Popular geographies and geographical imaginations: contemporary English-language geographical magazines

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Abstract English-language geographical magazines present very different geographical imaginations to their readers than those portrayed by academic geographers, with whom the editors and publishers of those magazines have very little contact. There is a mutual lack of appreciation – which could have substantial consequences for the academic discipline. To increase academic geographers' appreciation of the popular geographies being portrayed, the contents of recent volumes of three magazines – *National Geographic*, *Geographical*, and *New Zealand Geographic* – are distilled, with their major themes identified.

Keywords popular geographies, geographical imaginations, geographical magazines

> Geography magazines, such as *The Geographical* and *National Geographic* … have a world wide audience of millions. Indeed, in terms of size of audience, an interest in geography may be judged one of the most widespread, disciplinary-related, intellectual pursuits. … Yet it is not too great an exaggeration to say that academic geography is conducted as if these forums did not exist; as if geography was an almost entirely university-based specialism. In contrast to other disciplines with a large popular audience, such as history and natural science, academic geographers have little active involvement with popular outlets (for example, not only do academics play a major role in magazines like *History Today* and *The New Scientist* but they use these platforms to develop debates and encourage prospective students into their disciplines). (Bonnett, 2003, 56)
>
> All geographers know the value of a compass (*Geographical*, January 2008, 90)

To many people geography is a body of knowledge whereas to others it is an academic discipline which studies that subject matter. The discipline was only institutionalised in schools and universities in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, although its subject matter was taught long before that in different arena (Withers and

Mayhew, 2002). But is geography's subject matter as popularly understood the prime focus of the academic discipline or is there, as Bonnett (2003) implies, a major difference between the two: is the geography done by Geographers separate from the geography understood by non-Geographers? And if so, what are the implications of that that gap between popular (or vernacular, Johnston, 1986) and academic geography for the latter? (The term popular is used here, as by Bonnett, in line with *Oxford English Dictionary* definitions: 'intended for or suited to the understanding or taste of ordinary people … intended for and directed at a general readership'.[1])

Bonnett raised a number of issues: Is popular geography hostile to academic involvement?; Is popular geography an embarrassment to those involved in the 'serious pursuit' of the academic discipline?; Does popular geography present a 'badly wrong' view of the discipline?; and Is popular geography 'a throw-back to the imperial mind-set of racist 'foreign adventures', a benighted condition from which academics have managed to extricate themselves'? (Bonnett, 2003). Few have risen to his challenge and addressed those questions: the only response to his paper focused on links between school and academic geography in the UK, omitting the role of popular geographies in the creation of 'geographical imaginations' (Stannard, 2003). Bonnett (2008, 114-118) returned to the issue briefly in his later book, with a short discussion of the National Geographic Society and what it promotes as 'geography' – 'world knowledge', emphasising development and environmental campaigning, travel and international news.

It is generally appreciated within the academic discipline, although with little foundational detail, that the geographical imaginations promoted through popular magazines differ very substantially from what is taught and researched in universities. This has major potential consequences for public knowledge of, and respect for, the geographical profession. To extend that appreciation, a necessary initial step is gaining a deeper understanding of the popular magazines and the images of geography that they currently retail. This is desirable not just for its own sake but, much more importantly, its implications for health of the academic discipline within contemporary higher education systems. Geography, as many histories have demonstrated (e.g. Johnston, 2003; White, 2008), has struggled to prosper in many university systems – and continues to do so in some, even those where for a time it thrived (Holmes, 2002). Appreciation of the popular geographies and the geographical imaginations that they portray and, even more, interaction with those practices, could lead to better promotion of academic geographical imaginations. In the continuing competition for space and other resources within academia, geographers need to explore many 'political' strategies, and a closer alliance with the producers of popular geographies may assist with that.

A preface to that task is reported here through an analysis of the contents of three popular English-language geographical magazines; a wider examination of differences across language realms is left for later consideration.[2] *National Geographic* was selected because of its long-established world reputation – it is the

[1] http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/50184211?single=1&query_type=word&queryword=popular&first=1&max_to_show=10

[2] French-language geographical magazines appear to have greater involvement from academic geographers: indeed, one is on the editorial board of the French-language edition of *National Geographic*.

'market leader'; *Geographical* (formerly *Geographical Magazine*) because it is well-established in the UK market and, unlike the other two, has a formal connection with academic geography because its title is owned by the Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers); and *New Zealand Geographic* because it focuses on a small national market in a country where geography has been well represented in both schools and universities for more than half-a-century.[3] The material presented here is based on perusal and distilling of each magazine's contents over recent years and a more detailed analysis of that material in a recent single year – 2007. The goal is straightforward: to identify the dominant character of the magazines' contents and the geographical imaginations they portray.

Defining geography: subject and discipline

According to the regular column in *Geographical* about its parent body:

> Geography is about the understanding of the people, places and environments of our world, the processes by which they are changing, and the interconnections between them – both locally and globally.[4]

National Geographic is less explicit: its publisher, the National Geographic Society, exists 'For the increase and diffusion of geographic knowledge', towards which it, as a 'nonprofit scientific and educational organization' has since 1888 'supported more than 7,000 explorations and research projects, adding to knowledge of earth, sea, and sky'.[5] Its editor for 55 years, Gilbert Grosvenor, drew on lines from Tennyson's *Ulysses* (Grosvenor, 1957, 1):

> The key phrase, which suggests a theme for this history of the National Geographic Society, is simply "roaming with a hungry heart". The world teems with people who long to visit faraway places, to travel adventurously, to see strange customs and races, to explore mysteries of the sea and air. Not many persons can do these things in the physical sense, but they can venture far and wide through the pages of the NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC MAGAZINE.

Finally, when it was launched in 1989 its first issue simply proclaimed that '*New Zealand Geographic* will examine the important geographic themes of our times'.[6]

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[3] *Australian Geographic* and *Canadian Geographic* are very similar, nationally-oriented magazines. It is not claimed that *New Zealand Geographic* is typical of the three but the basic patterns described here apply to them all. *African Geographic*, on the other hand, has a slightly different mission, although it has combined with the other three, plus *Geographical*, in a recent joint project (Johnston 2009).

[4] It continues: 'The Society carries out a wide range of activities to support these aims. We support research groups [the former Institute of British Geographers which merged with the RGS in 1995]; promote geography within the national curriculum; produce scholarly publications; provide training in scientific field techniques and expeditions; offer information through our large map collection, library and picture library; and engage the *wider public through our popular national lecture series'* (my emphasis).

[5] In a recent issue of the magazine the number has been increased to 8,000.

[6] In a recent issue (92, July/August 2008), the publishers of *New Zealand Geographic* announced the establishment of a New Zealand Geographic Society whose members will 'be supporters and protectors of New Zealand's life, culture and sciences' as the promote 'New Zealand's natural and cultural heritage'. There is also a long-established New Zealand Geographical Society, which has published the academic journal *New Zealand Geographer* since 1945. In the following issue, *New Zealand Geographic* defined geography as 'Geography is the study of the physical features of the earth and its climate, population, and the interplay between nature and humanity. By this measure, climate change is the most significant geographical story of our generation and one that is desperately important to comprehend. Our future on earth depends on it.'.

These definitions differ substantially from academic geographers' characterisations of their discipline, whether or not they agree with Haggett's (1990, 8) contention that Hartshorne's (1959, 21) definition of geography as 'concerned to provide accurate, orderly, and rational description and interpretation of the variable character of the earth's surface' is both the best-known and most widely used. (Bonnett – 2008, 110 – disagrees, for example, and presents geography – pp. 6, 121 – as 'an attempt to find and impose order on a seemingly chaotic world … [it] … helps us imagine that there is meaning and sense in the world. Geography allows us to see order in, and impose order on, what otherwise would be chaos'.) Whatever their definition, however, few academic geographers would adopt Grosvenor's stress on travel and the exotic; the geographical imaginations promoted by academic geographers bear little apparent relation, it seems, to those portrayed in geographical magazines aimed at popular audiences although both – as demonstrated here – seek to advance an appreciation of areal differentiation.

The magazines

National Geographic, published by the National Geographic Society (postal subscribers are members), first appeared in 1888. Initially intended to be a scientific journal, the link with academic geographers was soon broken (Pauly, 1979; Schulten, 2001) and it became a popular magazine, for many years under the editorial direction of Gilbert Grosvenor (Grosvenor, 1957). The current contents reflect that long period of market-building and identity-development. Several histories have explored aspects of the Society and its magazine (Abramson, 1987; Bryan, 1987; Poole, 2004) and academic works have focused on specific issues such as its photography (Lutz and Collins, 1993; Rothenberg, 2007) and representation of particular areas (Steet, 2000; Tuason, 1999).

National Geographic is produced by a large staff. The January 2007 issue, for example, lists an editor-in-chief, an associate editor, a managing editor and three executive editors, plus 13 senior editors (each with a specific brief such as manuscripts, design, photography and 'geography & world affairs'). There are three assistant editors, four text editors, seven senior writers, four writers, 21 researchers, and 20 listed as responsible for various aspects of the illustrations (photography, design, artwork etc.) plus a large administrative and production staff.

Each monthly issue contained c.160 pages in 2007 with only a small amount of advertising matter, none of it in the central portion occupied by the magazine's core material of articles. Some advertising is linked to the magazine's basic themes; in 2003, for example, Ricoh placed a series of full-page 'Earth diaries' on such topics as virgin mangroves and conserving flora and fauna in Brunei as examples of its environmental stewardship. Each issue was dominated by 5 or 6 major articles, occupying just under three-quarters of the pages. There was also a number of regular contributions, usually 2-3 pages long: a few of them – such as 'Visions of earth', comprising three double-page pictures – appeared every month; others – such as 'Environment', 'Science', 'Wildlife', 'Space', 'Geography', 'Fossils' and 'expeditions' – appeared less frequently.[7] There was also a regular short introductory

[7] The nature of these short pieces changes over time,. In 2003, for example, , a *Washington Post* staff writer contributed 12 one-page articles under the heading 'The science of things' and there were also regular sections on: 'Geographica: the people, places and creatures of our universe'; 'Behind the scenes

piece 'From the editor', several pages of letters from readers, and the back page reprinted an early photograph from the magazine.

National Geographic's editor for much of the 20th century established seven underpinning principles (Grosvenor, 1957, 4-5):

1. Absolute accuracy;
2. 'Abundance of beautiful, instructive and artistic illustrations';
3. Everything published to have permanent value;
4. All personalities and trivia to be avoided;
5. Nothing of a partisan or controversial character;
6. 'Only what is of a kindly nature is printed about any country or people, everything unpleasant or unduly critical being avoided'; and
7. The content of each issue should be timely.

As a consequence of adhering to these while producing 660 issues, he claimed that 'each issue … has been accepted by the public as a highly readable textbook'. *National Geographic* is also published in 27 different foreign-language editions,[8] the Society publishes other, more specialist magazines (*National Geographic Kids, National Geographic Little Kids, National Geographic Adventure,* and *National Geographic Traveler*), and it has its own TV channel.[9]

Geographical (formerly, and still often known as, *The Geographical Magazine*) was founded in 1935 by Michael Heathorn Huxley, a soldier-diplomat who used the magazine to present what his obituarist (Anon, 1979, 167) called a vehicle for his 'own rather esoteric ideas, illuminating many curious and unexplored byways of geography'. He hoped it would be adopted by the Royal Geographical Society (RGS) but this did not happen and so it was produced by an independent company, most of whose trustees were RGS Fellows. After his retirement in 1959 it has been produced by a number of companies, linkedo the RGS which owns the title and is identified as the publisher. The RGS receives a licence fee based on the dividends from the shares and that income is placed in 'a fund for the advancement of exploration and research and the promotion of geographical knowledge'. For some time, notably under successive editors in the 1960s-1970s (Walter Hingston, Derek Weber and Ian Bain), the *Geographical Magazine* had closer links to the academic profession than is currently the case and it carried articles written by academic geographers:[10] in a survey of the magazine's coverage of the 'eastern bloc', Matless et al. (2008) refer to 49 separate articles, 13 of whose authors are readily identified as academic geographers,[11] with an article by one of them (Hamilton, 1965) used to examine the

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at the National Geographic Society'; plus a single-page item contributed by one of the Society's staff members entitled 'Cultures of the world: local knowledge provides a foundation for global understanding', which comprised a small amount of text plus four small photographs on a wide range of topics – Malta, Turkey, Vancouver, New York and England, for example.

[8] These separate editions cover: Brazil; Bulgaria, China, Croatia, Czechia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Indonesia, Israel, Italy, Japan, Korea, Latin America, Netherlands/Belgium, Nordic Countries, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain, Taiwan, Thailand and Turkey. Although many articles are translated and carried in a lot, it not all, of the separate editions there is also much that is not common.

[9] *Canadian Geographic* publishes special issues on travel.

[10] For example the December 1963 issue included articles by Michael Wise on the M4, by Eva Taylor on a new atlas of Britain, and by Gerald Crone on modern maps. The book reviews included one on George Dury's text on *The East Midlands and the Peak*.

[11] They include Frank Carter, Tom Elkins, Tony French, Ian Hamilton and David M Smith. One of the 'non-geographer' authors is the novelist Alan Sillitoe.

extent to which he had adopted the characteristics of 'conventional travel writing'. Today *Geographical* proclaims its market niche through a banner across the top of the front cover – 'Culture, Wildlife, Environment, Science, Travel'.[12]

Geographical appears monthly and can be purchased as part of a Fellow's RGS subscription. The first ten issues in 2007 contained 116 pages, the last two contained 102 and the 2008 issues only 98 each. In 2007 it carried some 20 pages of advertising in most issues, including a separate section – 'Geomart' – linked to the Fair Trade organisation, as well as a monthly section – 'Essential gear' – which evaluates and advertises particular products (see below). *Geographical* has a much smaller staff than *National Geographic*. The December 2007 issue lists an editor, features editor, art director, senior staff writer, picture editor, subeditor, equipment editor, cartographer, and special reports editor alongside those responsible for the production and administration.

Through 2007, the average issue of *Geographical* contained 8 main articles (seven in the shorter last two issues), comprising just over 40 per cent of the page total (a little over half the space allocated to articles in the other two magazines). Each issue included a 4-6 page book review section; 116 separate books were reviewed during the year, all but 21 of them by three reviewers only. Each issue also included a list of 'top ten reads' submitted by a 'celebrity' and a brief review of a 'Geographical Classic' selected by one of the regular reviewers.[13] Every issue of *Geographical* also included a number of 'Regulars', including: a 3-page section of short notes on contemporary issues ('Worldwatch');[14] a 1-page 'Climatewatch'; a 1-page 'Geopolitical hotspot' – invariably a picture with overlaid text; a 3-page article on one of the UK's Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty written by a staff member; a two-page map illustrating 'State of the world' (many of them taken from the *State of the World Atlas*: Smith, 2008); one or two pages of news from the RGS, plus (in most months) an advertisement for one of the society's regular events; a 1-page piece entitled 'From the collection' illustrating esoterica from the RGS holdings (such as Mary Kingsley's fur hat and Henry Bates's pincushion); a 4-page piece on 'Essential gear' (including advertising for 'ten of the best'), such as vertical rock climbing and audio equipment ; a 2-page section called 'Out and about' comprising hints for travellers; a 3-page item on photography ('Geophoto'); and a back-page 'In conversation with' a celebrity. There is also an editorial (almost invariably linked to the theme of one of the main articles) and letters from readers.

New Zealand Geographic, launched in 1989, is published by an independent company. It is one among several 'national' geographical magazines; others include *Australian Geographic*, published by the Australian Geographic Society since 1985, and *Canadian Geographic*, published by Canadian Geographic Enterprises on behalf of the Royal Canadian Geographical Society. *New Zealand Geographic* has no link to any other geographical institution, academic or otherwise, however; it is a stand-alone

[12] *National Geographic*'s website has the following list across the top of its home page – Animals, Environment, History, Maps, News, People & Places, Photography & Video, World Music – which provides a similar indication of the range of material it covers.

[13] More than 60 such 'classics' – not one of them written by an academic geographer – have now been reviewed.

[14] A letter-writer in the February, 2009, issue praised *Geographical* for the 'titbits of information' that it unearths.

publication which uses the generic term geography to sell its contents. (Under its logo – the head of a tuatara, a New Zealand lizard – in the editorial information column, it is presented as simply 'The journal of New Zealand'.) It appears bi-monthly; in 2007 each issue comprised 112 pages, with very little commercial advertising. The listed staff included only an editor, deputy editor, art director and web designer alongside those responsible for administration and production; the cartography is contracted out to a specialist firm. In 1994, *New Zealand Geographic* won the inaugural Communications Media Award for 'excellence in journalism'.

Each issue of *New Zealand Geographic* in 2007 carried 5-6 articles, occupying some 70 per cent of the page total. There were several (2-9) pages of reviews, covering 24 books during the year; 12 were contributed by the editor and six by a former editor. Regular features included an editorial, readers' letters, several pages of brief items of 'Geo-News', a two-page article on some aspect of 'Weather' contributed by a staff member of the New Zealand Metservice, and a 2/3-page article from the Executive Director of the Sir Peter Blake Trust, an environmental charity set up after his death.

All three magazines have websites. *Geographical*'s largely contains details about the current issue, plus advertising. *New Zealand Geographic*'s also offers information about the current issue plus an archive of abridged versions of earlier articles and an interactive page with a small number of features. *National Geographic* has by far the most extensive website. Each published article includes a link to a web-page where more material on the subject is available. For example, associated with a January 2007 article on the growth of Dubai, the website includes an interview with the author about the assignment, whereas articles on humpback whales and humming birds are supplemented by videos, and that on an Arctic trek has more pictures and an interview with the photographer. In addition, the magazine's main website offers, alongside information on the latest issue, a number of pages about photography, an archive of past articles and other material, videos, interactive games and quizzes, blogs involving several of the magazine's staff which invite reader comments, and a page called Geo-Pedia which is a 'wiki-style companion to our magazine feature stories'.

The approach; presenting geography

All three magazines share two basic, defining characteristics: emphasis on the visual, especially colour photography; and a journalistic style. They are written by journalists and illustrated by professional photographers, cartographers and artists.

The visual

High quality photography has characterised *National Geographic* for most of its publishing history (Grosvenor, 1957; Abramson, 1987, 131-144); it was a pioneer user of colour photography, and its articles are invariably illustrated with pictures taken by professionals, who are named along with the author in a box of credits at the end of each issue. (Rothenberg, 2007, provides biographical studies of two photojournalists who made a substantial number of contributions each to *National Geographic*.) The other two magazines also employ professional photographers and photojournalists, most of them acknowledged in the credits.

The extent of the photographic material is readily illustrated quantitatively. The 94 articles in *Geographical*'s 2007 issues covered 569 pages,[15] and included 729 separate photographs – averaging almost eight per article – covering 388 pages, just over two-thirds of the total space allocated to articles. Each issue contained two articles comprising captioned photographs only: the first, all by photojournalists, covered a range of topics; the other comprised a series of thematic selections of (mainly nineteenth century) photographs from the RGS archives.

New Zealand Geographic's six 2007 issues contained 33 articles covering 472 pages, of which 264 (56 per cent of the total) were occupied by some 467 photographs. The *National Geographic* dedicated an even larger component of its space to photographs. Its 68 articles published in 2007 occupied 1388 pages, 68 per cent of those allocated to the articles and some 49 per cent of the magazine's total pages for the year.

Other illustrative material was less in evidence. *National Geographic* has a major reputation for its cartography, and it did much in the 20th century developing cartographic imaginations through the many large maps enclosed with the magazine (see Poole, 2004; Schulten, 2001). Most of the 2007 articles had at least one colour, excellently crafted, map – usually a relatively small one to give relevant locational information (thematic maps were almost entirely absent). Some articles had more, and larger, maps – such as a two-page pull-out map of the Amazonian forest in the January issue – but in general these performed an important informational function only and were rarely major components of the story. The is true with the other magazines. A map illustrated only one-third of *New Zealand Geographic*'s articles, with several to bolster the argument in only one article, on climate change. *Geographical* is similarly sparing in use of maps, apart from its regular monthly feature on 'State of the world' in which a thematic map was the main focus with a brief commentary; the 'Geography' feature – which appeared in nine of *National Geographic*'s 2007 issues – also focused on thematic maps, such as those of the most polluted places in the world, of the percentage of the population aged over 85 in the USA, and of earthquake epicentres in the Midwest. *National Geographic* also has a long tradition of including separate fold-out maps: there were four of these in 2007, some of particular areas and the others thematic. Where relevant, the three magazines also carry informative colour diagrams to illustrate an article's content.

The text

As with much popular journalism – the magazines are very clear that is their market: *Geographical* states that 'Editorial proposals are only required from established writers and photojournalists' and *New Zealand Geographic* that 'Most articles .. are commissioned, however, contributions are welcome' – the writing style differs very substantially from academic publications, as well as those, such as *Geography Review*,[16] aimed at high school students. The majority of articles include substantial amounts of material dominated by reported speech, including (claimed) direct quotations. There is no indication how those cited were selected but their opinions/experience are presented as indicative of the generality. The clear goal is to personalise material, bringing it to life through individual experience (what

[15] The front cover listings also include one of the regular features at the end of each issue – 'Essential gear' – but they have been excluded from these calculations.
[16] See http://www.philipallan.co.uk/content.aspx?PAGE=PROD272:&SUB=10.

Grosvenor's grandson – Grosvenor, 1988, 90 – termed 'the classic, first-person, eyewitness-account style'[17]) – frequently sustained by the supporting photographic material. Even articles reporting the results of academic research, such as some of those in *National Geographic* drawing on its funded projects (all authored by a staff writers rather than the sponsored academics), adopt the same strategy by quoting the researcher.

Presentation of material through reported speech is frequently set within another trope – the record of a journey. Thus an article on the Great Wall of China (*National Geographic*, January 2003) reports on a journey along the wall, the author experiencing different events (such as funerals) and interviewing individuals en route. That approach (typical of what Matless at al., 2008, term 'conventional travel writing') dominates all three magazines. Rather than offer an overall synthesis the author reports a series of place-to-place visits, usually associated with meeting residents; geography is to be learned through vicarious travel writing if it cannot be experienced in the field. As such, the magazines' contents form a particular sub-set of the wider genre of travel writing that some academic geographers have addressed (Duncan and Gregory, 1989).

In *Geographical*, such articles encourage visits to the places covered; they are accompanied by a box – entitled 'Co-ordinates' – giving information on when to go there, how to get there, where to stay, and what to do. In January 2007, *Geographical* also reported on the First Choice Responsible Tourism Awards, under the title 'How Green is your holiday?'. Although the other magazines do not promote tourism to the same extent – some of their advertising is for tourist packages – their format is clearly designed in part to encourage visits to at least some of the places discussed, and external (including commercial) perceptions link travel/tourism to geography.[18] *Geographical* is the most explicit, with 'Travel' one of the five themes in its banner headline; one 2007 article, for example, promoted the rebuilding of Lebanon's tourism industry with reference to a new mountain trail.[19]

The content: promoting geography

Each magazine is extremely catholic in its subject matter. Within material ranging from slavery to traditional wrestlers, magical beans to green roofs on buildings, the history of flight to death, and porpoises trapped in herring weirs to arctic nesting birds in Australia, however, one basic feature and a number of common themes can be identified.

Absence of academic geography

A major feature of all three magazines – to a slightly greater extent in two than the third – is an absence of reference to the academic discipline of geography and the work of academic geographers. Indeed virtually nothing in *National Geographic* even

[17] Of course, some human geography research similarly seeks to appreciate through personalised reporting, but the ethics and protocols of such practices, including their contextualisation, are very different form the journalistic procedures deployed in the magazines.
[18] The National Geographic Society publishes separate magazines *National Geographic Adventure,* and *National Geographic Traveler.*
[19] *National Geographic* carried an article in 2003 on the British Three Peaks challenge.

recognises the discipline's existence, let alone draws on its work.[20] In the introduction to his centenary celebratory volume, for example, Bryan makes no reference to geography when writing of a 'century of exploding scientific knowledge and ecological awareness' (Bryan, 1987, 18). Nor do many of the Society's research grants apparently go to geographers:[21] of the five that were the subject of articles in 2003, one was to an evolutionary biologist, one to an anthropologist, and the other three to archaeologists; only one grant was featured in 2007 – to an ecologist-photographer who provided an articled on ants,.

New Zealand Geographic is totally detached from the academic discipline. When launched in 1989 the first issue included a welcome from Kenneth Cumberland, doyen among the country's academic geographers.[22] Its initial advisory board included another University of Auckland geographer – Grant Anderson – but this board was dropped fairly early in the magazine's existence (see Johnston, 2004).[23]

Compared to those two magazines, *Geographical* is somewhat closer to the academic discipline of geography; it has an Editorial Advisory Board of 12 (in December 2007), including the RGS Director (formerly a geography academic), two retired university vice-chancellors (and former academic geographers), one part-time academic geographer, one retired geography educator, and a geography graduate now Director-General of the Ordnance Survey.[24] Nevertheless, only one 2007 article was both specifically and exclusively devoted to the academic discipline.[25] The August issue included a four-page article – one page of which was taken up by pictorial material[26] – by its Features Editor entitled 'More than just maps and mountains'. The RGS-IBG annual academic conference occurred that month and the article's purpose asked what place does a subject so firmly associated with exploration and mapping the unknown

[20] The Society did launch a parallel journal in 1985 called *National Geographic Research*, *A Scientific Journal*, which did carry some material by academic geographers. It had an initial circulation of some 5,000 copies (Abramson, 1987, 249), but lasted for only six years. Bryan's (1987, 443) depiction of its contents refers to 'published articles on archaeology, biogeography, botany, ecology, entomology, geology, historical geography, palynology, urban anthropology, vertebrate palaeontology, and zoology'.

[21] One recent (2008) grant has been made to a UK academic geographer, however – David Nash of the University of Brighton for a project on 'Climate change and eolian activity in the Atacama Desert, northern Chile'.

[22] Cumberland (1945) also wrote the introductory foreword to the first issue of *New Zealand Geographer*.

[23] Interestingly, the November-December 2007 issue included a full-page advertisement (which costs c.NZ$5000) for postgraduate study in the University of Auckland's School of Geography, Geology and Environmental Science – although the then head of the school informs me that this was placed by the Faculty of Science with no reference to him. Discussions with senior geographers in New Zealand identified nobody with any links at all to the magazine.

[24] I was on that Board in the 1990s; I was unable to attend the only meeting I was invited to, and played no other role at all as in influence on the magazine and its contents. I'm told by one of the current members that their involvement is also minimal.

[25] There was also one in August 2008, reporting briefly (5 pages) on urban simulation studies being undertaken by Mike Batty and others at University College London's Centre for Advanced Spatial [they wrote it as Spacial] Analysis.

[26] There was: (a) a half-page collage made up of some material taken from maps and a number of simple diagrams of the human form, over which were the words 'Geographers are contributing to most of the major issues being faced by the world today'; and (b) a photograph (covering about the equivalent of one page of text) of tourists watching an extreme tidal surge in China, to illustrate the point that 'the study of natural phenomena such as this forms but one aspect of the discipline of geography'.

have in the modern world?'. The 'opinions' of ten academic geographers (including the RGS-IBG Director, Dr. Rita Gardner) were 'canvassed', using five standard questions,[27] leading to a conclusion that geography is 'a discipline that is constantly reinventing itself in order to help us better understand our ever-changing world. And like the explorers of the 19th century's golden age of discovery, today's geographers are continuing to break new ground' (*Geographical*, August 2007, 47).

Apart from that article, very few academic geographers appear in *Geographical*. Only one of 2007's 94 other articles refers to their work: that on melting glaciers draws on research by Alun Hubbard (Aberystwyth), Jonathan Carrivick (Leeds) and Stephan Harrison (Exeter at Cornwall). Rather like the *National Geographic*, however, *Geographical* carried articles on research by non-geographer academics; the 2007 volume includes contributions on research by archaeologists, a marine conservation biologist, forensic scientists, a geophysicist, and a linguist. However, a regular feature in 10 of the 12 issues entitled 'Hotspot' comprises one-page articles on contemporary geopolitical issues (from Guantánamo Bay to East Timor, Canadian aboriginal communities to Tonga) contributed by an academic geographer – Klaus Dodds. Those items aside, however, little material connects readers with the academic discipline. Of the 116 books reviewed only two – Mark Monmonier's *From squaw tit to whorehouse meadow: how maps name, claim and inflame* and Harm de Blij's *Why geography matters: three challenges facing America – climate change, the rise of China, and global terrorism* – are by academic geographers (both American), and only the first is directed at academic audiences. Most of those reviewed are about exploration and travel in some form. None of the twelve selected monthly as a 'Geographical Classic' can in any sense be described as academic geography – almost all are about exploration/travel; none of the twelve individuals who contributed their 'Top 10 writer's reads' is an academic geographer – and none of the 120 books selected is by one;[28] all twelve individuals 'In conversation with [one of the magazine's staff]' in the final-page feature of each issue are non-geographers (the nearest is Iain Stewart, a lecturer in geology at the University of Plymouth, who presented a series of TV documentaries on BBC1 in late 2007 entitled *Earth: the Power of the Planet*.)

None of *Geographical*'s other regular features pays much attention to the academic discipline, even on the one or two pages each month featuring news from the RGS. The August issue included a photograph of the two academics awarded the Society's main medals at its July Annual Meeting, and the October issue invited people to apply to become professionally accredited as Chartered Geographers, but the monthly Diary of Events focused on non-academic events, including the highlighted 'Lecture of the month'.[29] The regular three-page feature entitled 'Worldwatch' comprised snippets

[27] 'What is geography?'; 'Why do you think people have trouble defining it?'; 'What are some of the important contributions that geography has made to human knowledge in the past?'; 'What do you think are the big issues being addressed by academic geographers today?'; and 'What research topics are you currently working on?'.

[28] None of the books reviewed in *New Zealand Geographic* in 2007 was by an academic geographer, either, but given the small number of books published by them in any year that is perhaps not surprising. In general, the books covered there are less 'popular' than those reviewed in *Geographical*, however, and they include several academic volumes.

[29] Perhaps the closest of these to the academic discipline was the lecture on 'Horrible geography' to be given as the Children's Christmas Lecture by the author of a series of books for young children with that title – Anita Ganeri, who had been awarded the Geographical Association's Silver Award 'in

drawn from a range of sources, none linked to the academic discipline. (It included a monthly list of the 'top ten countries' on such indicators as energy consumption per head, expenditure on tourism, and prison populations.) Nor did the monthly page on 'Climatewatch' draw on geographers' work. The two-page maps on the 'State of the world' (many drawn from the atlas with the same title: Smith, 2008) provide geographical material of potential use (especially at school level), and the series of twelve features by the magazine's senior staff writer on 'Natural beauty', covering twelve of Britain's Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, focus on landscapes, with approximately two of the three pages occupied by photographs (but no map). The series of one-page articles on 'From the collection' featuring items held by the RGS focuses on esoterica such as 'Henry Bate's pincushion' and 'Rear Admiral Byrd's silver matchbox'.

Do the published readers' letters throw any light on the popular-academic schism? *New Zealand Geographic* publishes a small number with most addressing topics covered in previous main articles, although one criticised the magazine for straying 'beyond NZ geography and history' with its article on 'Death' (see below). Only in *Geographical* do a few indicate links to the academic discipline. One reader, responding to an article on volcanoes, opined that 'Straight physical geography seems to be somewhat neglected in *Geographical*, so it was great to see the balance being rectified' (*Geographical*, April 2007, 107) and a teacher lamented the lack of map reading instruction in British schools (*Geographical*, May 2007, 107). Perhaps the most telling letter, responding to the article linked to the RGS(IBG) academic conference (see above), expressed discontent with its definitions of the discipline: 'Unfortunately, vagueness gives rise to the question: is there really such a subject as geography?' but 'The great value of geography is its capacity, like history, to describe and offer coherent explanations' (*Geographical*, October 2007, 107). Contrast this with the 'Letter of the month' on that page, responding to the same article, which referred to a discipline that 'finds it necessary to study its navel then conclude by patting itself on the back' and ignoring major issues, such as the role of the oceans in combating climate change. It continued:

> Yet, as part of my … membership I also receive the Geographical Journal [the RGS house journal], with its obscure articles exploring minutiae in remote parts of the world. Are they really relevant to the big issues listed in the [August] article? In contrast, the following article (*Going, going, gone* [on drought in Australia] was one of the best I have ever read in *Geographical*. It used photographs, maps, charts and a wealth of well-researched data to back up every point made. Please can we have more of these? Surely this is the kind of thing we should be striving for – focused research to answer the intricacies of a larger problem. Could not the Society, with all of its prestige and funding, encourage more relevant research aimed at tackling the big issues of our time?

The main themes

Having established that all three magazines carry relatively little considered typical of academic geography – or even the geography taught at high schools, though they are probably among the intended audience of the snippets included in the Worldwatch

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recognition of her efforts to broaden the appeal of geography to young people': *Geographical*, December 2007, 22.

and Climatewatch (*Geographical*), Geo-News and Weather (*New Zealand Geographic*), and Geographica (*National Geographic*) sections – ten main themes stand out in an analysis of the main articles featured.

I. Wildlife. This is a dominant theme (Pauly – 1979, 518 – termed *National Geographic* 'primarily a magazine of natural history'[30]), emphasising fauna rather than flora – with a wealth of superb photography. Each issue of both *New Zealand Geographic* and *National Geographic* in 2007 contained at least one heavily-illustrated article on wildlife, for example, and in addition *National Geographic*'s regular 'Wildlife' feature comprised twelve short articles on topics such as the colour of baboons, how woodpeckers peck, and mayfly swarms in thunder. *Geographical* had fewer, covering flora (baobab trees) as well as fauna (chimpanzees and wild pigs), but the natural world – and its exploitation by humans (butterfly farming) – was again a clear theme.

II. The exotic rather than the quotidian. Much material in all three magazines emphasizes the exotic rather than the everyday – the obscure, the out-of-the way,[31] and the quirky are frequently the focus of attention. *Geographical* carried three articles on Madagascar and one on Mozambique, for example, plus two on the Indian Himalaya; of its 65 articles about a geographical location, 22 dealt with Asian topics and 16 with African; there were six only on Europe plus another two on the UK, six on (Latin) America, five on Australasia and three on Antarctica. The *National Geographic* emphasised North American themes in 2007 (16 of the 39 articles about a specific area) whereas in other years the balance has been different (in 2003, for example, there were 21 articles on Asian topics and 10 on African with 20 on North and South America combined.[32] For *New Zealand Geographic* the far-away were closer to home, with remote islands and inland areas getting much more coverage than the country's heavily populated areas.

The three journals differ in that whereas both *National Geographic* and *Geographical* are international in their coverage, *New Zealand Geographic* largely confines its attention to that country plus its Pacific and Antarctic environs.[33] Only three articles during 2007 covered topics outwith that territory, two of which – on New Zealanders in the Spanish Civil War and New Zealand security contractors working in Baghdad after the 2003 invasion – were locally relevant. Both of the other two magazines carry material on their country of publication, of course: *National Geographic* had a regular series on *ZipUSA* in 2003, 5-page articles on some aspect of activity at a selected zip code (potato harvesting in Idaho, for example, and golf at Augusta) and *Geographical*

[30] Pauly (1979, 527) referred to the magazine, under Grosvenor and after severance of the link with professional geographers, as describing 'the diversity of natural phenomena in space and time and revealed in particularistic detail. There was no attempt at systematization, a passion of specialists that required sustained attention and a technical vocabulary'.

[31] With *National Geographic* this undoubtedly reflects its long-standing concern with, and support for, exploration (as detailed by Abramson, 1987). The article on academic geography in *Geographical* discussed above also links the discipline to exploration – with which, of course, the RGS has been much involved.

[32] '…from 1905 to 1920 only those countries sufficiently distant and exotic to be independent of American standards of proper behaviour were featured in the *Geographic*' (Pauly, 1979, 528).

[33] *Australian Geographic* and *Canadian Geographic* similarly concentrate very largely on their home countries: *Canadian Geographic*'s title page proclaims the magazine's purpose as 'making Canada better known to Canadians and to the world'.

had its sequence on the UK's Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. But their main concern was to portray the wider world to their readerships.

This "geography of the geographical magazines' coverage" illustrates an emphasis – in *National Geographic* and *Geographical* especially – on the far-away rather than the near-to-home. Even within the more distant continents attention focuses on the remote, on the periphery rather than the core.; *Geographical*'s 2007 articles on African topics included a holiday resort in NE Mozambique, and three on Madagascar cover baobab trees, rural public health centres, and a remote tribe. Treatment of Asian and (non-US) American themes is similarly oriented to the remote. By contrast, the main urban centres in those continents are largely ignored.

Articles on the quirky included pieces on such diverse topics as: 'Gumboots' (*New Zealand Geographic*) – 14 pages, nine of them comprising photographs presenting this form of footwear as 'part of our social landscape'; and one in *Geographical* on the use of the wheelbarrow as 'a vital player in the national economy of Liberia', in particular the capital Monrovia. *National Geographic*'s 2003 monthly series on ZipUSA included several of a similar nature – including Indiana's annual circus festival, dramatic gravestones in Barre VT, and a Detroit zipcode used for mail to boat crews on the Great Lakes.

III. Rural not urban; landscapes not townscapes. The world's population is now more than 50 per cent urban, but their places are under-represented in all three magazines relative to the rural, the remote, and the wilderness. *New Zealand Geographic* carried only two articles in 2007 on urban New Zealand: an excellent piece on 'State Housing' and one on tourism in a small resort popular with surfers and for New Year's Eve beach parties. The remainder covered non-urban topics. National Geographic carried only six articles on urban topics in 2007 – two on rapid growth in Dubai and China, others on slum in Mumbai, Orlando FL, New Orleans' future, and Bethlehem. *Geographical*, too, rarely focused on urban areas; apart from the article on wheelbarrows in Monrovia, there were short pieces on the port of Nouadhibou in Mauritania being used as the 'graveyard' for redundant ships, and on the wettest town on earth – Cherrapunjee, India – plus articles on roof gardens, laundry workers in Mumbai, a school for disadvantaged children in Quito, and children's play in urban areas.

IV. People not places. *National Geographic* is not only renowned for its emphasis on photography – an historian claimed that at one stage it 'evolved more into a picture book than a serious text-filled magazine' (Abramson, 1987, 139) – but also somewhat notorious for its 1903 decision to publish pictures of bare-breasted peasant women in the Philippines, followed by many similar pictures in subsequent decades (Grosvenor, 1957). The magazine gained a reputation for such material – Abramson (1987, 143) suggests it was generally welcomed (as an 'anatomy primer' for 'generations of pubescent boys and girls' as well as 'seemingly innocent sexual fantasy' for adult males) although there was a clear racist element ('the only color of breasts that haven't been seen in *National Geographic* are white ones'). For others, the 'word association in casual conversation with non-geographers led them from geography to *National Geographic*, and from *National Geographic* to bare-breasted women' (Rothenberg, 2007, 15) and to studies of 'the intertwining of gender, race and sexuality' which deconstruction of the magazine for much of its history has revealed.

(See Rothenberg's – 2007, 114-119 – detailed discussion of two photojournalists who produced much of the early material; and also Lutz and Collins', 1993, analyses of the photographic representations.) Partial and full nudity pictures are now relatively rare in *National Geographic* (a 2003 article on Amazonian Indian tribes included several, mainly of males), but its photography remains focused on people in places rather than places themselves – on populated landscapes rather than scenery. *Geographical* and *New Zealand Geographic* also emphasize people in their photography.

V. Human not physical. Academic geography is firmly divided between its human and physical sub-fields. No such division is made in the popular magazines, but the human is stressed above the physical. Topics in or related to physical geography are not entirely ignored, but subject matter which can be illustrated by high quality colour photography is preferred. Thus in 2007 *National Geographic* included superbly-illustrated articles on Vesuvius, coldscapes, Death Valley, and global warming; and *New Zealand Geographic* had articles on the country's retreating glaciers (predominantly pictorial – 12 of the 14 pages – with no discussion at all of the science behind their retreat) and climate change there. But landscape-forming processes and the resulting landforms got relatively little coverage – and what was included made no reference to geographers' work.

Perhaps reflecting its links to the RGS, *Geographical* placed slightly more emphasis on subjects linked to physical geography, notably in its 'Geographical dossier' series of eight articles in 2007 on: the decline of marine ecosystems; volcanoes; whaling; Australia's water crisis; and melting glaciers – the other three were on the looting of antiquities, religion and the environment, and endangered languages. As noted above, however, only one of the five on physical geography topics drew on work by academics working in university geography departments (that on glaciers). There was also an article on the International Polar Year.

VI. General science and beyond. All three magazines not only display an implicit catholic definition of geography but also carry material beyond what could in any way be considered geographical into science more generally. *National Geographic* carried more than the others: its 2007 volume included pieces on memory, heart disease, swarm theory, space in the next generation, the cataclysmic death of stars, and pictures taken by the Hubble telescope. *New Zealand Geographic* included articles on sound, talking books, surveillance, and death; the latter included a small amount of geographical material, but the article ranged very widely – from how the brain works to cemetery headstones.[34]

VII. Fascination with the (distant) past. Archaeology provides a substantial amount of material for the magazines – especially *National Geographic* whose 2003 issues included nine articles on archaeological material (all sumptuously illustrated) and the

[34] It stimulated two letters in the next issue (November-December 2007, p.10).One stated that it strayed 'beyond NZ geography and history … As a Kiwi living overseas I read the magazine to get a taste of home. This article had nothing in particular to do with NZ despite scanty attempts to make the link. I have other sources that can cover this sort of material far better. Please step back over the line'. The other was congratulatory, claiming that it 'ranged seamlessly and clearly across the deeply personal, through complex anatomical, scientific and medical material to peripheral topics including organ donation, life expectancy and burial customs.. I encourage you to venture more into this territory in the future – both in style and substance – even if some may not think it strictly fits under the banner of your name. No one else seems to want to, and you do it so well'.

2007 volume included five – on Slovenian archaeology, Jamestown, a frozen body found in an Alpine glacier, and a body found in a Danish bog. Archaeology featured in three *Geographical* articles but its interest in the past came through mainly in its regular series 'Geographical archive', featuring thematic photographic material from the RGS archives (topics include expedition art, pictures of costumes, tattooing, and tea cultivation) and 'From the collection' (see above). There was also a small number of historical items – on the slave trade, for example, and on lost villages (though with no reference to Beresford's classic work).

VIII. Less concern for contemporary issues. Two of Grosvenor's seven principles for the *National Geographic* (which appear to underpin *Geographical* and *New Zealand Geographic* also) – 'Nothing of a partisan or controversial character' and 'The content of each issue should be timely' – are potentially contradictory; much (timely) material about the contemporary world almost necessarily has partisan and/or controversial elements. The latter were studiously excluded for much of *National Geographic*'s history (thereby reflecting the sixth principle: 'Only what is of a kindly nature is printed about any country or people, everything unpleasant or unduly critical being avoided': see Poole, 2004). The magazine's conservative credentials are widely recognised – what Abramson (1987, 233) calls its 'continuing anticommunist, pro-establishment point of view' – and it wasn't until the 1970s that this attitude was challenged with articles on, for example, South African apartheid, Cuba, and Harlem. These were not favourably received, and such editorial experimentation was discontinued: Abramson (1987, 241-242) reports that a planned article in 1977 on the conflict in Beirut was cancelled, with the next issue instead carrying pieces on salt and rats.

More recently, *National Geographic* has addressed politically-charged contemporary issues such as the impact of the civil war in Sudan on drilling for oil there, the separatist movement in Corsica, India's Hindu untouchable castes, Korea's demilitarized zone, the consequences of land reform in Zimbabwe, 21st century slavery, the clash between tradition and modernism in Saudi Arabia, and the growth of surveillance. The 2007 volume included discussions of ivory wars in Chad, democracy in Tonga, piracy in the Malacca Straits, and Islamic struggles between moderates and militants in Pakistan. The wording is always careful, but the magazine is no longer totally distancing itself from the 'bad and the nasty' aspects of the world alongside 'the good and the beautiful'.

Geographical addressed the contemporary world in 2003 through its regular series on 'Geopolitical hotspots' which included post-communist Albania, immigration from Ecuador to Spain, conflict between paramilitaries and peasants in Colombia, and the problems of divided Cyprus. *New Zealand Geographic*'s almost complete restriction of topical coverage to that country not surprisingly means that it carries little such material: the one exception in 2007 was its article on New Zealanders working as security contractors in Baghdad.

IX. Conservation. An exception to the absence of material on contemporary issues is concern for conservation, especially wildlife conservation, and environmental management more generally, which can be handled without substantial emphasis on

the political issues.[35] Each magazine displays a clear commitment to this activity – extending beyond wildlife and landscapes to wider issues linked, for example, to archaeology. *New Zealand Geographic* places explicit emphasis on this; its six issues in 2007 each contained at least one article with a strong conservation theme (several, and some of the others on wildlife, prepared in collaboration with the country's Department of Conservation) – but the other two magazines similarly address the substantial readership with environmental concerns. Hence, for example, *Geographical*'s links to the Fair Trade Foundation and its highlighting of the Green Tourism Awards: its 2007 Young Geographer of the Year award addressed the issue of 'Can recycling save the world?'. And if one types 'National Geographic Society' into Google© the headline that appears on screen is 'Inspiring people to care about the planet'.

X. Empiricism. All of the above nine themes have a strong empiricist emphasis, to portray the world as it is observed and pictorially represented, and can be discussed through a journalistic style emphasising individual's reported experience and views. Theory, however defined, is never mentioned, and scientific explanations, outside a small number of articles rarely offered. It is very largely, in Rothenberg's (2007) term, an innocent portrayal – though deconstruction of that innocence rapidly uncovers its ideological bases, as in works on *National Geographic*'s photography (Lutz and Collins, 1993; Rothenberg, 2007) and cartography (Poole, 2004); the magazine was also deeply involved in the conflicts over who first reached the North Pole (Abramson, 1987, devotes several chapters to this).

Conclusions

> What was once an important preserve for the geographer fell into the hands of popular magazines and the producers of commercial travelogues and brochures, television films, news, and documentaries. The failure to help build appropriate popular understandings to deal with a world undergoing rapid geographical integration was a striking abrogation of responsibility. (Harvey, 1984,)

Geography to many people implies a subject concerned with the world and emphasising maps, natural history, landforms, and landscapes, plus basic information such as capital city names and river lengths – sometimes called 'capes and bays geography'. To others, basically those who have studied it in further and higher and education, it implies a discipline which provides understanding, appreciation, even explanation, of aspects of the world through practices bridging the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. The two, it seems, should be linked, with the academic discipline providing the basic material that constitutes the popular subject.

This is not the case, however. Most lay appreciations of the subject geography bear little resemblance to what is undertaken and learned in the discipline Geography,[36] as has been illustrated by this analysis of the contents of three magazines, all of which use the word geographic(al) in their titles and might be assumed to be portraying the

[35] *Canadian Geographic* publishes an 'Annual Environment Issue'.
[36] Abramson (1987, 254), for example, concludes that the National Geographic Society 'generates enormous amounts of money from projects all somehow at least vaguely related to the study of geography and natural science'.

discipline's research findings and practices to a wide public. Those magazines, commercial in their orientation and overwhelmingly journalistic in their approach, operate at considerable distance from the discipline, suggesting either that their editors lack respect for academic geographers' work or that they consider it unsuitable (even in rewritten form) for the readers of popular magazines. (A – partial? – exception among the three considered here is *Geographical*, which is linked to the UK's leading learned society for academic geographers, but nevertheless it too carries very little generated by or about their work.) Instead, the magazines present material – heavily illustrated with high quality photography and graphics – about the natural world (especially fauna) and aspects of its human occupance which informs a wide readership, but not very much about geography as those who call themselves Geographers largely understand it. Two very separate geographical imaginations – the popular and the academic – are thus available, with the popular getting much more promotion than the academic.

This clear separation between popular geographies and academic geography may not influence how academic geographers practice their discipline but it undoubtedly influences how others (including politicians and other policy-makers) view it, with potential implications for attitudes towards the discipline – perhaps even its public support and funding. It certainly, as the quote from Harvey indicates, means that academic geographers are not using those popular media to inform a wider public about their work and geographical imaginations – and perhaps, too, that they consider transmitting their understanding of the world through such media either unnecessary or unbecoming.[37]

The latter would seem to be particularly short-sighted, not least as university geography departments face increasing difficulties recruiting students and there are perennial fears regarding the continued role of geography in high school curricula in countries (such as the UK and New Zealand) where it has traditionally been strong. Geographers need to address whether they – individually and collectively – should embrace the commercial orientation of the magazine publishers and seek, much more than heretofore, to promote their discipline and its practices through those media. This will not be achieved by sending articles to the editors. Collective action is required to make editors aware of geographers' work and its relevance to wider audiences – which may involve convincing them to broaden their magazines' scope. It would almost certainly involve academic geographers accepting that their material is rewritten by others into the magazine 'house styles' an d that others would take the needed photographs. But the benefits could be substantial.

Geographical imaginations are currently being created and sustained through media which, as demonstrated here, very largely ignore the academic discipline, its practitioners and their work. As a consequence, those popular imaginations are, at best, very partial in transmitting to wide audiences what geography is and what geographers do, and at worst very misleading. The academic discipline can only benefit by adopting strategies to alter that situation, portraying to audiences the range, quality and timeliness of so much geographical research, thereby enhancing their public profile and reputation.

[37] This, of course, is contrary to a substantial movement among academics to promote the 'public understanding of science'.

To do that, academic geographers first have to appreciate the nature of popular geography magazines and this essay has been written as a first exercise in that task, focusing on three magazines which use geography in their titles and claim to be promoting the subject. It has not directly addressed Bonnett's questions set out at the start of this paper: however, one might from reading the magazines infer an answer to whether popular geography is hostile to academic involvement and one might conjecture whether popular geography is an embarrassment to those involved in the academic world. Or it may be that the two operate in different spheres with little impact upon each other. After all, Geoffrey Martin (quoted in Abramson, 1987, 255[38]) when asked how American (academic – he used the term 'intellectual') geography might have differed if the National Geographic Society had not existed responded 'I don't suppose it would have been a hell of a lot different', although another geographer (who wished to remain anonymous) said that 'Today, the National Geographic Society is seen as the focus of American geography, and this has perhaps contributed to geography's demise as a subject of study at American universities' (quoted in Abramson, 1987, 249).

Whatever causal link, if any and in which direction, operates between popular and academic geographies, they clearly differ. For academic practitioners, awareness of that difference is desirable – not least because of the perceived continuing threats to the viability, indeed existence, of their discipline in various national educational systems. Geography is being promoted to the general public through popular magazines and other media as a subject with little or no reference to the discipline which shares the name. This may, as Martin suggested two decades ago, have no relevance to the discipline – it can continue to operate however its name is used in other contexts. But it may not, in which case a little knowledge of the 'other side' cannot be a 'dangerous thing'.[39]

This paper has offered no more than a preface to producing that 'little knowledge' with an overview of the nature of three popular magazines and their typical contents. Much more can clearly be done researching the nature of the popular geographical imaginations that they promote and the techniques that they deploy – not only over time but also over space. The 27 different editions of *National Geographic* provide one such opportunity, as do the popular geography magazines published in different linguistic realms – such as *Geo*, which appears in French, German and Italian versions[40], and *La GéoGraphie*.[41] Just as there are geographies of academic

[38] Geoffrey Martin is a UK-trained geographer whose career has been in the United States. He has written widely on the history of geography, including the fourth edition of *All possible worlds* (Martin, 2005).

[39] This may well be the case in France, where there has been considerable effort to bring academic and popular geographies together, not least in recent years by the annual Festival International de Géographie de Saint-Dié-des-Vosges (http://fig-st-die.education.fr/) which alongside 'scientific' events – lectures, debates, round tables, workshops – has a range of others, such as films, discussions in 'cafés geographiques' (http://www.cafe-geo.net/) dedicated, according to one website to the 'praiseworthy goal of 'developing public understanding of geographical principles and knowledge of scientific research into the subject'. (http://destinationsflen.eurostar.com/sisp/?event_id=15138&fx=event). (On an earlier bringing together of the two, see Clout, 2005.)

[40] See www.geomagazine.fr,, http://www.geo.de/, and http://www.mondadori.it/ame/it/gruppo/testate/geo.html

[41] http://www.lageographie.fr/

geography so there are undoubtedly geographies of popular geography too – and of their interactions.

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