, B., Harris, S., Whittall, D. and Winter, C. (2022) Racial capitalism and the school geography curriculum, *Teaching Geography*, 47. 1, pp 15–8.

Sinclair, D., de Fonseca, A. (2022) Operationalising anti-racist pedagogy in a secondary geography classroom, *Teaching Geography*, 47.2, pp 59 – 60.

Reilly, S. (2022) Helping trainee teachers to decolonise the school geography curriculum, *Teaching Geography*, 47.2, pp 64–6.

Widdowson, J. (2016) *GCSE Geography OCR B Student Book*: Oxford University Press.

Challenging slum stereotypes

Hafsa Bobat Garcia
Portsmouth College

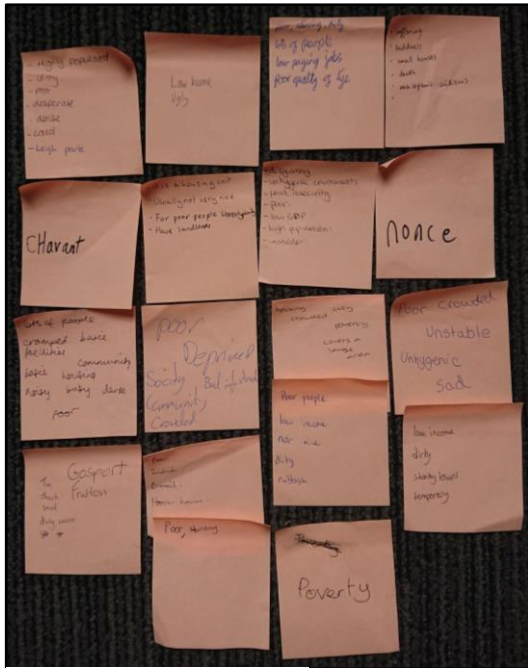
Slums. An inevitable consequence of rapid urbanisation in less developed countries as too many poor people, having too many children in rural areas, overwhelm cities with their lack of education and end up with no choice but “slumming it!”. Some of the problems facing the residents of these ‘unplanned’ and ‘illegal’ settlements include ‘poor sanitation’, ‘high rates of disease’ and ‘piles of uncollected waste’. City authorities with limited funds struggle to tackle the “slum problem” as there are just so many poor people ‘pouring into cities’. Despite their best intentions, there are just ‘not enough resources to cope’ with the influx. The main solution seems to be clearing away these problem areas and moving their residents into high-rise tower blocks.

So goes the narrative of popular geography textbooks from KS3 to A level. While some authors have made attempts to recognise the ‘strong sense of community’ found within some ‘slums’ and the ‘remarkable resilience’ of their residents, this often seems to be added more as an afterthought rather than challenging the concept of the ‘slum’ itself. Until recently I too had followed this approach, asking my students to define the term ‘slum’ unproblematically (‘a crowded urban area where people live in inadequate housing and poor living conditions’ according to one GCSE text; Widdowson, 2016 p.148) and then perhaps annotate a generic image to point out all the problems they face. Discussing some of the disadvantages of slum rehousing schemes had formed an important part of my A level lessons in the past. However, I had been unaware of the wider concerns of both academic geographers and ‘slum dwellers’ themselves when it comes to the term ‘slum’.

Over the past year my involvement in the Decolonising Geography Collective led me to consider these issues in more depth. I was introduced to Professor Alan Mayne’s (2017) book on the subject and I completed the excellent Future Learn course, ‘Development and Planning in African Cities’ (which I now recommend to my students) in preparation for replanning my approach to teaching about poor communities.

So, what exactly is the problem with this word: slum? And why should we reconsider the way we teach about ‘slums’ in geography lessons? Far from simply being another key geographical term which can be defined and used like any other, Professor Mayne describes the term as a ‘fundamentally deceitful construct’ and argues that while the word is used to describe what many ‘assume are indisputable realities’, in fact it is ‘merely a stereotype, a fantasy of its users’ imaginations’ (2017.p. 8-9). While urban poverty and the problems faced by the residents of disadvantaged urban communities are very real and should certainly not be downplayed, ‘slums’ are not. Rather, the term misleads and misrepresents to such an extent that it can have very real negative consequences for the residents of these communities when it is used by governments and city authorities. As geography teachers, we can play an important role in encouraging our students to think critically about what they are learning rather than accepting it without question.

With this approach in mind, I started a recent lesson on the topic by writing ‘SLUM’ on the board and asking my class to write down any words or phrases that came to mind - anything at all, either from their own general knowledge or from previous geography lessons. The outcome of this activity (Figure 1) clearly illustrated how the term is viewed almost entirely in a negative light, with several students



Author's photograph

going beyond more factual descriptions of poverty to value judgements such as 'ugly', 'sad', 'desperate', 'suffering' and even 'disgusting' and 'nonce'. Others named disadvantaged places in their local area, showing how the term has a much wider meaning in everyday use than a geography textbook might suggest. Annotating an image to identify problems such as 'overcrowding' or 'steep slopes' is a question that I have seen in both GCSE and A level exams.

To ensure that my class were still prepared for such a question but at the same time encouraging them to think beyond a simple list of 'slum problems', I still completed this activity but with a different approach. I avoided using a generic image but took the example of Kibera from the Future Learn course, making it clear where this place was and discussing its wider context. For example, the fact that less than 5% of the land is available for the urban poor, compared to 75% being utilised by the richest 10%

for uses including luxury golf courses. This division of land, which is often a legacy of racist colonial policies, can help to explain why 'slums' are so overcrowded; it is often more down to poor urban planning and inequality rather than the idea that there are just 'too many poor people having too many children' for the city to cope with.

I also encouraged pupils to add balance to their answers by thinking beyond 'problems' to consider the important role that these communities often play in a city. For example, what may be annotated as 'uncollected waste' could in fact be an important source of income and a recycling service, helping to make the city more sustainable. (For a place-specific example we looked at Cairo's Manshiyat Naser suburb).

We then discussed more explicitly why the term 'slum' has been criticised, whether we should even use it at all in geography and some possible alternatives such as 'informal settlement', 'poor urban community' and 'self-built housing' or whether it was more appropriate to use place-specific names such as 'favela' or 'gecekondu'. Students were interested to learn that, according to Mayne (2017) the term was originally used in 19th century London slang to refer to 'hidden away places of low repute'. Does a slang word really belong as a key term in geography today? Especially one that is so deeply tied-up with racialised and colonial thinking. Finally, we considered what some poor urban residents themselves have said about the term, such as those from the South African Abahlali base Mjondolo movement and the global network Slum Dwellers International: in a heart-felt tribute video available on YouTube, former SDI president Jockin Arputham talks about what's wrong with the term 'slum' and why poor urban communities should be valued and helped, not hidden away or eliminated.

After the lesson I asked students for their feedback; two of their comments are presented here:
You can download the slides and worksheet used in this lesson at this link: shorturl.at/ehzB8

"I think that the term 'slum' should be avoided wherever possible but mentioned at first so that people can be educated about it and learn to also avoid it in the future" - Duncan Jeynes

"It seems that the term 'slum' has been used too broadly for too long by educators, text book producers as well as members of the media with little thought to it's true meaning - the term has negative connotations that ultimately serve to subjugate the close-knit nature of many slum communities. I also feel that it is a term that's definition was and remains to this day too vague. It has often been used inappropriately to describe areas that simply are nothing like the true slum

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Why do we live in hazardous places?

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Each year I take final year University students to study volcanic hazards and emergency management around the Bay of Naples, Italy. Without fail, each year as we start to drive up the flanks of Mount Somma (Vesuvius volcano), one of the first questions students will ask is; *'why do these people choose to live where the risk of volcanic hazard is so high?'*. I respond by asking students to show their hand if they would live in the Bay of Naples. Occasionally, the odd hand may go up, but most students would clearly indicate that they never would. At the end of the field course, I ask the same questions again: *would the students live in the Bay of Naples?* In most instances, I get the opposite response, with more students saying 'yes', they would live in the Bay of Naples, but with a few caveats, mostly focusing on things such as how they would reduce their risk; actively seek information to evacuate if there is a pending hazard; and have a contingency plan.

The question of why people live in areas of high risk, whether it is a coastline prone to flooding and tsunami inundation to seismically active zones and/or on the flanks of volcano is a complex one.



Urban areas on the flank of Mount Somma- Vesuvius, Naples, Italy. Source: Author

Seismic active zones, where plates are colliding and/or being ripped apart, are some of the most dramatic landscapes in the world. Humans are aesthetically tuned to crave dramatic landscapes. Unfortunately, invariably these dramatic and breath-taking landscapes are forged by catastrophic events. Volcanic eruptions deposit thick layers of ash and pyroclastic material, and where rivers overtop their banks provide some of the most fertile soils that drive agriculture and local economies. Historically, coast and deltas are sites where some of the greatest civilizations grew and thrived. Nature and natural hazards provide much which aids our prosperity.

Post-16 & HE Phase Committee

What makes places we deem as hazardous so attractive is the same thing that makes them dangerous. Hazardous areas are places of periodic disruption and change. And change is the progenitor of diversity, opportunity and abundance. Where there is a hazard, there are also opportunities. As humans we are drawn to opportunities, particularly where we believe it progresses to growth, stability and security.

As we better understand natural phenomena and risk, avoidance is one of the best solutions to reduce loss of lives and livelihood. Not living and building in hazardous areas could significantly reduce the number and frequency of disasters. However, it is our stubbornness and willingness not to fear occasional disasters associated with natural phenomenon, that has led to the development, growth and prosperity of some of the world's greatest cities (e.g. London, Tokyo, Naples, Rome, New Orleans etc.). Sometimes adapting to change, rather than avoiding it, is part of our existence and evolution. Living in hazardous areas has driven our understanding of nature and led to some of the world's greatest inventions and engineering practices.

As a young Risk Manager working for the Government of Jamaica over 25 years ago, I remember going to a local coastal area to encourage residents to evacuate due to an approaching hurricane that our models showed would generate a significant storm surge. Very few residents took the advice. Most of the houses were destroyed but the residents promptly rebuilt.

Four years later, when there was another storm pending, I went back to the village to again encourage residents to relocate, with offer of alternative houses, paid for by the government. The residents refused. When I asked why, the common responses included: 'this is our home'; 'generations of us have lived here'; 'we have been through this before and we will get through it again'; 'it is peaceful'; 'it is beautiful and the sea gives us all we need to live and survive, what more you want from life?'

Somehow, I found myself empathising with what they said. As humans we have attachment to places. We identify with places that have meaning, history, and heritage and are part of our culture. Places are intrinsic to our identity. How many of us would readily give up our identity and who we are for a risk that may never occur in our lifetime?

So next time you question why people live in hazardous zone, remember it is not as simple as: 'it is due to poverty'; 'they don't have alternate accommodation; or 'they are not aware of the risk'. It is only by exploring the nuances of perceptions, belonging, identity, economics, risk acceptance and adaptation that you may be able to start answering this question, and in turn consider how to develop effective strategies to reduce the potential impact of disasters.

Place Matters! Rediscovering the role of geography in the energy transition

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This time last year, I wrote an article for *Geography Matters* focusing on the rapid changes taking place within the world's energy systems as a result of the global ambitions to reach net zero carbon emissions and the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. Since then, the subject of energy has increasingly dominated the headlines as a combination of factors have precipitated a worldwide energy crisis. As such, I thought it would be useful to write a short follow up to consider the events that have unfolded over the last 12 months, their local and global impacts, and the ways in which they illustrate just how much 'place matters'.

Focusing firstly on the ongoing energy crisis, the combined impact of a rebound in energy demand following the COVID-19 pandemic to record levels, energy supply limitations due to maintenance backlogs the Ukraine conflict, and associated embargoes on the importation of Russian fossil fuels have resulted in a dramatic increase in global energy prices. Wholesale gas prices increased from under £8 per therm in May 2020 to £394 per therm in February 2022, resulting in UK households facing a £129 billion increase in their energy bills (equivalent to 5.1% of GDP)¹. Across Europe the prospect of widespread fuel poverty has resulted in governments allocating over €800 million in the form of tax relief or market price caps to shield consumers². Meanwhile, the same record energy costs have seen private and state-owned oil and gas companies report record profits: Saudi Aramco reported an annual net profit of \$161.1 bn for 2022, the largest ever profit recorded by an oil and gas company in corporate history.

The resultant price shocks and their impacts on inflation have resulted in a sudden and dramatic shift in global energy policy to one with a much sharper focus on energy security. As one of the key components of the 'energy trilemma' that until recently received relatively little attention³, this has triggered a rapid reconfiguration of energy flows in which local energy production and the import of energy from nations considered to be reliable partners has risen to the top of the policy agenda. Prior to this crisis, Germany for example was reliant upon Russia for over half of its gas usage. Following the cancellation of Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline connection to Russia and the termination of gas supplies through the existing Nord Stream 1 pipeline following a series of explosions in September 2022, Germany had to rapidly address the resultant deficit in energy supplies. This has been achieved through a combination of energy efficiency measures over the summer and an increased reliance on gas imports via pipelines from Norway and via LNG (Liquid Natural Gas) carriers from the US and the Middle East⁴. Unfortunately, in a situation reminiscent of the global inequalities in access to COVID-19 vaccines, there is emerging evidence that some of these gas supplies were diverted from the Global South, resulting in widespread power cut in countries including Bangladesh and Pakistan⁵.

A silver lining to this energy shock has been what some energy analysts have referred to as the 'Great Clean Energy Acceleration'. As the cost of fossil-fueled generated energy has escalated, then the

¹ <https://www.carbonbrief.org/analysis-why-uk-energy-bills-are-soaring-to-record-highs-and-how-to-cut-them/>

² <https://www.bruegel.org/dataset/national-policies-shield-consumers-rising-energy-prices>

³ <https://www.worldenergy.org/transition-toolkit/world-energy-trilemma-index>

⁴ <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/where-does-germany-stand-gas-supply-2023-01-20/>

⁵ <https://qz.com/power-hungry-europe-is-leaving-developing-countries-sta-1849624921>

comparative value and competitiveness of renewable energy sources has become increasingly apparent. A progressive increase in the efficiency of solar photovoltaic panels coupled with reductions in manufacturing and installation costs have resulted in an 88% reduction in the cost of solar energy between 2010 and 2021. Similarly, the increasing size of wind turbines and their concomitant ability to harvest wind energy has resulted in reductions in the cost of energy generated by onshore and offshore wind of 68% and 60% respectively⁶. The accelerating pace of renewable projects resulted in 2022 being the first year in which the amount of electricity generated by solar and wind (22%) exceeded the amount generated through the burning of gas (20%) and coal (16%) in the European Union⁷.

As the mix of energy feeding the electricity grid in countries such as the UK becomes increasingly dependent on wind and sunlight, then the utility and value of a knowledge and understanding of weather and climate – a mainstay of our discipline – becomes ever more apparent. With the solar and wind resource varying over space and time, then there will be an increasing trade in energy between nations via interconnectors, allowing the broader energy system to make the most effective use of the energy generated and preventing the curtailment of renewable generation assets when there is no domestic demand. The recent commissioning of the North Sea Link between UK and Norway with a capacity of 1.4 GW (sufficient to power 90,000 homes) is already facilitating the exchange of Norwegian hydropower and British wind power depending on the relative generation capacity and demand⁸.

Another major change associated with the energy transition is a gradual move away from energy generation systems dominated by large, centralised power stations to a more decentralised system with an increasing focus on local energy production and consumption. The development of ‘place-based energy systems’ in which local energy production is matched to local energy consumption needs provides another exciting illustration of the ways in which knowledge and expertise of geographers can play an influential role in accelerating the drive towards net zero⁹.

The curricula we deliver inevitably require our students to engage with some uncomfortable truths about the increasingly apparent and dramatic impacts of climate change and our uncomfortable proximity to a range of potential climate tipping points. Nonetheless, as Greta Thunberg commented, ‘hope only comes from actions’ and it is clear that geography and geographers have the potential to play a central role in the decarbonised energy systems in which place matters more than ever. Over the last 12 months, I have been amazed by the explosion of careers opportunities associated with the energy transition and encouraged by the abilities of the geographers we teach to secure graduate careers in this space. I hope that these opportunities continue to enhance an appreciation of the value of our discipline at a time when the broad ranging knowledge and skills of geographers centered around an understanding of space, place and human-environment interactions could never be more important.

⁶ <https://www.irena.org/publications/2022/Jul/Renewable-Power-Generation-Costs-in-2021>

⁷ <https://ember-climate.org/insights/research/european-electricity-review-2023/>

⁸ <https://www.nationalgrid.com/national-grid-powers-worlds-longest-subsea-interconnector-between-uk-and-norway>

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